AP EDITION · DBQ + LEQ · CLASSROOM

1880

James A. Garfield vs Winfield Scott Hancock

A 105-minute lesson on the 1880 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, DBQ pairing, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA Gilded Age	ELECTORAL VOTES 369 total
WINNER James A. Garfield (Republican) · 214 EV	RUNNER-UP Winfield Scott Hancock (Democratic) · 155 EV
KEY ISSUE Civil service reform; Stalwart vs. Half-Breed Republican factions; tariff policy	TURNOUT 80.5%

CONTENTS

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2. Lesson plan (105 min) + framework alignment
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1880: James A. Garfield vs Winfield Scott Hancock

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 1880 that would produce a dark-horse Republican nomination. For each, identify the specific 1877-1880 development most responsible.
15 min	**Reading + vocab**	The 1880 election was the 24th U.S. presidential election. It produced James A. Garfield's dark-horse victory by the smallest popular-vote margin in U.S. presidential history (9,070 votes) and his subsequent assassination by a disappointed office-seeker. The election's structural legacy was the January 1883 Pendleton Civil Service Act - the structural endpoint of the Jacksonian spoils system that had dominated federal employment since 1829. The Republican Party was bitterly divided after Hayes's civil-service reform efforts. Two factions had emerged: (1) the Stalwarts, led by Senator Roscoe Conkling of New York, who defended the spoils system and wanted former President Grant to return for a third term; (2) the Half-Breeds, led by Senator James G. Blaine of Maine, who supported civil-service reform but were politically pragmatic. A third smaller faction - the "Independents" or "Reformers" - was led by Senator George F. Edmunds of Vermont. The Stalwart-Half-Breed warfare had paralyzed the Hayes administration's attempts at federal reorganization. The Republican National Convention met in Chicago from June 2-8, 1880. The convention deadlocked for 35 ballots between Grant (304 votes initially); Blaine (284 votes); Edmunds (34 votes); Senator John Sherman of Ohio (93 votes); and others. James A. Garfield, 48, an Ohio Republican congressman who had come to the convention to nominate Sherman, gave a powerful speech for Sherman that drew attention to himself. On the 34th ballot, a Wisconsin delegate began voting for Garfield. By the 36th ballot, Garfield had the nomination. Garfield was the second dark-horse Republican nominee after Hayes in 1876. Chester A. Arthur of New York - a Stalwart loyal to Conkling and the suspended Collector of the Port of New York - was selected as the vice presidential candidate. The Democratic National Convention met in Cincinnati on June 22-24, 1880 and nominated General Winfield Scott Hancock of Pennsylvania on the second ballot. Hancock was 56, a Union army hero who had commanded the federal defense

at Gettysburg. William H. English of Indiana was the vice presidential candidate. The Democratic platform attacked Republican corruption and called for an end to "centralization" of federal power.

The Greenback Party nominated General James B. Weaver of Iowa. The Greenback platform attacked the gold standard and supported the 8-hour workday, federal regulation of railroads, women's suffrage, direct election of senators, and graduated income tax. Weaver would later become the 1892 Populist Party nominee.

The campaign was less personal than 1876. The issues were tariff policy, civil-service reform, and Chinese immigration. The campaign's defining moment was the "Morey letter" - a forged October 1880 document attributed to Garfield endorsing Chinese immigration. The forgery was later attributed to Democratic operatives.

Garfield won 214 electoral votes to Hancock's 155. Weaver won 0 electoral votes but 308,578 popular votes (3.3%). Garfield carried 19 states; Hancock carried 19 states. The popular vote: Garfield 4,453,337 (48.3%); Hancock 4,444,267 (48.2%); Weaver 308,578 (3.3%). The Garfield-Hancock margin was 9,070 popular votes - the smallest popular-vote margin in U.S. presidential history.

