President Grover Cleveland

Stephen Grover Cleveland was born in Caldwell, New Jersey on March 18, 1837 to a large family where he was the fifth of nine children. His family moved to the middle of New York State where his father Richard was a Presbyterian minister. Unfortunately Richard died when Cleveland was sixteen years old and Cleveland and his older brother moved to New York City for work in order to support the rest of the family. Even though Cleveland was unable to attend college due to the family financial situation, he studied law and became a lawyer when he was twenty-two.

He became the assistant district attorney in Erie County, New York and hired a substitute to take his place when he was drafted to serve in the Civil War. This was a common practice of the times among wealthier families. From 1870 until 1873, Cleveland was County Sheriff and after that he returned to his law practice. By this time Cleveland weighed more than 250 pounds. Later in life he gained even more weight and his nickname was “Uncle Jumbo.”

In 1881 the Buffalo City (today called Buffalo) Democratic Committee asked Cleveland to run for mayor and surprisingly he won the election as a new face in local politics. With his law background he immediately exposed local corruption. The following year the Democratic state leadership asked Cleveland to run for governor and he won the election. He again tackled corruption, this time at the state level, and as a result gained national attention.

With favorable national attention, Cleveland became the Democratic nominee for the presidency in the election of 1884. Even though Cleveland delivered only two campaign speeches he did win the election but by one of the narrowest margins in history. His opponent James Blaine received 48.2 percent of the vote to Cleveland’s 48.5 percent. As the recent governor of New York, he won that state, which was critical in gaining sufficient electoral votes, but only by 1,200 votes.
President Grover Cleveland (Cont’d)

Cleveland’s first term as president is characterized by vetoes. At this time he earned another nickname, “Old Veto.” Since he believed in frugal government spending, he vetoed federal legislation that provided pensions to Civil War veterans. Cleveland entered the White House as a bachelor and his marriage to Frances Folsom in 1886 caused a stir across the nation. Frances was just 21 years old when she wed and was the daughter of Cleveland’s former law partner. The couple had five children and Frances was a popular First Lady.

In 1888 Cleveland ran for re-election against Benjamin Harrison. Again the popular vote was close, 48.6 percent for Cleveland and 47.9 percent for Harrison; Harrison carried the electoral vote and became president. In 1892, the Democratic Party again selected Cleveland as the presidential nominee and this time Cleveland was victorious in both the popular vote and the electoral vote. Cleveland is the only president to serve two non-consecutive terms.

An economic depression called the Panic of 1893 began about the same time as Cleveland’s second term, the most severe depression the United States had ever experienced. Unemployment was approximately 18 percent. A group of citizens known as Coxey’s Army marched to Washington, D.C. from the Midwest, demanding that the federal government initiate jobs programs to put people back to work. Cleveland did not believe this was an appropriate role for the federal government. When 150,000 railroad workers went on strike in 1894, Cleveland sent in federal troops to break the strike, another unpopular decision.
President Grover Cleveland (Cont’d)

Cleveland’s actions with regard to the pricing of gold and silver resulted in the depletion of U.S. gold reserves and the U.S. government became unable to pay its international obligations. Cleveland issued new government bonds to replenish the gold reserves. These bonds were largely purchased by wealthy financier J. P. Morgan. The majority of Democrats were swept out of office in the Congressional election of 1894 as a response to Cleveland’s methods of handling the depression and monetary crisis. Even though presidential term limits had not yet been introduced, Cleveland did not seek re-election to a second consecutive term.

After leaving office, Cleveland moved his family to Princeton, New Jersey where he practiced law and became a Trustee at Princeton University. In 1904 he published a book titled Presidential Problems about his terms in office. That same year his daughter Ruth died and he did not recover well from her death. While he was president he had a secret operation to remove cancer from his mouth. By 1908 Cleveland was suffering from gastro-intestinal, heart and kidney problems. He died on June 24, 1908.
President Grover Cleveland Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. Before he became President, Grover Cleveland served as a
   a. County sheriff
   b. Mayor
   c. Governor
   d. All of the above

2. Grover Cleveland’s nickname was
   a. Uncle Jumbo
   b. Old Veto
   c. Both a. and b. above
   d. None of the above

3. Cleveland’s first election to the presidency in 1884 is historic because
   a. It is one of the closest presidential elections in popular vote
   b. It was decided in the Electoral College
   c. Both a. and b. above
   d. None of the above

4. Cleveland’s re-election bid in 1888 is historic because
   a. It is one of the closest presidential elections in popular vote
   b. It was decided in the Electoral College
   c. Both a. and b. above
   d. None of the above

5. The economic depression that occurred during Cleveland’s second term is
   a. The Great Depression
   b. The Panic of 1893
   c. The Panic of 1837
   d. Crash of 1929

6. Cleveland used federal troops to break the strike of
   a. Police and firefighters
   b. Teachers
   c. Railroad workers
   d. Steelworkers
President Grover Cleveland Answers

1. d.
2. c.
3. a.
4. b.
5. b.
6. c.