

THE TWO TIMER,
OR
ONCE IS NOT ENOUGH

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Big Steve was born in the 1800s. Even though he claimed to be related, more or less directly, to Moses, he refused to follow his father into the ministry and instead headed west when he was young. He made his way to one of the scariest counties in the country, you could say. In the days of the Old West, Big Steve hanged a couple of guys.

So why is he a two timer? Big Steve was a two timer like no one else in American history. He admitted to fathering an illegitimate child, and yet his first love was Frank. Now, this is the 19th century, and the love of his life was Frank. Big Steve even purported to go through a wedding ceremony with Frank at a renowned residence (not a church, obviously).

As you can imagine, he was a Democrat. He refused to fight in the Civil War for the Union and eventually locked horns with Teddy Roosevelt. Nevertheless, some wumpy Republicans supported him when he ran for public office. They deserted him when he ran again, and he lost. In time, he entered what is commonly regarded as a sleazy profession and, of course, he was successful.

Sometimes he is associated with a candy bar, but he could well be described as negative and sour rather than sweet. He could also be described as panicky. Throughout his life, one of his favorite things to do was engage in piscatory acts in full public view, often in the

presence of women.

Eventually Big Steve returned to his home state and he died there — that is, the State of New Jersey, long known as a cesspool of corruption and immorality. Why are we concerned with him now? He has a couple of connections to Indiana that I'll describe in a bit.

We know this man today by the name Grover Cleveland. Everything that I have said about him is true, but much was omitted.

His full name was Stephen Grover Cleveland, and his father was indeed a minister. Steven Grover was the full name of a minister who had founded the church where Grover Cleveland's father was a minister when Grover Cleveland was born. Grover Cleveland went by the name Stephen when he was young and adopted the name Grover only in adulthood.

Grover's father left the family poor when he died. So when Grover was offered free college tuition if he, too, would become a minister, Grover declined. When he did find employment, he sent much of his earnings to his mother and sisters.

As to the title of this paper, Grover Cleveland was a two timer uniquely by serving two nonconsecutive terms as President. He is thus the 22nd and the 24th President of the United States. Above I said that Cleveland could be described as panicky. That was because he was born in

the year of the financial panic of 1837 and because the great financial panic of 1893 marred his second term as President.

While Grover Cleveland was born in New Jersey — a wonderful state that was my second home when I was young — his father moved the family to New York, and Grover is most closely associated with that state. After his father died, Grover did head west with his eyes set on the city of Cleveland, Ohio, which had been named after one of his distant forebears, Moses Cleveland. Moses had been a general of the Connecticut militia during the Revolutionary War.

On his way west, Grover never made it past Buffalo, New York. He stopped to visit his uncle in Buffalo, was introduced to many of the town bigwigs, and began clerking for a law firm. In Buffalo, he acquired the nickname Big Steve because he was 6'1" and hefty. He would become the second heaviest U.S. president, William Howard Taft being the first. His nephews and nieces dubbed him Uncle Jumbo. But his constituents called him Grover the Good because of his integrity and his many battles against political corruption.

Grover became a very successful attorney — the profession of law being what was described above as being considered sleazy. (I am a retired attorney, by the way.) In time, judges would ask Cleveland to mediate cases before them because he was considered fair and just, and the parties in the cases usually consented

because of Grover's sterling reputation for probity.

During the Civil War, Lincoln instituted a military draft for Union men. Under the Conscription Act, men could get out of the draft if they paid someone else to serve in their stead. Grover paid an immigrant \$150 to take his place as a draftee, and hence he avoided military service.

In 1870, he was elected sheriff of Erie County, New York — which was described above as being scary only because of the name Erie (as in eery). As sheriff, Cleveland personally saw that contracts were carried out to the letter and that, for instance, contractors didn't cheat in providing supplies to the sheriff's office.

