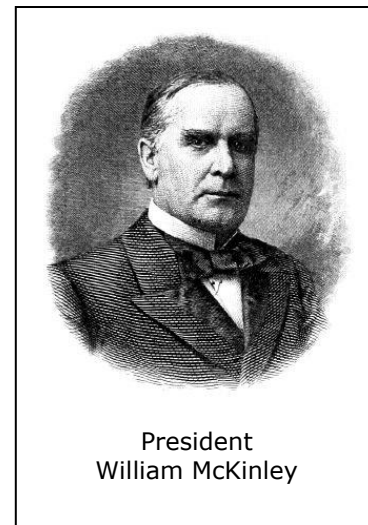


Fifty-Fifth Congress

Mar. 4, 1897 – Mar. 4, 1899

Administration of William McKinley

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Historical Background

As the nation continued to be buffeted by the effects of the Panic of 1893 and its ensuing depression, the 1896 Presidential election saw the realigning of political power, ushering in a new coalition of politicians. Incumbent Democratic President Grover Cleveland opted not to stand for a second consecutive term as his deep unpopularity within his own party meant he would have been unlikely to prevail. The Democratic Party nominated Nebraska Representative William Jennings Bryan and the Republicans nominated Ohio Representative and arch-protectionist William McKinley. Given the profoundly weakened economic climate, it was unsurprising that the election largely turned on economic and fiscal matters. What was surprising, however, was the fact that each of the two major party candidates were strongly associated with one of the two policies most frequently cited as contributing to the Panic—McKinley favored a deeply protectionist trade policy whereas Bryan was associated with the Free Silver movement. In the end, Bryan’s advocacy for an intentionally inflationary bimetallic monetary policy reminded voters of the abuses committed under the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, allowing McKinley to prevail with 51% of the popular vote.

The newly elected President William McKinley wasted no time in setting his agenda for the early months of his Presidency. The President bemoaned the failures of the Wilson-Gorman Tariff Act during his inaugural address on March 4, 1897 and called on Congress to enact a new, more stringent tariff law. On July 24 Congress delivered the Dingley Tariff Act, which had the

House	Senate
Majority Party: Republican (206 seats)	Majority Party: Republican (44 seats)
Minority Party: Democrats (124 seats)	Minority Party: Democrats (34 seats)
Other Parties: Populists (22 seats); Silver Republicans (3 seats); Independent Republican (1 seat); Silver (1 seat)	Other Parties: Populists (5 seats); Silver Republicans (2 seats); Vacant (1 seat)
Speaker of the House: Thomas Brackett Reed	President Pro Tempore: William P. Frye

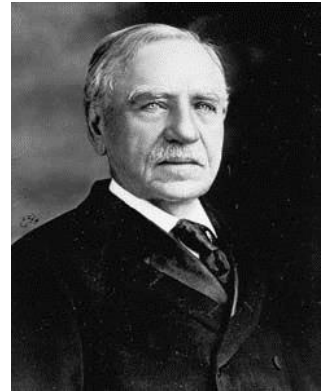
distinction of imposing the highest average rate of customs duties in the history of U.S. trade policy at the time.

As the Cuban War of Independence intensified, President McKinley had the opportunity to relitigate former President Grover Cleveland's decision to remain neutral in the conflict. Despite President Cleveland's forbearance, the U.S. press continued to publish lurid accounts of abuses by the Spanish upon the people of Cuba. In January 1898 Spanish loyalists in Havana rioted, protesting the new autonomous Cuban government, and destroyed printing presses of local newspapers publishing stories of Spanish abuses. The U.S. Consul-General in Havana, despairing of the lives and safety of Americans in Cuba, cabled Washington to report on these developments. In response, President McKinley dispatched the USS *Maine* to Havana to ensure the safety of American citizens living there. However, on February 15, 1898, the *Maine* was destroyed by a massive explosion, killing over 250 sailors. Although eventually determined to be unsubstantiated, in the immediate aftermath of the explosion, the military Board of Investigations, ruled that the explosion was caused by a mine located beneath the ship.

