

Forty-Fifth Congress

Oct. 15, 1877-Mar. 3, 1879

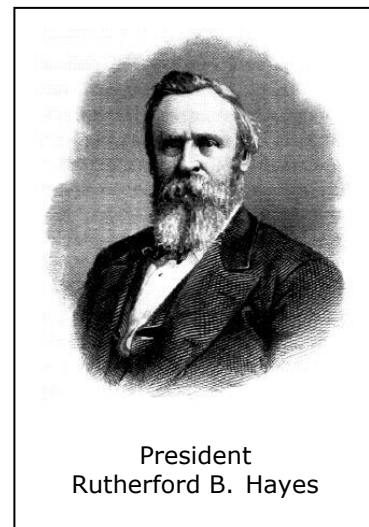
Administration of Rutherford B. Hayes

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Historical Background

The presidential election of 1876 was one of the most contested in U.S. history. The Democratic candidate, New York Governor Samuel J. Tilden won a bare majority of the popular vote, but failed to secure the required electoral votes to deliver a victory over his Republican opponent, Ohio Governor Rutherford B. Hayes. In hopes of securing the 20 uncommitted electoral votes from the states of Florida, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Oregon, which would put him just over the threshold of victory, Hayes assuaged the concerns of Southern legislators by promising to recall the last of the Federal troops stationed in the South, returning power to the erstwhile secessionist states – known as the Compromise of 1877. Hayes was thereby elected President by a razor-thin margin, with 185 electoral votes to Tilden’s 184. In April 1877, barely a month from his inauguration, Hayes ordered the withdrawal of all remaining Federal troops from the Southern states, effectively bringing the era of Reconstruction to a close 12 years after the end of the Civil War.

Subsequent to this compromise that delivered the Presidency to Hayes while ending the Federal government’s role in protecting the rights of the newly emancipated black slaves, the issue of bimetallism—the policy of backing U.S. currency with either silver or gold—returned to the fore of national political debate. The Coinage Act of 1873 ended bimetallism and established the gold standard as the official U.S. monetary policy. However, mining interests in Western states, who stood to benefit from a policy of free and unlimited silver coinage, as well as agricultural interests who favored an



House	Senate
Majority Party: Democrat (155 seats)	Majority Party: Republican (40 seats)
Minority Party: Republican (136 seats)	Minority Party: Democrat (35 seats)
Other Parties: Independent Democrats (2 seats)	Other Parties: Independent (1 seat)
Speaker of the House: Samuel J. Randall	President Pro Tempore: Thomas W. Ferry

inflationary monetary policy that would allow them to pay off substantial debts with devalued currency, combined to deliver Democrats a majority in the House of Representatives.

In December 1876, the House passed a bill introduced by Missouri Democrat Richard P. Bland that would have repealed the Coinage Act of 1873 and provided for the free and unlimited coinage of silver. Though initially unsuccessful, the Congress ultimately passed a bill that included a number of amendments introduced by Republican Senator William B. Allison of Iowa, which mandated that the treasury purchase a minimum of \$2 million and a maximum of \$4 million worth of silver every month. President Hayes vigorously opposed the bill and thus vetoed it when it came across his desk. That said, Congressional support for the bill was sufficient to override Hayes's veto and the Bland-Allison Act became law in February 1878.

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Dell, Christopher and Stephen W. Stathis. [*Major Acts of Congress and Treaties Approved by the Senate, 1789-1980*](#), Government Division (CRS), Sept. 1, 1982. 97th Congress, 2nd Session, 82-156 GOV. ProQuest Congressional, CRS-1982-GOV-0005

War or Peace?

Mexico Revolution and Nez Perce War

The U.S. maintained generally peaceful relations with foreign powers during 1877 and 1888. Treaty concerns with Italy, Great Britain, and Japan did not affect friendly relations with those countries.

