

Fifty-Third Congress

Aug. 7, 1893 – Mar. 3, 1895

Second Administration of Grover Cleveland

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Historical Background

The 1892 Presidential election was a rematch of the 1888 contest, pitting the incumbent Republican President Benjamin Harrison against former Democratic President Grover Cleveland, whose bid for reelection in 1888 was deferred by Harrison’s victory. Though he was ultimately able to secure the nomination, Harrison did not enjoy the unanimous support of his fellow Republicans. As the economic climate in the United States deteriorated, in part due to the McKinley Tariff Act and the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, which were both enacted during Harrison’s tenure, the election turned on economic matters. Cleveland campaigned on lowering the McKinley Tariff and repealing the Sherman Silver Purchase Act and returning to the gold standard. The strategy proved effective and Grover Cleveland became the first and, thus far, only person to be elected to non-consecutive terms as President.

As it turned out, the campaign focus on the economy proved prophetic. On February 20, 1893, twelve days before Grover Cleveland’s second inauguration, the highly-leveraged and grossly overextended Philadelphia and Reading Railroad entered receivership. The event has come to serve as the symbolic beginning point for an extended period of economic retraction and fiscal chaos that would come to be known as the Panic of 1893. Rather than a single discrete event, the Panic of 1893 describes a global economic depression aggravated by a range of contributing factors and impacting virtually all sectors of the economy.

Though ultimately representing one contributing factor among many, the Sherman Silver Purchase Act was subjected to special scrutiny by numerous policymakers, including the incoming President Grover Cleveland. During his 1893 State of the Union Address, President Cleveland claimed, “the present Government has utterly failed to correct, if indeed it has not aggravated, the very evils it was intended to prevent.” The Act was supported by the Free



President Grover Cleveland

House	Senate
Majority Party: Democratic (218 seats)	Majority Party: Democratic (44 seats)
Minority Party: Republican (124 seats)	Minority Party: Republican (40 seats)
Other Parties: Populist (11 seats); Independent Democrat (2 seats); Silver (1 seat)	Other Parties: Populists (3 seats); Silver (1 seat)
Speaker of the House: Charles Frederick Crisp	President Pro Tempore: Isham G. Harris

Silver movement, a coalition of mining and agricultural interests who sought to forestall the deflation of the dollar, which was forcing farmers to repay loans with increasingly valuable dollars. The Act confirmed the Federal government's commitment to bimetallism as fiscal policy, in which the country's paper currency is backed and can be redeemed for either gold or silver. Of arguably greater impact though, the Act did not authorize the free and unlimited coinage of silver that supporters of the Free Silver movement wanted but instead more than doubled the amount of silver required to be purchased monthly by the Treasury. This last was a boon to the mining industry and a disaster for virtually everyone else. The Act further stipulated that the Treasury's monthly purchase of silver be paid for with special issue Treasury notes that could be redeemed for either silver or gold. This had the effect of artificially overvaluing one currency—silver—while artificially undervaluing the other—gold. Canny investors exploited this dubious policy by purchasing the overvalued silver at market and exchanged it for the undervalued gold, which was then resold for a substantial profit at the market, which was then used to purchase more silver, *ad nauseum*, ultimately exhausting the Treasury's supply of gold, which had been driven out of circulation. As the Panic of 1893 broke out, the question of repealing the Sherman Silver Purchase Act attained a new urgency and the President signed the law repealing the Act in November 1893.

The following August, Congress approved the Wilson-Gorman Tariff Act, reducing the average ad valorem tariff rate to approximately 40 per cent. It was the first major reduction in the tariff rates since immediately following the Civil War. The law also allowed the Federal Government to levy income taxes on incomes exceeding \$4,000 a year.

In January 1893, the overthrow of Queen Lili'uokalani of Hawaii represented a "serious embarrassment" to the United States government resulting in the establishment of the Republic of Hawaii in 1894. In February 1894, Congress enacted the Federal Election Law Repeal, which repealed all sections of the Revised Statutes concerning The Election Franchise, supervisors of elections, and special deputy Marshals. In August of 1894, Congress passed the Bureau of Immigration Act, recommending a plan for the organization of a Bureau of Immigration charged with managing the influx of immigrants, particularly from China. Finally, in January 1895, Congress enacted the Printing Act, establishing the United States Government Printing Office (GPO) with the office of Superintendent of Documents, centralizing the printing, binding, and distribution of Federal government paperwork and documents.

