AP EDITION · DBQ + LEQ · CLASSROOM

1872

Ulysses S. Grant vs Horace Greeley

A 105-minute lesson on the 1872 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, DBQ pairing, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA Reconstruction	ELECTORAL VOTES 352 total
WINNER Ulysses S. Grant (Republican) · 286 EV	RUNNER-UP Horace Greeley (Liberal Republican) · 0 EV
KEY ISSUE Corruption reform; Reconstruction continuation; Liberal Republican revolt	TURNOUT 72.1%

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3. Background: vocabulary + primary source A
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1872: Ulysses S. Grant vs Horace Greeley

AP framework alignment

AP US History · Period varies by cycle · Reasoning skills: contextualization, comparison, causation, sourcing. CCSS · CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2 (central ideas), RH.11-12.6 (point of view), RH.11-12.7 (multiple sources). NCSS · D2.His.5.9-12, D2.His.14.9-12, D2.His.16.9-12.

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	Identify two structural conditions in U.S. politics by 1872 that would produce a Liberal Republican defection from the Grant coalition. For each, identify the specific 1869-1872 development most responsible.
15 min	**Reading + vocab**	The 1872 election is the structural inflection point of the Republican Party's Reconstruction coalition. Grant's 286-66 landslide masked the underlying weakness of Northern Republican commitment to continued Reconstruction enforcement. The Liberal Republican defection - even though electorally crushed - established the political pattern that would produce the 1877 Compromise and the structural end of Reconstruction. The election's historical significance lies less in its immediate result than in what the result revealed about the political coalition that had governed Reconstruction since 1865. The political environment was complicated. President Grant had governed for four years. His administration had passed the 15th Amendment (February 3, 1870), the Enforcement Acts (May 1870, February 1871), the Ku Klux Klan Act (April 20, 1871), and the May 22, 1872 Amnesty Act (restoring political rights to most former Confederate officials). The federal prosecution of the Klan had produced 5,000 indictments and over 600 convictions in 1871-72. But the administration had also produced major corruption scandals. The Credit Mobilier scandal - exposed by the New York Sun in September 1872 - revealed that Vice President Schuyler Colfax, Representative James A. Garfield, Speaker James G. Blaine, and other Republicans had received Credit Mobilier stock in exchange for political favors to the Union Pacific Railroad. The Liberal Republican Party emerged in 1872 from Republicans dissatisfied with Grant administration corruption and continued Reconstruction enforcement. The May 1-3, 1872 Liberal Republican Convention in Cincinnati nominated Horace Greeley over Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts (the Radical Republican who had been caned by Preston Brooks in 1856) and Charles Francis Adams (the Free Soil 1848 VP nominee, then U.S. minister to Britain). Greeley was an eccentric but nationally famous figure: he had championed antislavery, women's suffrage, the Homestead Act, public education, vegetarianism, spiritualism, and many other causes. He had also famously opposed the Civil War initially before becoming a

pro-war voice. Benjamin Gratz Brown of Missouri was the vice presidential candidate. The Liberal Republican platform: civil-service reform; one-term presidency; resumption of specie payments; tariff reduction; "universal amnesty and impartial suffrage" (a deliberately ambiguous phrase that allowed both pro- and anti-Reconstruction interpretations).

The Democratic Party - which had not won a presidential election since 1856 - made a strategic decision at its July 9-10, 1872 Baltimore convention. Rather than nominate its own candidate, the party endorsed Greeley and Brown. The fusion ticket was politically unusual: Greeley had spent his career as an editor attacking the Democratic Party. But Democratic leaders calculated that fusion was their only chance to defeat Grant. A small faction of Democrats, displeased with the fusion, held a separate convention in Louisville and nominated Charles O'Conor of New York (who refused to accept and won no electoral votes).

