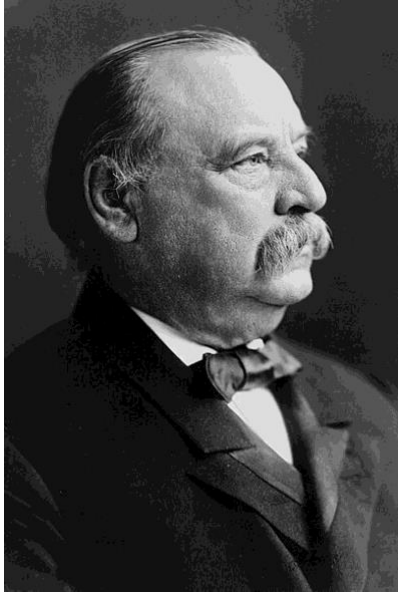


Activity 2: Exploring Diverse Perspectives Through World’s Fair Speeches

Perspective 1: Grover Cleveland



Born in 1837 in New Jersey, Grover Cleveland was the son of a Congregational and Presbyterian minister. Cleveland never attended college but was admitted to the New York bar and became active in local politics. He was a pro-business Democrat who served non-consecutive terms as president of the United States from 1885-1889 and 1893-1897. On May 1, 1893, the Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition opened to the public. As part of the opening ceremonies, President Cleveland gave a speech, reproduced below.

A few months earlier, in February 1893, the bankruptcy of a major railroad signaled a warning sign of economic downturn following two decades of explosive growth. In April 1893, the U.S. Treasury announced that they were running low on gold. Massive selloffs hit the stock market from May 3-5, sending share prices tumbling. The Panic of 1893 triggered an economic depression that lasted until 1897—the worst economic depression in U.S. history until the Great Depression of the 1930s. Many voters blamed Cleveland and the Democrats for the resulting bank and business failures, wage cuts, and high unemployment. But on the day of the fair’s opening ceremonies, the nation’s economic future was still uncertain.

Cleveland departed the White House in 1897, unpopular even among his own party. He lived in retirement until passing away in 1908.

Cleveland’s Address

“I am here to join my fellow citizens in congratulations which befit this occasion. Surrounded by the stupendous results of American enterprise and activity, and in view of the magnificent evidence of American skill and intelligence, we need not fear that these congratulations will be exaggerated. We stand to-day in the presence of the oldest nations of the world and point to the great achievements here exhibited, asking no allowance on the score of youth.

The enthusiasm with which we contemplate our work intensifies the warmth of the greeting we extend to those who have come from foreign lands to illustrate with us the growth and progress of human endeavor in the direction of higher civilization.

We who believe that popular education and the stimulation of these impulses of our citizens lead the way to the realization of the proud national destiny which our faith promises, gladly welcome the opportunity here afforded us to see the results accompanied by efforts which have

been exerted longer than ours in the field of man's improvement, while in appreciative return we exhibit the unparalleled advancement and wonderful accomplishments of a young nation, and the present triumphs of a vigorous, self-reliant and independent people. We have built these special edifices, but we have also built a magnificent fabric of popular government, whose grand proportions are seen throughout the world. We have made and here gathered together objects of use and beauty, the products of American skill and invention. We have also made men who rule themselves.

It is an exalted mission in which we and our guests from other lands are engaged, as we cooperate in the inauguration of an enterprise devoted to human enlightenment, and in the undertaking we here enter upon we exemplify in the noblest sense the brotherhood of all nations.

Let us hold fast to the meaning that underlies this ceremony, and let us not lose the impressiveness of this moment, as by a touch the machinery that gives life to this vast exposition is now set in motion. At the same time let our hopes and aspirations awaken forces which in all time to come shall influence the welfare, dignity and freedom of mankind."

As Cleveland delivered the last words of his speech, he raised a finger to a button. This article excerpt describes what happened next:

"The Electric Age was ushered into being in this, the last, decade of the nineteenth century today, when President Cleveland, by the pressing of a button, started the mighty machinery and rushing waters and revolving wheels in the World's Columbian exposition. No exhibit of the fair, which will attract thousands to this city for the next six months, can be more marvelous than the magic effect which marked the solemn opening of the fair at 12:08 o'clock today. Of the multitude of visitors—some estimate the number as high as 300,000—possibly not one fully realized the full import of the effect that was to come from the arrangement cleverly devised for the opening of the exposition. It was known, in a vague way, that the president was to press a key and that the electric communication with the machinery was to start the fair; but no one realized how intricate was this machinery, how infinite the ramifications of the electric spark, until the great fountains threw up their geysers seventy feet into the air and the rumbles and hum of wheels in the manufactures building and the clatter of machinery in all parts of that area of a mile square or more told the story of the final consummation of scientific thought... In previous expositions the possibilities of electricity have been limited to the mere starting of the engines in machin[e]ry hall, but in this it made a thousand servants do its bidding, and from the great engines and mammoth fountains down to the minutest act where power and touch were requisite, the magic of electricity did the duty of the hour."

President Grover Cleveland's address at the opening ceremonies of the World's Columbian Exposition on May 1, 1893, as printed in the *Wichita (KS) Daily Eagle*, May 2, 1893, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014635/1893-05-02/ed-1/seq-1/>.

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