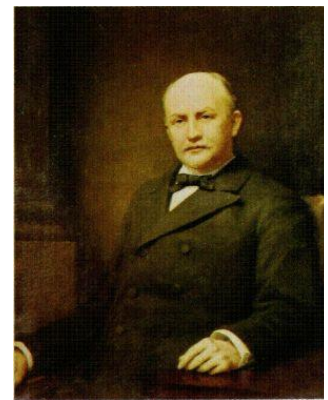
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President Pro Tempore
Isham G. Harris



Speaker of the House
Charles Frederick Crisp

War or Peace?

The 53rd Congress transpired during a time of relative peace for the United States. During his 1893 State of the Union Address, President Grover Cleveland discussed the impact of the Sino-Japanese War, stating that war rendered it necessary to dispatch American vessels arguing that “although the war between China and Japan endangers no policy of the United States it deserves our gravest consideration, by reason of its disturbance of our growing commercial interests in the two countries.” He went on to state that the year had been “free from disturbances by Indians,” citing instead the “favorable” conditions of reservations established by legislation the previous year for the Apache Indians who had formerly been prisoners. In his 1894 State of the Union address, Cleveland further argued that the “condition of the Indians and their ultimate fate are subjects which are related to a sacred duty of the Government” and claimed that the “solution of the Indian problem depends very largely upon good administration.”

Republic of Hawaii

Events in Hawaii presented the greatest challenge to U.S. diplomacy after a group of local insurgents led by American businessmen overthrew Queen Lili‘uokalani and declared the Republic of Hawaii in January 1893. The Committee of Safety, as the coup leadership was called, had planned the overthrow in order to force U.S. annexation of Hawaii. During the fighting the Committee expressed concern for the property and safety of American residents and U.S. Minister Plenipotentiary John L. Stevens summoned Marines and two companies of sailors from the *USS Boston*. Though these soldiers were ordered to remain strictly neutral during the conflict, the Committee of Safety and the Hawaiian government took the landing of U.S. troops as a sign of the U.S. Government’s support for the coup.

President Cleveland, an anti-imperialist and a staunch supporter of Hawaiian sovereignty, ordered an investigation of the coup and refused to recognize the newly declared Republic of Hawaii. Furthermore, he demanded that the republic reinstate Queen Lili‘uokalani and withdrew an annexation treaty brokered by the previous Harrison administration. A counter-coup was attempted in 1895, led by Robert Wilcox, in an effort to restore the monarchy. The coup failed and Queen Lili‘uokalani was tried and found guilty of treason. She was placed under house arrest for over a year until she was granted a full pardon after abdicating her throne. She would later travel to Washington, D.C. to lobby against annexation. Two reports came out of Congress investigating the coup and the Government’s culpability. The first was published in 1893, known as the Blount Report, and provided evidence of the United States’ complicity in the overthrow. The second, known as the Morgan Report, was published in 1894 in opposition to the Blount report.

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Economic Trends and Conditions

Panic of 1893

The Cleveland Administration was just two months old when the failure of the National Cordage Company inaugurated the Panic of 1893. The Panic became the worst economic depression the U.S had ever experience at the time. The factors contributing to the Panic were manifold, with no single cause playing a decisive role. However, with Benjamin Harrison's reelection hopes dashed by the returning President Grover Cleveland, two of his administration's major economic and monetary initiatives came under scrutiny for their contributing role in the crisis.