Garfield was inaugurated March 4, 1881. He immediately faced Stalwart-Half-Breed warfare over Cabinet appointments. Senator Conkling demanded continued Stalwart control of New York federal patronage; Garfield refused, appointing Half-Breed William H. Robertson as Collector of the Port of New York. Conkling and Senator Thomas C. Platt resigned from the Senate in May 1881; they were not re-elected. The Stalwart-Half-Breed warfare was at its peak when Charles Guiteau shot Garfield at the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad Station in Washington, DC at 9:30 a.m. on July 2, 1881. Guiteau was a disappointed office-seeker who had failed to receive a consular appointment despite expecting one as a Stalwart loyalist. After shooting Garfield, Guiteau allegedly shouted: "I am a Stalwart of the Stalwarts! Arthur is President now!" Garfield lingered for 79 days, partly because his doctors probed his wound with unwashed fingers (Joseph Lister's antiseptic methods had not yet been adopted in American medicine), causing massive infection that ultimately killed him on September 19, 1881. Garfield was the second U.S. president to be assassinated, after Lincoln in 1865.

Vice President Chester A. Arthur became the 21st president on September 20, 1881. Despite being a Stalwart, Arthur reversed his prior commitments and supported civil-service reform. The January 16, 1883 Pendleton Civil Service Act established merit-based hiring for many federal positions and created the U.S. Civil Service Commission. The Act's sponsor was Senator George H. Pendleton of Ohio - a Democrat who had championed civil-service reform for years. The Act initially covered only 10% of federal positions but provided the framework for gradual expansion: by 1900 it covered 40%; by 1932, 80%. By the mid-20th century, merit-based civil service had largely displaced the spoils system.

The 1880 election was the structural inflection point of U.S. presidential politics in three ways. First, the Solid South pattern (Hancock carried all 11 former Confederate states plus the four Border States) confirmed the post-Reconstruction collapse of Republican governance in the South. Second, the dark-horse Garfield nomination and the smallest-ever popular-vote margin demonstrated that Republican-Democratic competition had reached structural equilibrium after the Reconstruction-era Republican dominance. Third, Garfield's assassination and the resulting Pendleton Act produced the structural reform of federal employment that would shape 20th-century governance.

The 1880s-1890s era that the 1880 election inaugurated would be one of remarkably close presidential elections. The popular-vote margins in 1880 (9,070), 1884 (62,683), 1888 (Cleveland won popular vote but lost electoral; popular margin 90,596), 1892 (380,810), and 1896 (601,316) were all far smaller than the post-1864 Republican margins. The era's close competition reflected the Republican-Democratic equilibrium that the 1880 election had inaugurated. The 1896 William Jennings Bryan campaign would break the equilibrium by mobilizing agrarian populism around the gold standard / silver question, producing a Republican realignment that would dominate U.S. politics until 1932.

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

Stalwarts

The Republican faction led by Senator Roscoe Conkling of New York. Defended the spoils system; wanted Grant to return for a third term in 1880. Politically destroyed by Guiteau's assassination of Garfield (Guiteau identified himself as "a Stalwart of the Stalwarts").

Half-Breeds

The Republican faction led by Senator James G. Blaine of Maine. Supported civil-service reform but were politically pragmatic about patronage.

Greenback Party

The 1874-1884 third party advocating paper-money expansion. The 1880 candidate James B. Weaver won 3.3% of the popular vote. Weaver would later become the 1892 Populist Party nominee.

Pendleton Civil Service Act

The January 16, 1883 federal law establishing merit-based hiring for many federal positions and creating the U.S. Civil Service Commission. Sponsored by Senator George H. Pendleton of Ohio. Initially covered 10% of federal positions; expanded gradually to 80% by 1932.

Charles Guiteau

The disappointed office-seeker who shot President Garfield on July 2, 1881. Guiteau had failed to receive a consular appointment despite expecting one as a Stalwart loyalist. Garfield died September 19, 1881; Guiteau was tried, convicted, and hanged June 30, 1882.

Solid South

The pattern of consistent Democratic Party dominance in former Confederate states from approximately 1880 to 1960. Established by the post-Reconstruction collapse of Republican governance and the subsequent disenfranchisement of Black voters.

Chinese Exclusion Act

The May 6, 1882 federal law (signed by Arthur) prohibiting Chinese laborers from immigrating to the United States for ten years. The first U.S. federal law explicitly excluding a specific nationality. Renewed in 1892 and made permanent in 1902. Repealed in 1943.