Two men were convicted of murder during his tenure and sentenced to be hanged. Grover thought that it would have been wrong to have foisted the responsibility of hanging to anyone else. So he pulled the lever at the gallows himself, while standing where he could not see the convict. Normally hangings were public affairs, and people would come from miles around to witness them. Grover thought that practice improper. He had black muslin draped around the scaffold so that the executions would not be public spectacles. After the first hanging, Cleveland was so rattled that he was sick for several days afterwards.

He returned to legal practice after his term as sheriff. His most famous biographer, Alan Nevins, said, "Probably no man in the country, on March 4, 1881, had less thought

than this limited, simple, sturdy attorney of Buffalo that four years later he would be standing in Washington and taking the oath as President of the United States."

One day in 1881 while he was preparing to deliver a closing argument in court, a couple of men entered the courtroom. They asked the judge whether they could speak to Grover and then told him that they would like him to run for mayor on the Democratic ticket. Grover replied that he would consider the matter. They said that they needed to know that afternoon. After they left, Grover went up to the judge and told him that those men wanted him to run for mayor. He asked what the judge thought. The judge advised him to accept.

So Grover ran for mayor and won. As mayor, Cleveland solidified his reputation for honesty, hard work, and frugality. Cleveland became renowned for vetoing proposed city ordinances as mayor. He earned the moniker "The Veto Mayor" — and later carried that reputation forward as the Veto Governor and the Veto President. (Hence the description of him above as negative.)

Because he was a lawyer, he read city contracts to make sure that the city was not getting gypted. Due to the temptations of graft, members of the city council wanted to award a street cleaning contract to the *highest* bidder. Cleveland described the proposal "as the culmination of a most bare-faced, impudent, and shameless scheme to betray the interests of the people, and to worse than

squander the public money.” Grover instead awarded the contract to the lowest bidder, at \$100,000 less.

Cleveland’s reputation for honesty grew throughout the state of New York. Once again, he was asked to run for public office — this time for governor. He agreed to do so only if he approved of the rest of the ticket. The New York Democratic Party made sure that people known for political corruption were not nominated for other state offices. Finding the rest of the ticket acceptable, Cleveland ran and won in 1882. Interestingly, he never made a campaign speech during the gubernatorial race.

During his first two months in office, he vetoed eight bills. One of his most famous vetos was of the so-called Five Cent Fare Bill, which would have cut the fare on New York’s elevated train from a dime to a nickel. The bill was popular because train patrons wanted lower fares and also because the railroad owner was Jay Gould, one of the most notorious robber barons of the era. Cleveland vetoed the bill because he was convinced that it violated the “contract clause” of the U.S. Constitution. In addition, previously Gould had promised to fix New York’s dilapidated railroad system and had done so. Teddy Roosevelt, the minority leader in the New York senate, was one of the sponsors of the bill and was livid when he heard of the veto. Nevertheless, he agreed not to override the veto and later admitted that Governor Cleveland had been right.

Sometimes the General Assembly of New York would

include goodies directed to Buffalo in proposed legislation, believing that Cleveland wouldn't veto something that would help his own city. On one occasion, a bill provided that the State of New York would pay for his native town to get a new fire engine. He vetoed the bill anyway.

His greatest accomplishment as Governor may have been that he smashed the Tammany Hall political machine, which had long ruled the Democratic Party in New York. He also worked with Teddy Roosevelt to pass anti-corruption legislation and reform the civil service.

As the Presidential election of 1884 approached, the Democratic Party once more asked Cleveland to run. In September, during the campaign, a newspaper reported that Cleveland had fathered an illegitimate child. When his advisors asked Cleveland how they should respond, Cleveland famously replied by telegram, "Whatever you do, tell the truth."

It is uncertain whether Cleveland actually was the father. The mother knew several men intimately, including one of Cleveland's old law partners. Cleveland knew the woman, but he was the only one of her male associates who was unmarried. He may well have accepted responsibility to save his friend's widow and daughter from scandal. The child, after all, bore the name of Cleveland's partner, not of Cleveland, although Cleveland had paid support for the child until the child was eventually adopted. This public scandal gave rise to the infamous cartoon of a baby screaming, "I want my pa!" During the campaign,

Republicans walked behind a baby carriage shouting, “Ma, ma, where’s my pa?” Cleveland’s forthright admission led to the scandal’s blowing over quickly.