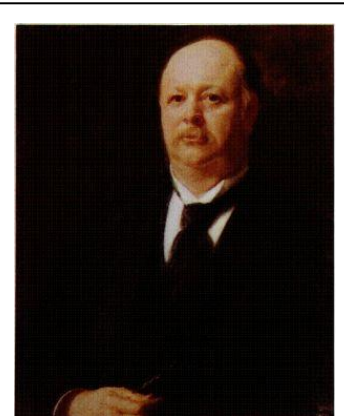
The incident inflamed an already hostile American public. The yellow press rushed to lay blame for the incident on the Spanish. While McKinley maintained his opposition to going to war with Spain immediately after the incident, the pressure continued to build until on April 11 the President formally asked Congress to grant him the authority to deploy troops to Cuba to end Spanish sovereignty over the island. The Congress responded by enacting the Cuban Independence Resolution, demanding that Spain relinquish its authority in Cuba and authorizing the President to use force to assure Spanish compliance, thus inaugurating the short, but hugely consequential Spanish-American War. To finance the war, Congress enacted the War Revenue Act on June 13, 1898. The Act imposed a series of taxes on a wide range of products, including liquor, tea, and tobacco and required stamps on some business transactions. The Act further imposed a 10 cents per pound duty on imported tea and authorized the Secretary of the Treasury to borrow sums at 3 percent as necessary to meet public expenditures.

In the Pacific, fears of Japanese territorial ambitions toward the Hawaiian Islands and mindful of the value the Hawaiian harbors offered for the use of the United States during the recently concluded war with Spain, aroused widespread sentiment in favor of annexation. On July 7, 1898, Congress enacted a joint resolution on the Annexation of Hawaii and on August 12, sovereignty over the islands formally transferred to the United States.

As the Federal government continued its efforts to regulate the rapidly industrializing economy, the Congress determined that the Interstate Commerce Act was proving insufficient to the task of regulating the railroad industry. Looking to close any loopholes and improve the effectiveness of the Interstate Commerce Act, Congress in late May 1898 approved the Interstate Commerce Carriers Act as a complement to the earlier law, providing for mediation in any future railroad disputes. On July 1, 1898, Congress enacted the Federal Bankruptcy Act, which broadened the legal means for declaring



President Pro Tempore
William P. Frye



Speaker of the House
Thomas Brackett Reed

bankruptcy to traders and non-traders and provided for creditor participation and the discharge of the debtor.

Source:

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?

Spanish American War

In 1898, relations between the United States and Spain, which had been tense throughout the nineteenth century, broke out into open hostility following the destruction of the USS *Maine* in Havana Harbor and the outbreak of the Spanish-American War. Leading up to the event the greatest object of tension between the two powers was Cuba, which had been harboring a nascent independence movement for some time. Moreover, Spain had cultivated fears over the prospect of U.S. annexation at the island, while U.S. business interests had achieved a near monopoly over Cuban sugar production. As a result of these long simmering tensions in the Caribbean U.S. shipping interests had suffered substantial losses. Meanwhile the Cuban revolutionary José Martí had spent the early-1890s shuttling between various diasporic Cuban communities throughout Latin America and the United States, uniting the various interests and raising funds and awareness for the Cuban revolutionary cause. (Martí had died in battle in 1895.)

During the period leading up to the war, U.S. policy had been primarily concerned with protecting the extensive U.S. economic interests that had developed in Cuba. By the time of the 55th Congress, President McKinley's efforts to reach diplomatic understanding with Spain in late-1897 were met with assurances of mutual good will on the part of the Spanish government. Moreover, there were pledges that the conflict in Cuba would, as the President put it in his address to the Congress that year, "continue but [would] be humane and conducted with all regard for private rights, being accompanied by political action leading to the autonomy of Cuba while guarding Spanish sovereignty."

McKinley suggested to the Congress that these assurances be met with caution—that Spain be permitted to exercise its sovereignty and prosecute its war and institute political reforms while the U.S. enforces its neutral obligations by cutting off the assistance Spain asserts Cuban agitators have received from U.S. quarters.

The attitude of caution was short-lived, however. On February 15, 1898 an explosion caused the USS *Maine* to sink in Havana Harbor, killing 266 sailors. The Federal Government was quick to assign blame to a Spanish mine, though the question remains unsettled to this day, and the House and Senate

unanimously approved a \$50 million appropriation in anticipation of inevitable armed conflict.

War was declared by the Congress on April 25, 1898. With the annihilation Admiral Cervera's fleet and the capitulation of Santiago the war came to a close on August 12th, only 10 weeks after hostilities began. On December 10, 1898, the Treaty of Paris, which dictated that Spain cede to the United States the colonies of Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines, and renounce all claim over the island of Cuba was signed.

