

**Anatomy of a Presidential Scandal
(Cleveland) – II**

Lead: After being nominated for President by the Democrats in the summer of 1884, Grover Cleveland was publicly accused of fathering an illegitimate child.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Cleveland was able to negotiate the shoals of scandal for several reasons. First, from the beginning, he told the truth. About 1871 widow Maria Halpin came from Jersey City to Buffalo where she found

work in the retail clothing trade. She was a tall, stunning beauty, spoke French and soon was seen in the company of several men, one of whom was Grover Cleveland. Their relationship was intimate and sexual. When her son was born in the fall of 1874, she named him Oscar Folsom Cleveland, in honor of Cleveland and his law partner. Cleveland accepted responsibility and provided for both mother and child. When the scandal broke, he confided the truth to a number of prominent clergy and political leaders.

Second, the Democrats stuck by their nominee. In the 1880s political parties had real power and largely brokered Presidential nominations.

Probably Cleveland would not have gotten the nomination had this story broken before the convention, but once he was the nominee, after soul searching and a little hand-wringing, the Party stuck with him.

Third, the thing was seen as a private matter. The real issue was public integrity and the capacity of the two candidates. Private conduct was considered irrelevant.

Finally, the reach of the media was relatively small. In Cleveland's day print media prevailed and often newspapers were attached to political parties. The Republican papers of course, kept the pot boiling, but the Democratic papers were hardly

**interested in pursuing the matter.
Therefore the story did not reach
critical mass.**

**Thus, through his honesty, by the
public's respect for personal privacy,
through political party strength, and
press restraint, Grover Cleveland
survived accusations of moral failure.
He went to sterling service, elected
twice President of the United States.**

**At the University of Richmond, this
is Dan Roberts.**

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Resources

Nevins, Allan. *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Courage*. New York, NY: Dodd, Meade, and Company, 1932.

Welch, Richard E. *The Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1988.