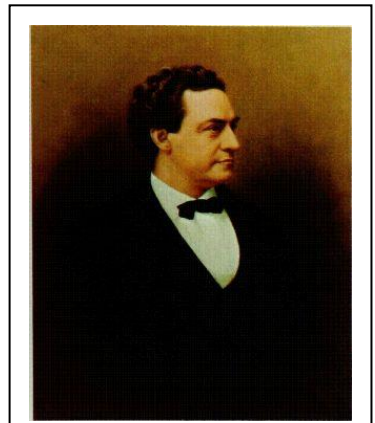
The 1878 revolution in Mexico created tensions along the southern border. Bandit incursions from Mexico into Texas caused the U.S. government to defer recognition of the acting Mexican government headed by President Porfirio Diaz. President Hayes ordered the U.S. Army to pursue these bandits into Mexican territory, which caused President Diaz to send his own troops to the border. The situation was diffused by a joint agreement between the two powers. By 1878, U.S. and Mexican military forces had managed to effectively decrease the border troubles.

Spanish attempts to put down the rebellion in Cuba did not draw the U.S. into that conflict directly, but trade with Cuba was disrupted by arrests, embargoes, and oppressive taxes levied against American property. In his 1877 State of the Union address, President Hayes noted that "such occurrences cannot but tend to excite feelings of annoyance, suspicion and resentment" between the U.S. and Spain. The conflict was concluded in 1878.

In Montana and Idaho territories, a conflict broke out between several bands of Nez Perce Indians and the Federal government. At the heart of the dispute was the government's insistence that the Nez Perce, whom they classified as non-treaty Indians, vacate their ancestral homelands in the Pacific Northwest to a reservation in Idaho. The Nez Perce insisted that this forced relocation violated the terms of the 1855 treaty signed at Walla-Walla. Unfortunately, a small group of Nez Perce Indians, most of whom had adopted Christianity, signed a new agreement in 1869 ceding 90% of their territory, leaving only 750,000 acres in Idaho. Thus, those Nez Perce not



Senate Majority Leader
Thomas W. Ferry



Speaker of the House
Samuel J. Randall

involved in signing the new treaty were relegated to non-treaty status, giving the Federal government the justification they needed to force the tribe to relocate. Though, militarily, there were a number of leaders among the Native American bands involved in the Nez Perce War, politically, the Nez Perce Chief Joseph represented the interests of the great majority of the tribe. As the resisting Indians were confronted with the government's superior numbers, Chief Joseph led a devastating fighting retreat, fending off much larger invading forces with as few as 200 warriors. But when Brig. General Nelson Miles led a surprise attack on the defending Nez Perce, Chief Joseph was forced to surrender on October 5, 1877, a moment immortalized in a speech the Nez Perce leader delivered, which ended with the promise, "From where the sun now stands I will fight no more forever."

Near the end of the 45th Congress, in response to growing discontent over unchecked Chinese immigration in the West, a Chinese Exclusion Act was passed. Hayes vetoed the bill because it would have abrogated the Burlingame Treaty of 1868 between the U.S. and China without negotiation and inflame relations between the two countries. House Democrats attempted to impeach President Hayes over the veto, but failed when Republicans prevented a quorum by refusing to vote.

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Economic Trends and Conditions

Economic issues, in particular the question of maintaining the dollar's gold standard, were of primary importance to Congress. The Coinage Act of 1873 which made gold the sole metallic backing for currency, in part led to economic depression. As a result, Democrats took control of the House in

1875 with the support of dissatisfied farmers and silver-mining advocates. President Hayes' 1877 State of the Union address called for a return to currency bimetallism as long as the reintroduction of silver did not affect the status of public debt.

In 1878, the House passed a bill introduced by Richard P. Bland that allowed unlimited silver coinage in addition to gold. In the Senate, Senator William B. Allison attached a number of amendments to the bill which, among other things, limited the silver coinage to two to three million dollars a month. The compromise Bland-Allison Act was passed by Congress on February 28, 1878 overriding Hayes' veto.

The ongoing economic instability hit labor hard, especially in the railroad construction industry. Throughout the depression, wages were cut drastically and poor working conditions prevailed, resulting in a number of strikes. The largest of these strikes, later known as the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, beginning in July 1877. Initially starting in Martinsburg, West Virginia on July 14, the strike spread to Maryland, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Missouri by July 20 and did not end until early September.

Riots erupted in Cumberland and Baltimore, Maryland, trapping militia and resulting in 10 civilian deaths and 25 wounded before President Hayes sent federal troops. In Illinois, strikers paralyzed rail yards in several major cities, including Chicago. Coal miners joined the strikers and the Workingmen's Party, a major political party at the time, organized demonstrations that drew thousands. On July 25, bloody riots broke out between strikers and police near the Halsted Street viaduct. About 30 civilians were killed and more than a 100 wounded in the resulting Battle of the Viaduct.

