

Chester Arthur

Better than Expected
Twenty-First, 1881-1885



Nicknames: "Elegant Arthur", "The Gentleman Boss", "Our Chet", "The Dude President"

Birth: October 5th, 1829, Fairfield, Vermont

Death: November 18th, 1886, New York, New York

Significant Events During Arthur's Partial Term: Jesse James killed ... Brooklyn Bridge opens ... Gunfight at OK Corral ... Krakatoa Erupts ... U.S. Time Zones Introduced ... First Skyscraper Built (Chicago) ... Number of States remains at thirty-eight

Quotes: *"The office of the Vice President is a greater honor than I ever dreamed of attaining."*
-- Chester Arthur, 1880

"Chet Arthur President of the United States! Good God!"
-- Attributed to an acquaintance of Arthur's, on his becoming President

"I am but one in fifty-five million, still in the opinion of this one-fifty-five-millionth part of the country's population, it would be hard to better President Arthur's administration." -- Mark Twain

"Men may die, but the fabrics of our free institutions remain unshaken. No higher or more assuring proof could exist of the strength and permanence of popular government than the fact that though the chosen of the people be struck down his constitutional successor is peacefully installed without shock or strain except the sorrow which mourns the bereavement." -- Chester Arthur, 1881

"My inspiration is a godsend to you and I presume that you appreciate it...It raises you from a political cypher to the President of the United States...Never think of Garfield's removal as murder. It was an act of God, resulting from a political necessity for which he was responsible."
-- Charles Guiteau, the assassin who killed James Garfield (#20), to President Chester Arthur

"I may be President of the United States, but my private life is nobody's damned business."
-- Chester Arthur

How his term ended: Arthur lost his bid for reelection.

Other Professions: School Teacher and Principal; Lawyer; Tariff Collector, Soldier

Worst Mistake: Arthur opened Indian Territory to white Settlement, although the Indians who had been displaced to that location had been promised that it would be theirs forever ("as long as the green grass grows and the water flows").

Saving Grace: As a lawyer, Arthur won a 1855 case reminiscent of Rosa Parks and the ensuing bus boycott in Alabama a century later. Lizzie Jennings had been forcibly ejected from a whites-only streetcar in New York. Arthur defended her and won the case, leading to desegregation of public transportation in New York City.

Thus, similar to Lincoln, Arthur seemed to have his heart in the right place regarding the blacks, but didn't lose any sleep over the plight of the Indians.

Notes: Arthur, although born poor and orphaned (his father died when he was one and a half), worked his way through life Horatio Alger style (as had his predecessor, James Garfield), and became a college President at twenty-six and the youngest General in the Union Army at thirty.

Arthur was fired by Rutherford B. Hayes (#19) when he was Collector of the Port of New York. This was because Arthur had become the symbol of the evils of patronage, something Hayes wanted to stamp out.

Like Hayes, Arthur often defended fugitive slaves and other persecuted blacks in his work as a lawyer.

Arthur's wife of twenty years died the year before he became President.

Arthur hesitated to take over the Presidential duties during the interim period between when Garfield was shot and when he died (recall that Garfield hung on for eighty days before finally succumbing) at least partly because the assassin said after shooting him that his motive in killing the President was that he (the shooter) was a Stalwart (Arthur's faction of the party) and that he had acted so as to pave the way for Arthur to become the President.

The wealthy Arthur had the White House renovated by designer Louis Tiffany in Art Nouveau style, and also had an elevator added.

Arthur vetoed a bill to exclude Chinese immigration, but the bill had enough support that it was passed over his veto anyway.

Arthur was the last President to be born in a log cabin. The previous ones had been Jackson (#6), Taylor (#12), Fillmore (#13), Pierce (#14), Buchanan (#15), Lincoln (#16), and Garfield (#20).

Is it just me, or does Arthur not bear a strong resemblance to Captain Kangaroo?

Arthur had two children, one grandchild, and no great-grandchildren; thus, he has no living descendants today.