Ironically, it came out in the same campaign that his opponent’s eldest son had been born three months after his opponent had been married. Democrats advised Cleveland to make this a political issue. Cleveland asked them to bring him the information. He looked the documents over, then tore them up and told his staff and advisors not to raise this issue during the campaign.

Cleveland won the Presidential contest, becoming the first Democrat elected to the Presidency since James Buchanan (who preceded Lincoln). (Andrew Johnson, incidentally, who became President on Lincoln’s death, was a Democrat but in 1864 he and Lincoln both ran on the ticket of the National Union Party, an offshoot of the Republican Party.) Cleveland and Woodrow Wilson were the only Democratic Presidents to serve during the years of Republican domination from the Civil War until the Great Depression. Some of Cleveland’s support came from a faction of the Republican Party known as the Mugwumps, known for their opposition to political corruption and desire for reform. (These are the “wumpy Republicans” mentioned earlier.) Cleveland remarked, “A Democratic thief is as bad as a Republican thief.” Joseph Pulitzer’s New York World endorsed Cleveland and explained why in these words: “1. He is an honest man. 2. He is an honest man. 3. He is an honest man. 4. He is an honest man.”

After Cleveland won, his supporters changed the Republican cry of “Ma, ma, where’s my pa?” to “Ma, ma, where’s my pa? Gone to the White House, ha, ha, ha.”

Cleveland’s first time in Washington, D.C. was coming down a few days before he was inaugurated. His inaugural address suggested things to come:

It is the duty of those serving the people in public office to closely limit public expenditures to the actual needs of the Government economically administered, because this bounds the right of the Government to exact tribute from the earnings of labor or the property of the citizen, and because public extravagance begets extravagance among the people.... A due regard for the interests and prosperity of all the people demands ... that our system of revenue shall be so adjusted as to relieve the people of unnecessary taxation ... and preventing the accumulation of a surplus in the Treasury to tempt extravagance and waste.

Cleveland proved to be a fiscal conservative, cutting government spending and vetoing more bills during his two terms than all previous Presidents had done, combined. He is second in the number of vetoes to this day. Who is first? FDR — because FDR served three full terms and a bit of a fourth. Cleveland said, “I ought to have a monument over me when I die — not for anything I

have ever done, but for the foolishness I have put a stop to.”

Many of the bills Cleveland vetoed during his first term were for pensions for Civil War veterans. The official Pension Board had already rejected the claims, and Cleveland was asked to override them. He generally refused. In his final address to Congress, he explained: “I have endeavored within my sphere of official duty to protect our pension roll and make it what it should be, a roll of honor, containing the names of those disabled in their country's service and worthy of their country's affectionate remembrance.”

When Grover found that railroads that had gotten enormous land grants were not living up to their part of the bargain, he reclaimed 81 million acres for federal use. He undercut patronage employment by refusing to replace Republicans who were doing their jobs well.

More controversially, in 1886, even though the federal government was currently running a budget surplus, he vetoed the “Texas Seed Bill,” which allocated \$10,000 (\$2 million in today’s currency) for buying seed grain from Texas farmers during a severe drought. Cleveland explained:

I can find no warrant for such an appropriation in the Constitution, and I do not believe that the power and duty of the general government ought to be extended to the relief of individual suffering

which is in no manner properly related to the public service or benefit. A prevalent tendency to disregard the limited mission of this power and duty should, I think, be steadfastly resisted, to the end that the lesson should be constantly enforced that, though the people support the government, the government should not support the people. The friendliness and charity of our countrymen can always be relied upon to relieve their fellow-citizens in misfortune.... Federal aid in such cases encourages the expectation of paternal care on the part of the government and weakens the sturdiness of our national character, while it prevents the indulgence among our people of the kindly sentiment and conduct which strengthens the bonds of a common brotherhood.