Sources:

McKinley, William. [*Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, with the annual message of the President transmitted to Congress*](#). House, Dec. 6, 1897. 55th Congress, 2nd Session, H.Doc. 1/1 (Pr25.1:897). ProQuest Congressional, 3629 H.doc.1/1

McKinley, William. [*Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, with the annual message of the President transmitted to Congress December 5, 1898*](#). House, Dec. 5, 1898. 55th Congress, 3rd Session, H.Doc. 1/1 (Pr25.1:898). ProQuest Congressional, 3743 H.doc.1/1

Economic Trends and Conditions

The administrations of President Grover Cleveland and President William McKinley were peculiar in the sense that each President bucked the conventional wisdom of the time. Despite their significant differences in policy preferences, both Presidents viewed industry benevolently and favoring a laissez-faire approach to managing the economy at odds with the historical tendency to favor greater, rather than less government intervention in the economy. On the question of trusts, which had come under fire for the anticompetitive practices employed by the railroad industry, both Presidents surmised that rather than being an objective ill, in certain circumstances the consolidation of an industry or sector could have a salutary impact on consumers.

It was this aspect of each President's economic philosophy that resulted in the relatively light-handed approach each administration took to investigating violations of the Sherman Antitrust Act. For McKinley, the issue would quickly be tied to the need to develop a robust protectionist tariff structure to protect U.S. commercial interests from foreign competition. It was thus the first priority of the McKinley administration to the repeal the Wilson-Gorman Tariff Act of 1894, which had lowered tariffs for a number of key imports, to be replaced by a substantially more protectionist tariff regime. This was accomplished with the passage of the Dingley Act of 1897, which raised tariff rates on woolens, linens, silks, china, and sugar to as high as an average of 52%.

Subsequent to the passage of the Dingley Tariff, President McKinley delineated a number of priorities aimed at the promotion of U.S. economic interests over the remainder of his administration. These include the proposal for a trans-isthmian canal bisecting Central America, which at this time was planned for territory in Nicaragua and Costa Rica, efforts to organize and international convention aimed at establishing uniform

systems for the transmission and maintenance of telegraph lines, and concerns over foreign control of Chinese ports and attendant questions of non-prejudicial U.S. access to those ports.

Klondike Gold Rush

On August 16, 1896, an American prospector named George Carmack was looking for gold with his family in Canada's Klondike Territory. On the advice of another prospector, the family headed to a small tributary of the Klondike River called Bonanza Creek where they found gold in great quantities. Due to the remoteness of the territory and the vicissitudes of winter, news of the find didn't reach the continental United States until the following June. But when it did, it generated a mad stampede to the Klondike territory, with as many as 100,000 prospectors attempting the journey, although fewer than half that number made it. If the Klondike gold rush produced a stunning quantity of gold, it also ended as abruptly as it began. By 1898, prospectors arriving in the Klondike were leaving when they found it too difficult to make a living. When gold was discovered at Atlin Lake, in the Yukon Territory and in Nome, Alaska, the Klondike gold rush was finished.

Pennsylvania Coal Mining Strikes

In the eastern Pennsylvania coal country in August 1897, coal miners including thousands who emigrated from central and eastern Europe despaired of recent reductions in their wages and other cost cutting measures imposed by the mining companies. The Honey Brook division of the Lehigh and Wilkes-Barre Coal Company, looking for novel ways to cut costs, consolidated the company's mule stables. The move caused the largely teenage mule drivers to travel farther each day to pick up and drop off their mules, though they received no compensation for this time. After talks failed to break the impasse, a cohort of roughly 25 mule drivers went on strike. Soon, other employees of the mine, seeing the mistreatment the mule drivers received at the hands of supervisors, began to join the strike. Within two days, some 2,000 workers had joined. On August 23 the strike ended when management agreed to a series of concessions.

Two days later a group of teenage workers at the A.S. Van Wickle mine went on strike seeking higher wages. When management attempted to hire Slavic strikebreakers, the Slavic miners instead joined the strike as well. In this case, too, the company agreed to a pay raise, thus ending the strike. However, it soon became apparent that the company would only make good on some of its pledge and many of the workers promised a raise did not receive one. Moreover, while during the course of negotiations management agreed to begin treating the mine's Slavic workers equitably, after work resumed, the mining management reneged on their agreement.

