AP EDITION · DBQ + LEQ · CLASSROOM

1884

Grover Cleveland vs James G. Blaine

A 105-minute lesson on the 1884 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, DBQ pairing, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA Gilded Age	ELECTORAL VOTES 401 total
WINNER Grover Cleveland (Democratic) · 219 EV	RUNNER-UP James G. Blaine (Republican) · 182 EV
KEY ISSUE Political corruption; civil service reform; tariff policy	TURNOUT 78.2%

CONTENTS

1. Cover
2. Lesson plan (105 min) + framework alignment
3. Background: vocabulary + primary source A
4. Primary source B (DBQ pair)
5. Worksheet (8 questions)
6. Long-essay-question + rubric
7. Answer key + discussion

1884: Grover Cleveland vs James G. Blaine

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 1884 that would produce a Democratic presidential victory after 28 years of Republican dominance. For each, identify the specific 1877-1884 development most responsible.
15 min	**Reading + vocab**	The 1884 election was the 25th U.S. presidential election. It ended the 28-year Republican monopoly on the presidency (since 1856) with Grover Cleveland's 219-182 electoral-vote victory over James G. Blaine. The election was decided by 1,047 votes in New York - the closest deciding state in U.S. presidential history. The campaign was widely regarded as the dirtiest in U.S. history up to that point. The Republican Party had been fractured by the 1881-1883 Garfield assassination and Pendleton Civil Service Act struggle. The Stalwart faction had been destroyed by Guiteau's assassination of Garfield; the Half-Breeds led by Senator James G. Blaine of Maine dominated Republican politics. The Republican National Convention met in Chicago on June 3-6, 1884 and nominated Blaine on the fourth ballot over President Chester A. Arthur and Senator George F. Edmunds of Vermont. John A. Logan of Illinois was the vice presidential candidate. Blaine carried significant scandal baggage from the Mulligan letters - correspondence with a railroad executive showing he had accepted favors in exchange for legislative help. The letters ended with "burn this letter" which Blaine had instructed but his correspondent had preserved. A significant Republican faction - the "Mugwumps" - refused to support Blaine and endorsed the Democratic nominee. The Mugwump leaders included Carl Schurz, George F. Hoar, Charles Eliot, Henry Ward Beecher, and Mark Twain. The Democratic National Convention met in Chicago on July 8-11, 1884 and nominated Governor Grover Cleveland of New York on the second ballot. Cleveland was 47, a former mayor of Buffalo and governor of New York. He had a reputation for honesty - reformers called him "Grover the Good." Thomas A. Hendricks of Indiana was the vice presidential candidate. The campaign produced two famous scandals. In July 1884, the Buffalo Evening Telegraph published a story revealing that Cleveland had fathered an illegitimate son

in 1874 with a Buffalo widow named Maria Halpin. Cleveland's response was: "tell the truth." Republican rallies chanted "Ma, ma, where's my pa?" Democrats responded after Cleveland won: "Gone to the White House, ha ha ha!"

On October 29, 1884, Protestant minister Samuel D. Burchard spoke at a Republican rally at Fifth Avenue Hotel in New York City. He called the Democratic Party "the party of Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion." The remark insulted Irish Catholic voters in New York City. Blaine, sitting on the platform, did not denounce the insult. The Irish Catholic vote in New York City swung decisively to Cleveland.

The Belshazzar's Feast banquet at Delmonico's on October 29, 1884 (same day as Burchard) attended by Blaine and prominent New York industrialists (Jay Gould, Cornelius Vanderbilt II) - depicted in a New York World cartoon as a "millionaires' feast" - solidified the Democratic narrative that Blaine was the candidate of corrupt wealth.

Cleveland won 219 electoral votes to Blaine's 182. Cleveland carried 20 states; Blaine carried 18. The popular vote: Cleveland 4,914,482 (48.5%); Blaine 4,856,903 (48.3%); Butler 175,370 (Greenback, 1.7%); St. John 150,369 (Prohibition, 1.5%). The Cleveland-Blaine popular-vote margin was 57,579. The decisive state was New York (36 electoral votes), which Cleveland won by 1,047 votes out of 1.17 million cast.