Cleveland also reduced tariffs, a move that angered many in his home state of New York. He stated:

When we consider that the theory of our institutions guarantees to every citizen the full enjoyment of all the fruits of his industry and enterprise with only such deduction as may be his share toward the careful and economical maintenance of the government which protects him, it is plain that the exaction of more than this is indefensible extortion and a culpable betrayal of American fairness and justice. The public treasury, which should only exist as a conduit conveying the people's tribute to its legitimate

objects of expenditure, becomes a hoarding place for money needlessly withdrawn from trade and the people's use, thus crippling our national energies, suspending our country's development, preventing investment in productive enterprise, threatening financial disturbance, and inviting schemes of public plunder.

There are three other notable tidbits about Cleveland's first term. First, his Vice President was Thomas Hendricks, former Governor of Indiana. Hendricks died in November 1885. So Cleveland had no Vice President for most of his first term. Second, on Thanksgiving Day, 1885, he became the first President to suggest that the day be set aside for religious services and family gatherings: "And let there also be on the day thus set apart a reunion of families, sanctified and chastened by tender memories and associations; and let the social intercourse of friends, with pleasant reminiscence, renew the ties of affection and strengthen the bonds of kindly feeling." Setting aside a day for Thanksgiving continues, with friends and families gathering as Cleveland suggested. Grover started the tradition.

Third, and the most important tidbit about his first term, in 1886, the same year that he unveiled the Statue of Liberty, Grover Cleveland became the only President to be married in the White House. His bride's name was, actually, Frank because she had been named after an uncle, but she was known to the public as Frances. She

was the daughter of one of Cleveland's law partners, and when they married, she was 21 and Cleveland was 49. Their first-born child was named Ruth, known in the press as Baby Ruth. Tragically, when Ruth was 12, she got a fever and passed away in three days from diphtheria. In her memory, a candy bar named Baby Ruth came out in 1921. Cleveland's last child, born in 1903, died in 1995. Think of that. That man's father (Grover) had been born in 1837, and the son was still living in 1995. Moreover, that man's grandfather (Grover's father) was an infant when Thomas Jefferson was President.

Cleveland ran for re-election in 1888, this time against Benjamin Harrison of Indiana. Even though Cleveland won the popular vote — he won the popular vote all three times he ran for President — he lost the electoral college vote. In 1884, Indiana was one of four swing states that went Cleveland's way. In 1888, Indiana and even Cleveland's home state of New York went for Harrison. The mugwumps also supported Harrison. Cleveland was steadfast throughout the campaign in calling for a lower tariff. This stance probably cost Cleveland some votes. He later admitted, "Perhaps I made a mistake from the party standpoint; but damn it, it was right."

As Cleveland and his wife were leaving the White House after the defeat, Frances said to the White House butler, Jerry West, "Jerry, I want you to take good care of all the furniture and ornaments in the house, for I want to find everything just as it is now, when we come back again." Jerry asked, When? Frances replied, "We are

coming back four years from today.”

Grover Cleveland returned to legal practice, but watched the Benjamin Harrison administration with frustration. Harrison and the Republicans turned Cleveland’s budget surplus into a deficit. Moreover, Cleveland, along with many in the Northeast, thought that gold alone should back United States currency. Harrison and many in the West believed that gold and silver should equally back our currency. The Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890 enacted Harrison’s view, requiring the federal government to buy virtually all of the output of the silver mines in the United States, at nearly double its value. Because silver was relatively cheap, people bought silver, sold the silver in return for convertible paper money, and then converted the paper money into gold. Silver purchases greatly depleted the U.S. gold reserves while increasing the minting of silver. The result was widespread currency inflation, leading to an economic boom followed by a bust. In addition, in 1890, thanks to William McKinley, who was then in Congress, tariffs rose to an all-time high. Cleveland favored low tariffs and one year spent his annual address to Congress attacking protective high tariffs.