The Republican Party renominated Grant at its June 5-6, 1872 Philadelphia convention. Henry Wilson of Massachusetts replaced Vice President Schuyler Colfax (politically tainted by Credit Mobilier) on the ticket. The Republican platform endorsed civil-service reform, gradual debt reduction, continued Reconstruction, a high tariff, women's suffrage (the first major-party endorsement), and the rights of newly freed Black Americans.

The campaign focused on three issues. (1) Grant administration corruption. (2) Reconstruction policy. (3) Greeley's eccentricities (Thomas Nast's Harper's Weekly cartoons portrayed Greeley as a fool, a turncoat, and an unreliable intellectual; the cartoons reached mass audiences and shaped public opinion). The Republican strategy: position Grant as a stable wartime leader; position Greeley as an erratic intellectual.

Grant won 286 electoral votes to Greeley's 66. Grant carried 31 of 37 states; Greeley carried 6 (Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, Tennessee, Texas). The popular vote was 3,597,132 (55.6%) to 2,834,125 (43.8%) - a much larger margin than 1868. Grant's 1872 result was the second-largest popular-vote margin of any Republican presidential candidate until Nixon in 1972.

Horace Greeley died on November 29, 1872 - 24 days after the November 5 popular vote. His wife had died on October 30, 1872; his New York Tribune had been politically attacked through the campaign; he had lost the election decisively. He is the only major-party presidential candidate to die between Election Day and the Electoral College vote.

When the Electoral College met December 4, 1872, Greeley's 66 popular-vote electors scattered their votes: 42 to Thomas A. Hendricks of Indiana, 18 to Benjamin Gratz Brown, 2 to Charles Jenkins of Georgia, 1 to David Davis of Illinois, and 3 to Greeley himself (not counted by Congress because the candidate was dead). The

constitutional ambiguity exposed: the Twelfth Amendment did not address candidate death between Election Day and the Electoral College vote. The 1933 Twentieth Amendment partially addressed the issue by moving the inauguration from March 4 to January 20 and establishing procedures for what happens if a president-elect dies before the inauguration - but the ambiguity about Election Day-to-Electoral College deaths remains unresolved in U.S. constitutional law.

Grant's second term (1873-1877) was difficult. The September 18, 1873 Panic - triggered by the failure of Jay Cooke & Company - produced a deep depression that lasted until 1879. The Whiskey Ring scandal in 1875, the Indian Ring scandal in 1876, and continued Reconstruction violence damaged Republican standing. The 1873 Slaughterhouse Cases narrowed 14th Amendment protections. The 1876 United States v. Cruikshank decision overturned federal convictions of the Colfax massacre perpetrators. The 1873 Colfax massacre (150 Black men killed by White League paramilitaries in Louisiana), the 1874 Coushatta massacre, and the 1875 Vicksburg massacres demonstrated that Reconstruction governments could not protect Black civil rights without continued federal military presence. The 1876 election - between Rutherford B. Hayes and Samuel J. Tilden - was disputed for months and eventually resolved by the 1877 Compromise that withdrew federal troops from the South and effectively ended Reconstruction.

The Liberal Republican Party itself dissolved after 1872. Many of its members eventually rejoined the Republican Party; others migrated to the Democratic Party. The structural pattern persisted: many Northern Republican voters had begun to view Reconstruction as politically exhausting and economically irrelevant. The 1873 Panic accelerated the trend by making economic recovery the central political concern. The 1877 Compromise was the structural endpoint of the trajectory the 1872 Liberal Republican defection had begun.

20 min	**Source A**	Read aloud once; students annotate individually for tone, evidence, and audience.
20 min	**Source B**	Compare/contrast against Source A. Pair-share on the DBQ comparison question.
20 min	**Worksheet**	Eight questions: 5 short-answer, 2 stimulus-based MCQ, 1 long-essay framing.
20 min	**LEQ planning**	Students sketch a thesis + outline for the LEQ comparison prompt. Submit for next-day full essay.
5 min	**Closure**	Exit ticket: one sentence summarizing the comparison.