Cleveland was inaugurated March 4, 1885 - the first Democrat to deliver an inaugural address since James Buchanan in 1857. He governed as a fiscally conservative reform Democrat: he supported Pendleton civil-service reform; he vetoed many private pension bills for Civil War veterans (414 vetoes in his first term, more than all prior presidents combined); he supported tariff reduction (1887 annual message focused entirely on tariff reform); he opposed federal subsidies to railroads.

Cleveland would lose his 1888 re-election bid to Benjamin Harrison (despite winning the popular vote by 90,596) but return to win in 1892 - making him the only president to serve two non-consecutive terms (22nd and 24th president). The 1884-1892 Cleveland-Harrison-Cleveland sequence demonstrated the structural Republican-Democratic equilibrium that the 1880 election had inaugurated.

The 1884 election's structural significance was fourfold. First, the Republican monopoly on the presidency was broken; the Republican-Democratic competitive equilibrium that had begun in 1880 had been confirmed as a multi-decade structural feature. Second, the Mugwump phenomenon - reform-minded party defectors swinging a national election - established that independent voting could be politically decisive in close elections. Third, Cleveland's reform Democratic governance demonstrated that the post-Reconstruction Democratic Party could be both the Solid South party AND a national party with reform credentials. Fourth, the Burchard "Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion" incident demonstrated the structural importance of religious affiliation

		in late 19th-century American politics - the era when "ethnocultural" rather than economic voting was structurally dominant. The 1880s-1890s era that the 1884 election inaugurated would be one of remarkably close presidential elections. The popular-vote margins in 1880 (9,070), 1884 (57,579), 1888 (90,596 - Cleveland won popular but lost electoral), 1892 (380,810), and 1896 (601,316) all reflected the structural Republican-Democratic equilibrium. The 1896 William Jennings Bryan campaign would break this equilibrium by mobilizing agrarian populism around the gold/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

Mugwumps
The Republicans who refused to support Blaine in 1884 because of his Mulligan-letters bribery record. They voted for Democrat Cleveland instead. Primarily reform-minded New England Republicans led by Carl Schurz, George F. Hoar, Charles Eliot, Henry Ward Beecher, Mark Twain.

Maria Halpin scandal
The July 1884 campaign scandal in which a Buffalo widow named Maria Halpin claimed Cleveland had fathered her son. Cleveland told his campaign "tell the truth."

Belshazzar's Feast
The October 29, 1884 Republican dinner at Delmonico's in New York City attended by Blaine and prominent New York industrialists. The New York World cartoon depicted it as a "millionaires' feast" mocking the poor.

Ethnocultural voting
The pattern of late 19th-century American voting in which religious affiliation (Protestant/Catholic), ethnic origin (Anglo/Irish/German), and ritual observance (temperance, sabbatarianism) drove partisan choice more than economic policy. The Burchard remark's decisive effect demonstrates ethnocultural voting in action.

Tariff politics
The dominant economic policy debate from 1865 to 1913. Republicans generally supported high protective tariffs; Democrats generally supported tariff reduction. Cleveland's 1887 annual message focused entirely on tariff reform.

Mulligan letters
Correspondence between Blaine and a railroad executive showing Blaine had accepted favors in exchange for legislative help. The letters had ended with "burn this letter."

Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion
The October 29, 1884 remark by Protestant minister Samuel D. Burchard at a Republican rally. Insulted Irish Catholic voters; Blaine did not denounce; cost Blaine New York by 1,047 votes.

Grover the Good
Cleveland's reform reputation as governor of New York (1883-85). Crucial to Mugwump support.

Solid South
The pattern of consistent Democratic Party dominance in former Confederate states from approximately 1880 to 1960.

Inaugural Address

GROVER CLEVELAND, MARCH 4, 1885

Cleveland took the oath at the East Portico of the U.S. Capitol on March 4, 1885 - the first Democrat to deliver an inaugural address since James Buchanan in 1857. The address was relatively brief (about 1,700 words). The civil-service reform commitment articulated here was crucial to retaining Mugwump Republican support.