Morey letter

The forged October 1880 letter attributed to Garfield endorsing Chinese immigration. Published in the New York Truth. Almost cost Garfield California. Later attributed to Democratic operatives.

Tariff politics

The dominant economic policy debate from approximately 1865 to 1913. Republicans generally supported high protective tariffs; Democrats generally supported tariff reduction. The McKinley Tariff of 1890 and the 1894 Wilson-Gorman Tariff were major statutes. The 1913 Underwood Tariff substantially reduced rates; the 16th Amendment's income tax provided alternative federal revenue.

Inaugural Address

JAMES A. GARFIELD, MARCH 4, 1881

Garfield took the oath at the East Portico of the U.S. Capitol on March 4, 1881. The address explicitly endorsed civil-service reform and racial-equality protection - both positions associated with the Half-Breed Republican faction. The "no thoughtful man" framing on civil-service reform was Garfield's commitment to merit-based federal employment, directly opposed to the Stalwart defense of the spoils system.

> *"The civil service can never be placed on a satisfactory basis until it is regulated by law. For the good of the service itself, for the protection of those who are intrusted with the appointing power against the waste of time and obstruction to the public business caused by the inordinate pressure for place, and for the protection of incumbents against intrigue and wrong, I shall at the proper time ask Congress to fix the tenure of the minor offices of the several Executive Departments and prescribe the grounds upon which removals shall be made during the terms for which incumbents have been appointed."*

Garfield, "Inaugural Address" (Washington, DC, March 4, 1881). 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

Inaugural Address

JAMES A. GARFIELD, MARCH 4, 1881

"The civil service can never be placed on a satisfactory basis until it is regulated by law. For the good of the service itself, for the protection of those who are intrusted with the appointing power against the waste of time and obstruction to the public business caused by the inordinate pressure for place, and for the protection of incumbents against intrigue and wrong, I shall at the proper time ask Congress to fix the tenure of the minor offices of the several Executive Departments and prescribe the grounds upon which removals shall be made during the terms for which incumbents have been appointed."

Garfield, "Inaugural Address" (Washington, DC, March 4, 1881). Public domain.

SOURCE B

Pendleton Civil Service Act

U.S. CONGRESS, JANUARY 16, 1883

"Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the President is authorized to appoint, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, three persons, not more than two of whom shall be adherents of the same party, as Civil Service Commissioners, and said three commissioners shall constitute the United States Civil Service Commission. It shall be the duty of said commissioners: First. To aid the President, as he may request, in preparing suitable rules for carrying this act into effect, and when said rules shall have been promulgated it shall be the duty of all officers of the United States in the departments and offices to which any such rules may relate to aid, in all proper ways, in carrying said rules, and any modifications thereof, into effect. Second. And, among other things, said rules shall provide and declare, as nearly as the conditions of good administration will warrant, as follows: First, for open, competitive examinations for testing the fitness of applicants for the public service now classified or to be classified hereunder."

U.S. Congress, "Pendleton Civil Service Act" (Washington, DC, January 16, 1883). Public domain.

The 1880 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 (Garfield's Inaugural) that commits to congressional regulation of the civil service. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 2 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify the key phrase in Source B (Pendleton Civil Service Act) that establishes the competitive-examination principle. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

Both sources address civil-service reform but they perform different political functions. Identify the specific function each source performs.

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

Source A was delivered 22 months before Source B was enacted. What does the temporal ordering tell you about the relationship between presidential commitment and legislative implementation?

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER

Source B initially covered only 10% of federal positions. Identify three specific 1883-1939 developments that gradually expanded merit-based hiring coverage.

QUESTION 6 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

Who sponsored the Pendleton Civil Service Act?

( ) A. Roscoe Conkling
( ) B. James G. Blaine
( ) C. George H. Pendleton
( ) D. John Sherman

QUESTION 7 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

By what percentage of federal positions did Pendleton Act coverage reach by 1932?