Background

Before the worksheet, review the key terms below and then read the primary source carefully. The two source-analysis questions on the worksheet (questions 6 and 7) ask you to quote from the excerpt.

Key terms

Liberal Republican Party
The 1872 third party formed by Republicans dissatisfied with Grant administration corruption and continued Reconstruction. Nominated Horace Greeley; also endorsed by the Democratic Party. Dissolved after 1872.

Amnesty Act of 1872
The May 22, 1872 federal law restoring political rights to most former Confederate officials. About 500 prominent Confederate leaders excluded. Signaled the gradual federal retreat from Reconstruction enforcement.

Slaughterhouse Cases
1873 Supreme Court 5-4 decision narrowing the 14th Amendment's Privileges and Immunities Clause. Effectively removed federal protection of most civil rights from state interference.

Colfax massacre
The April 13, 1873 massacre of 150 Black men by White League paramilitaries in Colfax, Louisiana. The deadliest single incident of post-Civil-War racial violence. The 1876 Cruikshank decision overturned federal convictions of the perpetrators.

Pendleton Civil Service Act
The 1883 federal law establishing merit-based hiring for many federal positions and creating the U.S. Civil Service Commission. Replaced large portions of the Jacksonian spoils system. Passed after the 1881 assassination of James Garfield by a disappointed office-seeker mobilized civil-service reform politically.

Credit Mobilier scandal
The 1872 scandal revealing that Vice President Schuyler Colfax, Representative James A. Garfield, Speaker James G. Blaine, and other Republicans had received Credit Mobilier stock in exchange for political favors to the Union Pacific Railroad.

Panic of 1873
The major financial crisis that began September 18, 1873 with the failure of Jay Cooke & Company. Produced a deep depression lasting until 1879. The longest U.S. economic contraction until the Great Depression.

United States v. Cruikshank
1876 Supreme Court decision overturning federal convictions of the Colfax massacre perpetrators. Held that the 14th Amendment's due process and equal protection clauses applied only to state actions, not to private violence. Severely restricted federal authority to prosecute racial violence.

1877 Compromise
The informal political settlement of the disputed 1876 election. Republicans accepted Rutherford B. Hayes's election in exchange for the withdrawal of federal troops from the South. Effectively ended Reconstruction and inaugurated the Jim Crow era.

Second Inaugural Address

ULYSSES S. GRANT, MARCH 4, 1873

Grant took the oath for his second term at the East Portico of the U.S. Capitol on March 4, 1873. The address was 1,341 words. Grant addressed the corruption charges directly and defended his administration's civil-service reform efforts. The address also explicitly endorsed continued Reconstruction enforcement. The "I have been the subject of abuse and slander" framing positioned the 286-66 landslide as moral vindication.

> *"Under the Providence of God I shall give my support to such measures as will tend to the rapid pacification of the country and the protection of the rights of all our citizens in every section. I have endeavored to find a course of policy which would lead to the best results, and I believe the principles of action which I have observed are sound. They have not always been such as suited the popular wishes of the moment, but they have always been such as I believed to be the best for the great body of the people. I have been the subject of abuse and slander scarcely ever equaled in political history, which to-day I feel that I can afford to disregard in view of your verdict, which I gratefully accept as my vindication."*

Grant, "Second Inaugural Address" (Washington, DC, March 4, 1873). Public domain.

Document-based question

Source A is on the Background page; Source B is below. Use both as evidence for the worksheet's source-analysis questions and the LEQ.

SOURCE A

Second Inaugural Address

ULYSSES S. GRANT, MARCH 4, 1873

"Under the Providence of God I shall give my support to such measures as will tend to the rapid pacification of the country and the protection of the rights of all our citizens in every section. I have endeavored to find a course of policy which would lead to the best results, and I believe the principles of action which I have observed are sound. They have not always been such as suited the popular wishes of the moment, but they have always been such as I believed to be the best for the great body of the people. I have been the subject of abuse and slander scarcely ever equaled in political history, which to-day I feel that I can afford to disregard in view of your verdict, which I gratefully accept as my vindication."