> *"The people demand reform in the administration of the Government and the application of business principles to public affairs. As a means to this end, civil-service reform should be in good faith enforced. Our citizens have the right to protection from the incompetency of public employees who hold their places solely as the reward of partisan service, and from the corrupting influence of those who promise and the vicious methods of those who expect such rewards; and those who worthily seek public employment have the right to insist that merit and competency shall be recognized instead of party subserviency or the surrender of honest political belief."*

Cleveland, "Inaugural Address" (Washington, DC, March 4, 1885). 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

GROVER CLEVELAND, MARCH 4, 1885

“The people demand reform in the administration of the Government and the application of business principles to public affairs. As a means to this end, civil-service reform should be in good faith enforced. Our citizens have the right to protection from the incompetency of public employees who hold their places solely as the reward of partisan service, and from the corrupting influence of those who promise and the vicious methods of those who expect such rewards; and those who worthily seek public employment have the right to insist that merit and competency shall be recognized instead of party subserviency or the surrender of honest political belief.”

Cleveland, "Inaugural Address" (Washington, DC, March 4, 1885). Public domain.

SOURCE B

Address to the Mugwumps of Massachusetts

CARL SCHURZ, JULY 1884

“Mr. Blaine's public record stands branded with crimes which would dishonor any public man. He has used the position with which the people had trusted him to make money in transactions concerning which honor and good faith required his absolute disinterestedness. He has appealed to the meanest passions of the populace. The Republican party of which he is the nominee has, in nominating him, betrayed the most precious trust that ever was confided to a political organization. To support such a nominee is to compromise the moral character of every supporter. It is the duty of every honest Republican to vote against him.”

Schurz, "Address to the Mugwumps of Massachusetts" (Boston, July 1884). Public domain.

The 1884 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 (Cleveland's Inaugural) that commits to civil-service reform enforcement. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 2 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify the key phrase in Source B (Schurz's Mugwump address) that justifies Republican defection from Blaine. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

Both sources articulate reform commitments but from different positions. Identify the specific political function each source performs.

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

Cleveland's Inaugural commits to civil-service reform enforcement. How does this commitment relate to Schurz's Mugwump address?

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER

The Burchard "Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion" remark on October 29, 1884 swung the Irish Catholic vote in New York City to Cleveland. What does this reveal about late 19th-century ethnocultural voting?

QUESTION 6 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

Who delivered the "Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion" remark?

( ) A. James G. Blaine
( ) B. Samuel D. Burchard
( ) C. John A. Logan
( ) D. Carl Schurz

QUESTION 7 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How many vetoes did Cleveland issue in his first term?

( ) A. 82
( ) B. 231
( ) C. 414
( ) D. 584

QUESTION 8 · SHORT-ANSWER

Sketch your thesis sentence for the LEQ (next page). State your position: was the 1884 election coalition-breaking, equilibrium-establishing, or ethnocultural-revealing? Identify one piece of evidence from each source you will use.

Long-essay-question

LEQ PROMPT

Cleveland's 1885 Inaugural (Source A) articulates a civil-service reform commitment that maintained Mugwump Republican support for his administration. Carl Schurz's July 1884 Mugwump address (Source B) articulates the structural case for Republican defection to support Cleveland based on Blaine's corruption record. Using BOTH sources and your knowledge of the 1865-1892 period, evaluate the extent to which the 1884 election's structural significance was (a) the breaking of the post-Civil-War Republican coalition by reform-minded defection, (b) the establishment of close Republican-Democratic competitive equilibrium that would dominate U.S. politics through 1896, or (c) the demonstration that ethnocultural rather than economic voting was structurally dominant in late 19th-century American politics. Defend a clear thesis.