The first of these initiatives was the McKinley Tariff Act, which was authored by Ohio Representative William McKinley, the so-called "Napoleon of tariffs." The tariff reflected the protectionist tendencies of its Republican champions, including McKinley and former Benjamin Harris, raising the average duty on imports to nearly fifty percent. Individual tariffs were not raised across the board, instead, McKinley set the tariffs for each category of goods at a rate that he surmised would give the greatest advantage to U.S. industrial concerns. Tariffs were raised on a whole suite of goods, while in a few cases they were lowered or remained even, such as in the cases of molasses, tea, coffee, hides, and, critically, sugar, which, at the time, was the item that raised the most tariff revenue. This curiously complex, yet peculiarly inept, tariff scheme accomplished virtually none of its intended goals as it reduced government revenues while imposing increased costs on consumers and raising the specter of retaliatory tariffs imposed by U.S. trading partners. Passage of the almost universally reviled tariff was only secured by promising to support the monetary policy bill introduced by the Silver Republicans in exchange for their support for the McKinley tariff.

But it was the Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890, the very same law for which passage was assured by the bargain entered into by the Harrison Administration and the Silver Republicans, that attracted the pointed critique of President Cleveland and his allies. The Sherman Act was the initiative of the Silver Republicans—a loose coalition of lawmakers whose only point of correspondence was a vested interest in maintaining a silver backed currency and authorizing the free and unlimited coinage of silver. The group was primarily comprised of members with ties to agriculture and mining. The latter, obviously, because the maintenance of a silver backed currency in the United States and provisions promoting the coinage of silver virtually guaranteed a high demand for silver. Whereas farmers, who tended to carry relatively large amounts of debt incurred in developing and improving their holdings, were being forced into bankruptcy by the deflationary tendencies that had raised the value of the dollar over the intervening years, forcing them to pay back their debts with increasingly valuable—and scarce—dollars.

The Sherman Silver Purchase Act confirmed the Federal government's commitment to bimetallism as fiscal policy, in which the country's paper currency is backed and could be redeemed for either gold or silver. Significantly, though the Act did not provide for the free and unlimited coinage of silver as its supporters hoped, it increased the amount of silver that the Treasury was required to purchase monthly more than twofold—mandating a monthly purchase of 4.5 million ounces of silver in addition to the \$20-40 million monthly silver purchase required by the Bland-Allison Act. Unsurprisingly, this provision had a salutary impact on the mining industry. But for virtually everyone else, the silver purchase provision wreaked havoc. Moreover, the Act required the Treasury to pay for its silver purchases with special issue Treasury notes that could be redeemed for either silver or gold. This had the effect of artificially overvaluing one currency—silver—while artificially undervaluing the other—gold. Canny investors exploited this policy peculiarity by purchasing the overvalued silver at market and exchanged it for the undervalued gold, which was then resold for a substantial profit at the market and those profits were looped back through the system to buy more silver and the process repeats, *ad nauseum*. This process continued apace, with the Federal government subsidizing the profits of traders, leaving itself at risk of exhausting the nation's gold reserves. Though attributing the Panic of 1893 wholly to the insalubrious fiscal policy embodied in the Sherman Silver Purchase Act would require ignoring numerous other factors that contributed to it, such as a smaller financial panic set off in 1890 by the near insolvency of a London private bank that had made a series of disastrous investments in Argentina, the election loss by the administration behind the broadly unpopular monetary and tariff laws meant that there were few left in Washington who were willing to defend the policies whereas demonizing the laws and calling for their immediate repeal was an easy way to score some easy political points in early 1893.

Another major factor contributing to the crisis was the long-overdue bursting of the railroad industry bubble in the United States after a protracted period of excess enthusiasm that drove a spree of overbuilding

and speculation in the U.S. railroad industry. Agriculture prices, particularly wheat and cotton, were hit with declining prices and rising transportation costs. In an effort to ease the crisis and boost domestic spending, Congress enacted the Wilson-Gorman Tariff of 1894 (against President Cleveland's wishes and without his signature), which provided the first major reduction in the tariff rates since the immediate aftermath of the Civil War. The Wilson-Gorman Tariff also authorized an unapportioned income tax on incomes above \$4000 and on interest, dividends, and rents. When the Supreme Court struck down the income tax provision of the Act in 1895, the Court was accused of joining President Cleveland and favoring the rich over the poor.

During the Depression, the unemployment rate soared all over the country, thousands of businesses failed, and hundreds of banks closed. Coxey's Army, in one of the first major protest marches on Washington, D.C., marched from Massillon, Ohio to persuade Congress to authorize a public works program to provide jobs for the unemployed. Strikes erupted, notably within the coal and railroad industries of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Illinois, as wages saw drastic cuts.