Grant, "Second Inaugural Address" (Washington, DC, March 4, 1873). Public domain.

SOURCE B

Liberal Republican Platform

LIBERAL REPUBLICAN NATIONAL CONVENTION, MAY 3, 1872

"We charge upon the present Administration the high crime of seeking to fasten upon the Government a class of professional civil servants, whose acquaintance with their duties extends only so far as to know when their official income is to be paid them. We brand it as a betrayal of the public trust to appoint to office solely on the recommendation of partisan friends, while leaving worthy men to languish for want of bread. We demand a reform of these abuses, and call for a return to that simple, honest, and economical administration of the Government which was the rule of the founders of the Republic. We recognize the equality of all men before the law, and hold that it is the duty of the Government in its dealings with the people to mete out equal and exact justice to all, of whatever nativity, race, color, or persuasion, religious or political."

Liberal Republican National Convention, "Platform" (Cincinnati, OH, May 3, 1872). Public domain.

The 1872 Election

Answer the eight questions below. Source A is on the Background page; Source B is on the DBQ Pair page.

QUESTION 1 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify the key phrase in Source A (Grant's Second Inaugural) that frames the 286-66 landslide as moral vindication against corruption charges. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 2 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify the key phrase in Source B (Liberal Republican Platform) that characterizes Grant administration appointments as a betrayal of public trust. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

Both sources address Grant administration governance, but they make incompatible claims about it. Identify the specific claim each source makes.

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

Source B was written before Source A. What does the temporal ordering tell you about how the political situation evolved across the 1872 campaign?

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER

Source B says "we recognize the equality of all men before the law" and calls for "equal and exact justice to all, of whatever nativity, race, color, or persuasion." How did the Liberal Republican coalition reconcile this language with its proposal to end Reconstruction?

QUESTION 6 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

Which 1883 federal law established merit-based hiring for many federal positions and created the U.S. Civil Service Commission?

( ) A. Civil Service Act
( ) B. Pendleton Act
( ) C. Sherman Act
( ) D. Interstate Commerce Act

QUESTION 7 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How many electoral votes did Greeley's 66 popular-vote electors give to Thomas A. Hendricks when the Electoral College met on December 4, 1872?

( ) A. 18
( ) B. 26
( ) C. 42
( ) D. 66

QUESTION 8 · SHORT-ANSWER

Sketch your thesis sentence for the LEQ (next page). State your position: was the 1872 Liberal Republican defection structural, contingent, or founding? Identify one piece of evidence from each source you will use.

Long-essay-question

LEQ PROMPT

Grant's 1873 Second Inaugural (Source A) defends his administration against corruption charges and frames the 286-66 landslide as moral vindication. The 1872 Liberal Republican Platform (Source B) characterizes Grant administration appointments as "a betrayal of the public trust" requiring "a return to that simple, honest, and economical administration of the Government which was the rule of the founders of the Republic." Using BOTH sources and your knowledge of the 1865-1883 period, evaluate the extent to which the 1872 Liberal Republican defection was (a) a structural product of growing Northern Republican fatigue with Reconstruction that the corruption charges merely catalyzed, (b) a contingent response to specific 1869-1872 Grant administration scandals that would not have produced the defection without those scandals, or (c) the founding moment of the civil-service reform movement that would ultimately produce the 1883 Pendleton Civil Service Act. Defend a clear thesis.

GRADING RUBRIC

Thesis (1 pt): must take a defensible position on the structural-vs-contingent-vs-founding axis. Contextualization (1 pt): mention at least two of the Credit Mobilier scandal, the Whiskey Ring, the 1873 Panic, the 1877 Compromise, the Pendleton Act. Evidence (2 pts): must quote at least one phrase from each source. Analysis (1 pt): must explicitly evaluate the extent rather than treating the three framings as equivalent. Total 5 points.