In response, the strike resumed and within days, some 3,000 workers had successfully shut down four mines in the area. In less than a week, as many as 10,000 area mine workers were on strike and the mine owners were forced to seek the assistance of Luzerne County Sheriff James F. Martin when their private police force proved incapable of handling a labor stoppage of this size. On September 10, a group of 300-400 striking workers, mainly Germans and Slavs marched to a nearby coal mine to support a newly

formed United Mine Workers (UMW) union. As the workers arrived in the town of Lattimore, they were met by the Sheriff's posse and were ordered to disperse. In the confusion, a scuffle ensued, and the police opened fire on the crowd, killing at least 19 mine workers and injuring as many as 50 others. Sheriff Martin and 73 deputies were arrested and tried, in each case pleading self-defense. The Sheriff and all of his deputies were acquitted, despite the fact that autopsies revealed that nearly all of the dead workers had been shot in the back.

As the Federal government worked to identify more effective ways to regulate railroad industry and curb the abuses of the past, efforts were made to craft new legislation to complement the Interstate Commerce Act and increase the tools available to regulators investigating the industry. Looking to close any loopholes and improve the effectiveness of the Interstate Commerce Act, Congress in late May 1898 approved the Interstate Commerce Carriers Act as a complement to the earlier law, providing for mediation in any future railroad disputes. On July 1, 1898, Congress enacted the Federal Bankruptcy Act, which broadened the legal means for declaring bankruptcy to traders and non-traders and provided for creditor participation and the discharge of the debtor.

Sources:

McKinley, William. [*Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, with the annual message of the President transmitted to Congress*](#). House, Dec. 6, 1897. 55th Congress, 2nd Session, H.Doc. 1/1 (Pr25.1:897). ProQuest Congressional, 3629 H.doc.1/1

McKinley, William. [*Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, with the annual message of the President transmitted to Congress December 5, 1898*](#). House, Dec. 5, 1898. 55th Congress, 3rd Session, H.Doc. 1/1 (Pr25.1:898). ProQuest Congressional, 3743 H.doc.1/1

Major Treaties

Treaty of Paris, ended the Spanish-American war and secured from Spain a recognition of the independence of Cuba and an agreement to assume the Cuban debt. In addition Spain ceded Puerto Rico and Guam to the United States as a war indemnity and ceded the Philippines to the United States in return for a payment of \$20 million. Concluded December 10, 1898. Approved by the Senate Feb. 6, 1899. ([30 Stat. 1754](#))

Source:

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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Landmark U.S. Supreme Court Decisions

Allgeyer v. Louisiana, holding that States may not prohibit citizens from contracting out-of-state insurance on the grounds that it violated an individual's 'liberty to contract' or their economic liberty, 165 U.S. 578 (1897)

United States v. Trans-Missouri Freight Association, holding that the Sherman Act was applicable to the railroad industry, 166 U.S. 290 (1897)

Barrett v. United States, upheld a Utah State law limiting working hours in mines and smelters. Held that such laws are a legitimate, constitutional exercise of the state police power, given the inherent danger of such work, 169 U.S. 218 (1898)

United States v. Wong Kim Ark, holding that children born in the United States generally acquire American citizenship at birth under the Citizenship Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, even if born to foreigners, 169 U.S. 649 (1898)

Williams v. Mississippi, upheld provisions of Mississippi's state constitution setting requirements for voter registration including literacy tests and poll taxes, 170 U.S. 213 (1898) Overruled by the Voting Rights Act of 1965

Smyth v. Ames, concluded that a Nebraska law that established maximum rates for the transportation of freight within the state violated the fourteenth amendment because it effectively took property without due process, 171 U.S. 361 (1898) Overturned by *Federal Power Commission v. Hope Natural Gas Company*, 320 U.S. 591 (1944)

Source:

Costello, George A. and Johnny H. Killian. [Constitution of the United States of America. Analysis and Interpretation](#). CRS, Library of Congress, Jan. 1, 1996. 103rd Congress, 1st Session, S. Doc. 103-6 (Y1.1/3:103-6). ProQuest Congressional, 14152 S.doc.6

1897 Events

- **Feb. 18:** British Army's Benin Expedition capture, burn and loot Benin City, West Africa
- **Feb. 27:** The French military governor of Madagascar, Joseph Gallieni, exiles Queen Ranavalona III and abolishes the monarchy
- **Apr. 5:** [Greece and the Ottoman Empire declare war, known as the 'Thirty Days' War'](#)
- **Apr. 15:** [Drillers near Bartlesville, Oklahoma strike oil for the first time in the designated "Indian Territory"](#)
- **Apr. 19:** The inaugural Boston Marathon is held
- **Apr. 30:** [J.J. Thomson of the Cavendish Laboratory announces the discovery of the electron as a sub-atomic particle](#)
- **May 14:** ["The Stars and Stripes Forever," the American patriotic march by John Philip Sousa, is performed for the first time](#)

