

## This Day in History... January 16, 1883

### Passage of the Pendleton Civil Service Act

On January 16, 1883, President Chester A. Arthur signed the Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act, making major changes to the American Civil Service System.

When a new US president began his term in the early 1800s, one of his first duties was to dismiss thousands of federal employees and replace them with members of his own party. The “spoils system” was part of the privilege of the position, and recipients of the jobs were expected to contribute to the president and party’s campaign.

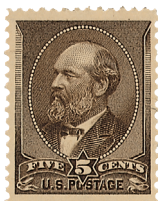


*Grant appointed America's first Civil Service Commission in 1872, but Congress refused to take the proper actions to make it permanent.*

One of those who received a generous salary from the system was Chester A. Arthur. He was appointed the collector of the Port of New York as a reward for his support of Roscoe Conkling, a powerful New York congressman. Arthur’s earnings from his salary, and a portion of the fines paid, were more than the president’s at the time.

When Rutherford B. Hayes became president in 1877, he began reforming the Civil Service. His first target was the overstuffed Customs House. Eventually, he replaced Arthur.

When Chester A. Arthur unexpectedly became president, those in favor of the spoils system considered him an ally. In Garfield’s short time as president, he pushed for reform and did not fill empty positions with supporters of Conkling’s political machine. Charles J. Guiteau, who felt he should have received a position in exchange for his party support, shot Garfield. The assassination showed the need for reform of the spoils system.



*As a mourning stamp, #205 was planned to be printed in black, but Garfield's wife didn't like it and suggested brown.*

In Arthur’s first presidential address to Congress, he asked for civil service reform legislation, going against his former political allies. Democratic Senator George Pendleton of Ohio had introduced legislation in 1880, but the Republican Congress did not act on it. He proposed positions would be based on merit, determined by an examination. When reintroduced, Pendleton’s bill passed through Congress and was signed by Arthur on January 16, 1883.

As well as qualifying civil service candidates through testing, rather than party loyalty, the act also made it illegal to fire an employee for political reasons. “Assessments” or mandatory party donations were no longer allowed. The United States Civil Service Commission was created to oversee the law. The Civil Service Commission was implemented to oversee appointments and ensure political activities did not take place at the work site. Arthur appointed three reformers to the commission, who published their first set of rules in May 1883.

When first passed, the Pendleton Act affected about 10% of federal jobs. Because of a provision that allowed outgoing presidents to keep their appointees in a position by converting it to a civil service job, today about 90% of federal jobs are Civil Service positions.



*Stamp issued for the 100th anniversary of the civil service act.*



*Finding corruption in the Office of Indian Affairs, Schurz made some of the first civil service reforms.*



*In the Star Route Fraud case, postal officials worked with stagecoach operators to over-charge the government. The case highlighted the corruption, and Americans wanted civil service reforms.*



*From the Prexies*

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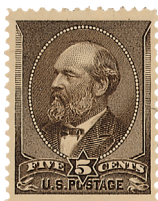
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