Answer key

QUESTION 1

Accept any of: "I have been the subject of abuse and slander scarcely ever equaled in political history, which to-day I feel that I can afford to disregard in view of your verdict", "your verdict, which I gratefully accept as my vindication", "I have endeavored to find a course of policy which would lead to the best results". The "vindication" phrase is the cleanest framing.

Grant's framing positions the electoral landslide as moral evidence against corruption charges.

QUESTION 2

Accept any of: "the high crime of seeking to fasten upon the Government a class of professional civil servants", "a betrayal of the public trust to appoint to office solely on the recommendation of partisan friends", "we demand a reform of these abuses". The "betrayal of the public trust" phrase is the cleanest characterization.

The Platform's framing positions the spoils system itself as the structural problem requiring reform.

QUESTION 3

Source A claims Grant's administration has been honest and the 286-66 landslide demonstrates voter approval. The corruption charges are framed as partisan attacks that voters have explicitly rejected. Source B claims the Grant administration has betrayed public trust through patronage appointments that have created a corrupt class of professional officeholders. The corruption charges are framed as legitimate concerns that require structural reform. The two claims are politically incompatible: the first treats the spoils system as acceptable governance; the second treats it as a structural problem requiring constitutional reform.

AP students should be able to identify the substantive disagreement.

QUESTION 4

The Liberal Republican Platform (May 1872) preceded Grant's Second Inaugural (March 1873) by ten months. The temporal ordering tells you that the Platform was a pre-election political document attacking Grant administration governance, while Grant's Inaugural was a post-election political document responding to the attack via the landslide result. The Platform framed corruption as the central problem requiring reform; the Inaugural framed corruption charges as partisan attacks that voters had rejected. The ten-month gap demonstrates how rapidly political framing can shift based on electoral outcomes: a charge that was politically resonant in May became politically disregarded in March after the November landslide.

AP students should be able to articulate how electoral outcomes shift political framings.

QUESTION 5

The Liberal Republican coalition reconciled its civil-rights language with its anti-Reconstruction position through the deliberately ambiguous formula "universal amnesty and impartial suffrage." The "universal amnesty" portion endorsed restoring political rights to former Confederate officials - the Democratic Party position. The "impartial suffrage" portion endorsed continued Black voting rights - the Republican Party position. The coalition could thus appeal to both Northern Republicans uncomfortable with continued military Reconstruction and Southern Democrats demanding restoration of white-supremacist political authority. The reconciliation was rhetorical rather than substantive: in practice, ending Reconstruction would produce the post-1877 Jim Crow disenfranchisement that nullified "impartial suffrage." The coalition's ambiguity reflected its inability to take a substantive position on the central political question of the era.

AP students should be able to articulate how political coalitions use deliberate ambiguity to mask internal divisions.

QUESTION 6

Pendleton Act. The 1883 federal law establishing merit-based hiring for many federal positions and creating the U.S. Civil Service Commission. Replaced large portions of the Jacksonian spoils system. Passed after the 1881 assassination of James Garfield by a disappointed office-seeker (Charles Guiteau) mobilized civil-service reform politically.

AP students should know the Pendleton Act as the structural endpoint of the spoils system.

QUESTION 7

42. Thomas A. Hendricks received the most votes from the Greeley electors (42 of 66). He would later be elected Vice President under Grover Cleveland in 1884 but die in office in November 1885.

AP students should know that Hendricks was the main beneficiary of the Greeley vote scattering.

QUESTION 8

Open-ended thesis sketch. Acceptable answers should: (1) state a clear position on the structural-vs-contingent-vs-founding axis, (2) avoid treating them as equivalent, (3) signal at least one piece of evidence from each source. Award credit for any defensible thesis that meets these three conditions.

The thesis sketch is preparatory. The LEQ rubric evaluates the full essay.