GRADING RUBRIC

Thesis (1 pt): must take a defensible position on the coalition-breaking-vs-equilibrium-vs-ethnocultural-voting axis. Contextualization (1 pt): mention at least two of the Stalwart-Half-Breed split, the Pendleton Act, the Solid South, the Burchard remark, the 1896 realignment. 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: "civil-service reform should be in good faith enforced", "Our citizens have the right to protection from the incompetency of public employees who hold their places solely as the reward of partisan service", "merit and competency shall be recognized instead of party subserviency". The "good faith enforced" phrase is the cleanest commitment.

Cleveland's framing committed his Democratic administration to the Pendleton Act framework Republicans had passed in 1883.

QUESTION 2

Accept any of: "Mr. Blaine's public record stands branded with crimes which would dishonor any public man", "the people had trusted him to make money in transactions concerning which honor and good faith required his absolute disinterestedness", "the Republican party of which he is the nominee has, in nominating him, betrayed the most precious trust". The "branded with crimes" phrase is the cleanest indictment.

Schurz's framing established that Republican party loyalty must yield to candidate integrity.

QUESTION 3

Source A is Cleveland's presidential commitment to civil-service reform - articulated as the new president to maintain his Mugwump-Republican-plus-Democratic coalition. The function is to bind the Democratic administration to the reform framework that Republicans had passed in 1883. Source B is Schurz's pre-election justification for Republican defection - articulated as the leading Mugwump intellectual to mobilize reform-minded Republican voters for Cleveland. The function is to provide the structural argument for party defection based on candidate integrity. Together, the sources reveal the structural sequence: Mugwump defection (Schurz's call) ’ Cleveland victory ’ Democratic-Republican reform consensus (Cleveland's commitment).

AP students should be able to articulate the function distinction.

QUESTION 4

The relationship is direct and structural. Schurz's Mugwump address called for Republican defection based on Blaine's corruption record. Many reform-minded Republicans defected. Cleveland's civil-service reform commitment in his inaugural was specifically directed at maintaining the Mugwump coalition for his Democratic administration. The commitment was politically necessary because: (1) Mugwumps had supported Cleveland primarily because of his reform reputation. (2) Reversing course on civil-service reform would have alienated them politically. (3) The "in good faith enforced" framing committed Cleveland to executive enforcement of the Pendleton Act framework - the same reform standard the Mugwumps had demanded. The structural relationship: Source B's call for defection created the political coalition that Cleveland's Source A commitment was designed to maintain in office.

AP students should be able to articulate the coalition-maintenance relationship.

QUESTION 5

The Burchard incident reveals three specific features of late 19th-century ethnocultural voting: (1) Religious affiliation (Protestant/Catholic) was politically decisive at the margin. The Irish Catholic vote in New York City moved decisively to Cleveland after Burchard's remark identified Catholics with the Democratic Party - reflecting the ethnocultural rather than economic basis of voting. (2) Religious bigotry remarks by surrogates could damage a candidate even if the candidate did not personally endorse them. Blaine's failure to denounce Burchard cost him New York. (3) The structural composition of the Republican coalition included Catholic voters who could be alienated by Protestant nativism. The 1,047-vote margin in New York demonstrates how thin the Republican Catholic vote actually was. The structural lesson: in close elections, ethnocultural marginal voters could be decisive even though their numbers were small relative to the total electorate.

AP students should be able to articulate the structural significance of ethnocultural voting.

QUESTION 6

Samuel D. Burchard. The Protestant minister who spoke at the Republican rally at Fifth Avenue Hotel in New York City on October 29, 1884 - six days before the election.

AP students should know Burchard by name.

QUESTION 7

414. Cleveland's 414 vetoes in his first term were more than all prior presidents combined. Most of the vetoes were of private pension bills for Civil War veterans whom Cleveland believed had not earned the pensions.

AP students should know the 414-veto figure as evidence of Cleveland's fiscal conservatism.

QUESTION 8

Open-ended thesis sketch. Acceptable answers should: (1) state a clear position on the coalition-breaking-vs-equilibrium-vs-ethnocultural-voting axis, (2) avoid treating them as equivalent, (3) signal at least one piece of evidence from each source.

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