( ) A. 40%
( ) B. 60%
( ) C. 80%
( ) D. 95%

QUESTION 8 · SHORT-ANSWER

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

Long-essay-question

LEQ PROMPT

Garfield's 1881 Inaugural (Source A) commits to seeking congressional legislation regulating the civil service. The 1883 Pendleton Civil Service Act (Source B) operationalizes that commitment by establishing the U.S. Civil Service Commission and the principle of competitive examination for federal hiring. Using BOTH sources and your knowledge of the 1877-1900 period, evaluate the extent to which the Pendleton Act was (a) a structural product of accumulated reform pressure that the Garfield assassination merely catalyzed, (b) a contingent response to the specific political crisis produced by Guiteau's identification of himself as "a Stalwart of the Stalwarts" after shooting Garfield, or (c) the founding moment of the modern American administrative state that would dominate 20th-century governance. 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 Stalwart-Half-Breed split, the 1880 36-ballot Republican Convention, the Conkling-Platt May 1881 Senate resignations, the gradual expansion of civil-service coverage, the 1939 Hatch 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: "the civil service can never be placed on a satisfactory basis until it is regulated by law", "I shall at the proper time ask Congress to fix the tenure of the minor offices of the several Executive Departments", "for the protection of those who are intrusted with the appointing power against the waste of time and obstruction to the public business caused by the inordinate pressure for place". The "regulated by law" phrase is the cleanest commitment.

Garfield's framing committed presidential authority to legislative regulation of federal employment.

QUESTION 2

Accept any of: "open, competitive examinations for testing the fitness of applicants for the public service", "three Civil Service Commissioners, and said three commissioners shall constitute the United States Civil Service Commission", "not more than two of whom shall be adherents of the same party". The "open, competitive examinations" phrase is the cleanest articulation of the merit principle.

The Act's competitive-examination framework is the structural basis of the merit-based civil service.

QUESTION 3

Source A is a presidential commitment to seek civil-service reform legislation; it articulates the political case for reform but does not implement it. Source B is the implementing legislation that operationalizes the reform through specific institutional mechanisms (the Civil Service Commission, competitive examinations, bipartisan commissioner appointment). Together, the sources reveal the structural sequence: presidential commitment (1881) ' assassination crisis (July-September 1881) ' institutional implementation (1883). Without presidential commitment, the assassination might have produced a different reform; without the assassination, the commitment might not have produced legislative action.

AP students should be able to articulate the presidential-vs-legislative role distinction.

QUESTION 4

The 22-month gap covers Garfield's short presidency (March-July 1881), the assassination crisis (July-September 1881), Arthur's succession (September 1881), Arthur's reversal of his Stalwart commitments (1881-82), Senator Pendleton's drafting of the bill (1881-82), and congressional passage (January 1883). The temporal ordering reveals that the rhetorical commitment of March 1881 required two specific intervening conditions to produce legislative implementation: (1) the assassination crisis that mobilized public opinion against the spoils system; (2) Arthur's reversal that produced executive support for the reform he had previously opposed. The ordering tells you that presidential commitment alone was structurally insufficient - it required additional political catalysts to produce legislation.

AP students should be able to articulate the multi-stage political process required to translate presidential commitment into legislation.

QUESTION 5

Accept any three of: (1) Cleveland's 1885 executive order expanding coverage to additional positions. (2) The 1896 Theodore Roosevelt civil service commissioner reforms strengthening examination standards. (3) McKinley's 1897 executive orders. (4) Theodore Roosevelt's 1903-1909 expansion of coverage. (5) The 1907 Hatch Act restrictions on political activity by federal employees. (6) The 1923 Classification Act standardizing federal pay grades. (7) The 1939 Hatch Act (renamed from the 1907 version) prohibiting federal employees from political campaigning. By 1932, approximately 80% of federal positions were covered by merit-based hiring; the spoils system had been substantively displaced.

AP students should be able to identify multiple specific 1883-1939 developments expanding merit-based hiring.

QUESTION 6

George H. Pendleton. The Democratic Senator from Ohio who had championed civil-service reform for years before the 1881 Garfield assassination created the political conditions for the legislation's passage.

AP students should know Pendleton as the Act's sponsor.

QUESTION 7

80%. The Act initially covered only 10% of federal positions in 1883. By 1900 it covered 40%; by 1932, 80%. By the mid-20th century, merit-based civil service had largely displaced the spoils system.

AP students should know the gradual expansion percentages.

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.