



CIVICS IN REAL LIFE

Civil Service

Civics is all around us. There is a lot to know about the government and how “We the People” interact with the government and each other. Let’s help each other expand our civic literacy.

Charles J. Guiteau really thought he deserved that job. After all, other supporters of the new president, James Garfield, had been appointed to well-paying government jobs. Why shouldn’t he? He thought the only way he would get a job with the presidential administration would be to replace Garfield with another Republican president who would like him better, so on July 2, 1881, he shot and killed the recently elected **President Garfield** at a train station. The murder of President Garfield by a man angry over not getting a government job he thought he was owed simply because he supported the president helped lead to the passage of the Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act of 1883, otherwise known as the “**Pendleton Act**”.

The idea that one should secure a government position in exchange for supporting a politician or party might sound odd to us today, but it is how the United States government operated for a long time. This is known as the **patronage** (or ‘spoils’) system, and the Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act instead created a civil service to replace it.

Today, **in order to get** most government positions, you must meet certain qualifications, which may include security clearances, testing, and experience. At the same time, there are a number of job protections in place

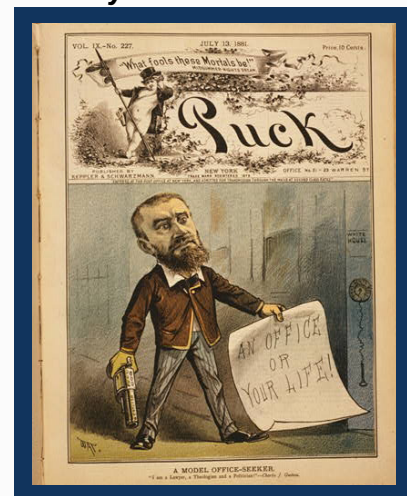


to ensure that these workers cannot be removed from their position for political reasons. There are exceptions to this, however, because while all civil service jobs are government jobs, not all government jobs are civil service jobs!

For example, the president is allowed to appoint his own supporters to advisory positions in the Cabinet or other Executive Branch jobs, or as ambassadors to other countries, usually with Senate approval. The president may also remove appointed officials, including those confirmed by the Senate. This includes, for example, a Cabinet official or agency chief.

The **4 million people** who make up the United States federal workforce do a wide variety of jobs. They are military personnel, postal workers, secretaries, department heads, traffic planners, advisors, teachers, social workers, scientists, and so many others. It is these men and women who do the day to day work of government that helps keep our lights on, our mail delivered, our national highways safe, and our nation functioning. People enter government service for a variety of reasons, but all of them work in positions that in some way seeks to have a positive impact on the lives of Americans.

At the core of the federal civil service is the idea that these people are working not for a president or a party, but for the people. Because of this, it’s important that civil servants be qualified to do the work, and that they be free to do the work without worrying that a new party in power will replace them, even though they may have done a good job. These civil servants fulfill the important civic responsibility to engage with the community and to work to make even the smallest difference in the lives of their fellow citizens.



To Think and To Do: People enter the federal civil service for many reasons, and there are numerous different types of jobs available. Review the **job opportunities** available in the federal civil service. What one or ones interest you, and how might the job connect to the **responsibilities of citizenship**?

Learn MORE about the Civil Service. Free registration may be required.

- **Find a Federal Government Job**, from USA.gov
- **Pendleton Act (1883)**, from OurDocuments.gov
- **What is federal civil service like today?**, from American Historical Association



**Lou Frey
Institute**