The most serious strike, the Pullman Strike, shut down the majority of the nation's freight and passenger railroad traffic west of Detroit, Michigan for a period of early two months from May 11 to July 20, 1894. The strike began in Pullman, Chicago when nearly 4,000 employees of the Pullman Palace Car Company began to strike in response to wage reductions. At its peak, the strike involved over 250,000 workers in 27 states. President Cleveland ordered some 12,000 Army troops to stop strikers from interfering with the trains, especially those carrying mail. The arrival of the military in Chicago only served to embolden the striking workers and inducing a riot. On July 7, national guardsmen fired into a crowd, killing more than 30 strikers and wounding 57 more. Troops were not recalled until July 20, after the railroads resumed regular scheduled service. Estimated property damage from the riots exceeded \$80 million. Congress created the U.S. Strike Commission to investigate the strike and it issued a 700-page report later that year. Amid the crisis, on June 28, President Grover Cleveland and Congress inaugurated a national Labor Day as a conciliatory gesture toward the labor movement.

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Landmark U.S. Supreme Court Decisions

Nix v. Hedden, holding that tomatoes are 'vegetables,' not 'fruit,' under the Tariff Act of 1883, 149 U.S. 304 (1893)

Schillinger v. United States, holding that sovereign immunity forbids patent infringement suits against the Federal government because patent infringement is a tort and tort suits cannot be filed against the Government without Congress's consent, 155 U.S. 163 (1894)

Pollock v. Farmers' Loan & Trust Co., held that the unapportioned direct taxes imposed by the Income Tax Act of 1894 as a part of the Wilson-Gorman Tariff were unconstitutional because they were not apportioned according to population, 157 U.S. 429 (1895)

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1893 Events

- **Jan. 2:** Webb C. Ball designs a standard system establishing accuracy among watches, used by railroad engineers and workers
- **Jan. 17:** [The Committee of Safety instigates a coup against the Hawaiian monarchy, resulting in the overthrow of Queen Lili'uokalani](#)
- **Feb. 1:** Thomas A. Edison finishes construction of the first motion picture studio in West Orange, New Jersey
- **Feb. 23:** Rudolf Diesel receives a patent for the diesel engine
- **Feb. 24:** [American University established by an Act of Congress in Washington, D.C.](#)
- **Mar. 10:** Côte d'Ivoire becomes a French colony
- **May 1:** [The 1893 World's Fair, also known as the World's Columbian Exposition, opens to the public in Chicago](#)
- **May 5:** [Panic of 1893 - A crash on the New York Stock Exchange triggers an economic depression](#)
- **June 7:** Gandhi engages in his first act of civil disobedience in British administered India
- **June 20:** Lizzie Borden is acquitted of murdering her parents
- **July 1:** U.S. President Grover Cleveland is operated on in secret to remove a tumor
- **Aug. 27:** The Sea Islands Hurricane hits Savannah, Charleston, and the Sea Islands, killing over 1,000
- **Sept. 19:** [New Zealand becomes the first country in the world to grant women the right to vote](#)
- **Sept. 21:** Brothers Charles and Frank Duryea drive the first gasoline-powered motorcar on public roads in Springfield, Massachusetts
- **Oct. 10:** The first car number plates appear in Paris, France
- **Nov. 7:** [Colorado women are granted the right to vote](#)
- **Nov. 12:** The Durrand Line is established as the boundary between British India and Afghanistan by a memorandum of understanding
- **Dec. 4:** The Shangani Patrol of British South Africa Company soldiers is ambushed and annihilated by more than 3,000 Matabele warriors in the First Matabele War