In St. Louis, the railroad strike turned into one of the first general labor strikes in U.S. history when diverse labor groups came together to demand reforms such as the eight-hour day and the banning of child labor. The strike quickly organized and held the city for over a week. However, the strike was put to an end when 3000 federal troops and 5000 special police seized the strike's command center and arrested over seventy leading strikers. Unlike the other strikes, the St. Louis strike was relatively bloodless, with approximately 18 deaths and little rioting.

Pennsylvania saw the worst violence. In Philadelphia, rioters set fire to the Center City. Reading, Pennsylvania was rocked by the Reading Railroad Massacre in which militia fired on strikers and killed approximately 10 civilians. In Pittsburgh, militiamen fired on strikers in an attempt to quell the growing crowd. The resulting 20 deaths and 29 wounded infuriated the strikers who then trapped the militia in a railroad roundhouse, and torched 39 buildings, 104 locomotives, and 1,245 freight and passenger cars. The following day, on July 22, the militia killed more than 20 people as they tried to retreat from the city.

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Landmark U.S. Supreme Court Decisions

Pennoy v. Neff, holding that states cannot hold jurisdiction over persons who are physically absent from the state, 95 U.S. 714 (1878)

Reynolds v. United States, holding that laws may not infringe on religious beliefs, but may infringe on religious practices. 98 U.S. 145 (1878)

Wilkerson v. Utah, affirming that death by firing squad did not constitute cruel and unusual punishment, 99 U.S. 130 (1879)

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1877 Events

- **Jan. 1:** Queen Victoria is declared Empress of India
- **Jan. 25:** 1876 U.S. Presidential Election - [Congress passed Electoral Commission Bill requiring a recount of electoral votes](#)
- **Jan. 29:** Satsuma Rebellion of samurai against new imperial government begins in Japan
- **Feb. 12:** Great Railroad Strike of 1877 - Railroad workers in the U.S. begin to strike initiating the Great Railroad Strike of 1877 to protest wage cuts and push for an 8-hour work day
- **Feb. 26:** 1876 U.S. Presidential Election – [Southern Democrats meeting secretly with Hayes’s Republicans to negotiate the removal of Federal troops in exchange for support, known as the Compromise of 1877](#)
- **Mar. 2:** 1876 U.S. Presidential Election – [Electoral Commission declares recount in Rutherford B. Hayes’s favor over Samuel J. Tilden who won the popular vote](#)
- **Mar. 18:** President Hayes appoints Fredrick Douglass marshal of Washington D.C.
- **Apr. 10:** Federal troops withdraw from Columbia S.C.
- **Apr. 12:** Great Britain annexes South African Republic
- **Apr 24:** The last federal occupying troops withdraw from the South, signaling the end of Reconstruction
- **Apr. 24:** [Russian Empire declares war on Ottoman Empire, beginning the Russo-Turkish War](#)

- **May 5:** Sitting Bull leads Lakota tribe into Canada to avoid persecution by U.S. Army
- **May 21:** Romania declares itself independent from the Ottoman Empire
- **June 1:** U.S. troops authorized to pursue bandits across the border into Mexico
- **June 15:** Henry Ossain Flipper becomes the first African-American cadet to graduate from the U.S. Military Academy
- **June 17:** *Nez Perce War* – [the Nez Perce defeat the U.S. Cavalry at White Bird Canyon in Idaho Territory](#)
- **July 9:** First Wimbledon tennis tournament is held in London, England by the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club
- **July:** *Great Railroad Strike of 1877* - President Hayes dispatches federal troops to suppress strikers
- **July 14:** *Great Railroad Strike of 1877* - General U.S. strike brings the railroad trains to a standstill
- **July 21:** *Great Railroad Strike of 1877* – Militia attack strikers killing 20 people in Pittsburgh. The remaining strikers retaliate by burning buildings, stock and locomotives
- **July 22:** *Great Railroad Strike of 1877* – Militia shoot strikers in Pittsburgh as they retreat from the city
- **July 23:** *Great Railroad Strike of 1877* - Reading Railroad Massacre occurs when state militia fire on strikers killing approx. 10 people
- **July 25:** *Great Railroad Strike of 1877* - Riots breakout as coal miners join the striking railroad workers in Chicago resulting in roughly 30 casualties and later known as the Battle of the Viaduct
- **July 30:** [In a battle against Russian troops, the Turkish army and its allies destroy the Bulgarian city of Stara Zagora and massacre its inhabitants](#)
- **Sept. 22:** [Oglala Sioux chief Crazy Horse dies after being bayoneted by a U.S. soldier at Fort Robinson, Nebraska](#)
- **Oct. 5:** *Nez Perce War* – [Chief Joseph surrenders, ending the Nez Perce War](#)
- **Oct 17:** Pennsylvania Railroad and Standard Oil Company sign a contract strengthening the oil-transport monopoly
- **Nov. 21:** [Thomas Edison invents the phonograph](#)