The Democrats re-nominated Cleveland in 1892, and Cleveland won. During the campaign, Mrs. Benjamin Harrison was dying of tuberculosis and President Harrison would not campaign. Two weeks before the election she died, and Cleveland and all other candidates also ceased campaigning.

During his first Presidential campaign, Cleveland had spoken out against U.S. expansionism and imperialism. But during the Harrison administration, American sugar planters had dethroned the queen of Hawaii. Three weeks before Cleveland came into office, the Harrison administration submitted to the U.S. Senate a treaty to annex Hawaii. Five days after taking office, Cleveland withdrew the treaty. Cleveland also withdrew the Berlin Conference Treaty, which would have guaranteed U.S. access to the Congo.

In a message to Congress in December 1893, Cleveland explained his opposition to annexing Hawaii: "I suppose that right and justice should determine the path to be followed in treating this subject. If national honesty is to be disregarded and a desire for territorial expansion or dissatisfaction with a form of government not our own ought to regulate our conduct, I have entirely misapprehended the mission and character of our government and the behavior which the conscience of the people demands of their public servants." During his first term, Cleveland had met the queen when she was a princess traveling with her mother en route to Queen Victoria's golden jubilee celebration. Today every year native Hawaiians celebrate Grover Cleveland's loyalty to that Hawaiian queen (who considered Grover a friend), and a group from Hawaii makes an annual pilgrimage to the home where Cleveland was born to do him honor.

Unfortunately, shortly after he took office, the United

States was hit with the greatest economic depression it had yet faced — the Panic of 1893. He was inaugurated in March, and in May the stock market crashed and by the end of the month the U.S. had breached its gold reserve legal requirement. Consequently, British capital fled the United States and by June the unemployment rate reached 16 percent. In October, Cleveland got Congress to repeal the Sherman Silver Purchase Act to reduce the coinage of silver. Cleveland also worked hard to cut tariffs, but succeeded in lowering the rate from only 47 percent to 40 percent. Those moves, however, weren't enough. By the end of 1893, 119 railroads had gone bankrupt.

On top of this, in 1894, Pullman car railroad workers struck. Cleveland sent in troops to break up the strike because it was holding up the delivery of United States mail. At least a dozen people died in the melee. As a result, Cleveland created Labor Day as a peace offering to American workers. In 1896, the Klondike gold rush helped alleviate the economic situation but only slightly.

Upon leaving office in 1897, Grover Cleveland moved his family to Princeton, New Jersey. He continued one of his favorite past times — fishing, which is the piscatory act mentioned earlier. Grover even wrote a book about fishing and hunting, but he would not hunt anything except duck — and that, for eating. Cleveland served as a trustee at Princeton (while Woodrow Wilson was university president) until Cleveland died in June 1908.

I'll close this essay with three quotes. The first is from Allan Nevins, Cleveland's most famous biographer.

In Grover Cleveland, the greatness lies in typical rather than unusual qualities. He had no endowments that thousands of men do not have. He possessed honesty, courage, firmness, independence, and common sense. But he possessed them to a degree other men do not.

The second quote is from Henry Louis Mencken, the acerbic literary critic, editor, and author. Mencken ridiculed virtually everyone in politics, from Teddy Roosevelt to Coolidge. So his words on Grover Cleveland are remarkable.

We have had more brilliant Presidents than Cleveland, and one or two were considerably more profound, but we have never had one, at least since Washington, whose fundamental character was solid and more admirable.... No conceivable seduction could weaken him. There was something almost inhuman about his fortitude....

....

He was not averse to popularity, but he put it far below the approval of conscience. In him all the imaginary virtues of the Puritans became real.

The third quote is from Cleveland himself. His last words, uttered on his deathbed, were, "I have tried so hard to do

right.”

Rest in peace, Stephen Grover Cleveland. You
deserve it.