1894 Events

- **Jan. 7:** William Kennedy Dickson receives a patent for motion picture film
- **Feb.:** Donghak Peasant Revolution in Korea: Peasant unrest erupts in a massive revolt of the followers of the Donghak movement. China and Japan send military forces to aid the Joseon Dynasty government
- **Feb. 12:** French anarchist Émile Henry sets off a bomb in a Paris café, killing one person and wounding 20
- **Feb. 15:** French anarchist Martial Bourdin attempts to destroy the Royal Greenwich Observatory, London, with a bomb
- **Mar. 1:** The Local Government Act passes, reforming local government in Britain, creating a system of urban and rural districts with elected councils
- **Mar. 12:** Coca-Cola is sold in bottles for the first time
- **Mar. 25:** [Coxey's Army \(of the unemployed\) departs Massillon, Ohio for Washington, D.C., marking the first significant protest march in the United States](#)
- **Apr. 11:** Britain establishes a protectorate over Ireland
- **Apr. 21:** [A coal miner's strike shuts down mines across the central United States](#)
- **May:** [The bubonic plague breaks out in the Tai Ping Shan area of Hong Kong, killing 2,552 people by year's end](#)
- **May 1:** The May Day Riots (against unemployment) break out in Cleveland, Ohio
- **May 11:** [Nearly 4,000 Pullman Palace Car Company factory workers strike in Illinois in what would be known as the Pullman Strike](#)
- **June 23:** The International Olympic Committee is founded at the Sorbonne, Paris
- **June 24:** [The President of France, Sadi Carnot, is assassinated](#)
- **June 30:** The Tower Bridge in London opens for traffic
- **July:** A fire at the site of the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago destroys most of the remaining buildings
- **July 4:** [The Republic of Hawaii is proclaimed by Sanford B. Dole](#)
- **Aug. 1:** *First Sino-Japanese War* - [War is declared between the Qing Empire of China and the Empire of Japan, over their rival claims of influence on their common ally, the Joseon Dynasty of Korea, marking the start of the first Sino-Japanese War](#)
- **Sept. 4:** In New York City, 12,000 tailors strike against sweatshop working conditions
- **Nov. 1:** Tsar Alexander III is succeeded by his son, Nicholas II, who would be the last Romanov Tsar of Russia

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[Hearings on Proposed Legislation](#). Congressional Record, 53rd Congress, 2nd Session (Apr. 19, 1894) Vol. 26, pp. 3842-3844. ProQuest Congressional, CR-1894-0419

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[Petitions, etc.](#) Congressional Record, 53rd Congress, 2nd Session (July 23, 1894) Vol. 26, pp. 7815-7816. ProQuest Congressional, CR-1894-0723

[Petitions, etc.](#) Congressional Record, 56th Congress, 1st Session (Dec. 11, 1899) Vol. 33, pp. 227-230. ProQuest Congressional, CR-1899-1211

Major Acts

Repeal of Sherman Silver Purchase Act. Repealed the Sherman Silver Purchase Act of July 14, 1890, which in part provided for the Secretary of the Treasury to purchase 4,500,000 ounces of silver bullion monthly over and above the minimum monthly purchase required by the Bland-Allison Act of 1878. Approved November 1, 1893. ([28 Stat. 4, Chap. 8](#))

Federal Election Law Repeals. Repealed all sections of the Revised Statutes concerning The Election Franchise, supervisors of election, and special deputy marshals. Approved Feb. 8, 1894. ([28 Stat. 36, Chap. 25](#))

Bureau of Immigration Act. Required the Secretary of the Treasury to recommend a plan, by the next Congress, for organizing a Bureau of Immigration, and authorized the President to appoint, by and with the advice

and consent of the Senate, commissioners of immigration for the term of four years. Approved August 18, 1894. ([28 Stat. 372, Chap. 301](#))

Wilson-Gorman Tariff Act. Reduced the average ad valorem tariff rate to approximately 40 per cent, and permitted the Federal Government to levy an income tax on incomes in excess of \$4,000 per year. Approved August 27, 1894. ([28 Stat. 509, Chap. 349](#)) Certain provisions of this Act were subsequently held unconstitutional in *Pollock v. Farmer's Loan & Trust Co.*, 157 U.S. 429 (1895).

Printing Act. Organized the United States Government Printing Office, establishing the office of Superintendent of Documents and centralizing the printing, binding, and distribution of Government documents and publications. Approved Jan. 12, 1895. ([28 Stat. 601, Chap. 23](#))

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