1878 Events

- **Jan. 9:** Umberto I becomes King of Italy
- **Feb. 2:** Greece declares war on Turkey
- **Mar. 3:** Treaty of San Stefano concludes the Russo-Turkish War; Bulgaria regains its independence from the Ottoman Empire
- **May 15:** [Tokyo Stock Exchange is established](#)
- **June 15:** Eadweard Muybridge produces the first sequence of stop-motion still photographs in *Sallie Gardner at a Gallop*; the predecessor of silent film, it demonstrated that all four feet of a galloping horse are off the ground at the same time
- **June – Aug.:** *Bannock War of 1878* – [The Bannock group of Northern Paiute Indians, who were facing a crisis due to their inability to](#)

[support their subsistence lifestyle on the relatively meagre Fort Hall Reservation of southern-Idaho and northern-Nevada, began raiding settler camps, drawing a military campaign led by General Oliver Otis Howard, which ultimately defeated the Bannock](#)

- **July 13:** Treaty of Berlin makes Serbia, Montenegro and Romania completely independent, confirms the autonomy of Bulgaria, makes Cyprus a British possession and allows Austria-Hungary to garrison the Bosnia Vilayet
- **Nov. 21:** Second Anglo-Afghan War commences when the British attack Ali Masjid in the Khyber Pass
- **Dec. 7:** [New Mexico is linked to the rest of the nation by railroad for the first time as the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway inaugurates a newly completed line through the Raton Pass](#)
- **Jan.-Dec.:** [More than 13,000 people die from yellow fever in lower Mississippi Valley in one of the worst epidemics in U.S. history](#)

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Major Acts

Bland-Allison Act. Provided for the Secretary of the Treasury to make monthly purchases of not less than \$2 million and not more than \$4 million worth of silver to be coined into silver dollars. The Act also made silver legal tender "except where otherwise" stipulated in contracts, authorized the issuance of paper money backed by coin deposits in the Treasury, and directed the President to call an international monetary conference for the purpose of setting a ratio between gold and silver. The President, with the advice and consent of the Senate, was to appoint three commissioners to attend the conference on behalf of the United States. Approved Feb. 28, 1878. ([20 Stat. 25, Chap. 20](#))

Timber and Stone Act. Allowed for the sale of Western timberland to the public for \$2.50 per acre in 160 acre blocks for logging and mining purposes. Approved June 3, 1878. ([20 Stat. 89, Chap. 151](#))

Rivers and Harbors Appropriation Act of 1878. In part provided that it would be unlawful "to employ any part of the Army of the United States, as a posse comitatus, or otherwise, for the purpose of executing the laws, except in such cases and under such circumstances as such employment of said forces may be expressly authorized by the Constitution or by act of Congress." Approved June 18, 1878. ([20 Stat. 89, Chap. 151](#))

Sundry Civil Appropriations Act of 1880. Authorized appropriations for various departments and agencies. Established the United States Geological Survey under the Department of the Interior for classification of public lands, examination of geological structure, mineral resources, and products of the national domain. Approved Mar. 3, 1879. ([20 Stat. 377, Chap. 182](#))

Sources:

Dell, Christopher and Stephen W. Stathis. [Major Acts of Congress and Treaties Approved by the Senate, 1789-1980.](#) Government Division (CRS), Sept. 1, 1982. 97th Congress, 2nd Session, 82-156 GOV. ProQuest Congressional, CRS-1982-GOV-0005

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