- **May 19:** British novelist and playwright Oscar Wilde is released from prison in England and goes into exile on the continent
- **May 26:** [Bram Stoker's contemporary Gothic-horror novel *Dracula* is published](#)
- **June 22:** Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee is celebrated in the United Kingdom
- **July 17:** [The Klondike Gold Rush begins when the first successful prospectors arrive in Seattle](#)
- **July 25:** [Novelist Jack London sails to join the Klondike Gold Rush where he will write his first successful stories](#)
- **Aug. 10:** [Pharmacist Felix Hoffmann successfully synthesizes acetylsalicylic acid at the Bayer pharmaceutical company, which will market the product under the brand name "Aspirin"](#)
- **Sept. 1:** The Tremont Street Subway in Boston opens, becoming the first underground metro in North America
- **Oct. 15:** Leopold II crowned king of Belgium
- **Nov. 23:** J.L. patents the pencil sharpener
- **Nov. 25:** [Puerto Rico declares independence from Spain](#)

1898 Events

- **Feb. 15:** *Spanish-American War* - [A mysterious explosion sinks the U.S.S. *Maine* in Havana Harbor, Cuba, killing 266 sailors and ultimately setting in motion the Spanish-American War](#)
- **Mar. 24:** The first American-manufactured automobile, a Winton, is sold in Port Carbon, Pennsylvania
- **Apr. 5:** Annie Oakley promotes the service of women in combat situations with the U.S. military in a letter to President William McKinley
- **Apr. 25:** *Spanish-American War* - [U.S. declares war on Spain](#)
- **June 7:** William Ramsay and Morris Travers discover neon at their laboratory at University College London after extracting it from liquid nitrogen
- **June 9:** [China leases Hong Kong to the British government for a period of 99 years](#)
- **June 12:** [General Emilio Aguinaldo declares the Philippines' independence from Spain](#)
- **July 1:** *Spanish-American War* - [Battle of San Juan Heights](#)
- **July 3:** *Spanish-American War* - [U.S. forces defeat the Spanish fleet off Santiago Bay, Cuba](#)
- **July 7:** [U.S. formally annexes the Kingdom of Hawaii](#)
- **July 17:** *Spanish-American War* - [Spanish surrender to the U.S. at Santiago](#)
- **Aug. 28:** Brad's Drink is rebranded as "Pepsi-Cola"
- **Nov. 10:** A mob of armed white supremacists attack African American businesses and supporters in local government in Wilmington, North Carolina
- **Dec. 10:** *Spanish-American War* - [The Treaty of Paris signed by Spain and the U.S.](#)

- **Dec. 26:** [Marie and Pierre Curie announce the discovery of a substance they call radium](#)

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["Acquisition of Territory."](#) Congressional Record, 55th Congress, 3rd Session (Feb. 6, 1899) Vol. 32, pp. 1480-1487. ProQuest Congressional, CR-1899-0206

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Major Acts

Dingley Tariff Act. Imposed the highest average rate of custom duties written into any U.S. tariff law up to that time. Approved July 24, 1897. ([30 Stat. 151, Chap. 11](#))

Cuban Independence Resolution. Recognized the independence of Cuba and demanded that Spain relinquish authority and withdraw its land and naval forces from Cuba. Directed the President to use force in carrying out this resolution. Disclaimed any intention of exercising sovereignty over Cuba. Approved Apr. 20, 1898. ([30 Stat. 738](#))

War Revenue Act. Imposed taxes on fermented liquors, tobacco, seats and berths in parlor and sleeping cars, mixed flour, legacies and individual shares of personal property. Placed a duty of 10 cents per pound on imported tea, and authorized the Secretary of the Treasury to borrow sums at 3 percent, which might be necessary to meet public expenditures on certificates not to exceed \$100 million. Passed June 13, 1898. ([30 Stat. 448, Chap. 448](#)) Certain provisions of this Act were subsequently held unconstitutional in *Fairbank v. United States*, 181 U.S. 283 (1901), and *United States v. Evoslef*, 237 U.S. 1 (1915).

Interstate Commerce Carriers Act. Provided for mediation by the Chairman of the Interstate Commerce Commission and the Commissioner of the Bureau of Labor in railroad disputes, although neither official was empowered legally to initiate the proceedings. Approved June 1, 1898. ([30 Stat. 424, Chap. 370](#))

Federal Bankruptcy Act. Extended the legal means for declaring bankruptcy to traders and non-traders and provided for the creditor participation and the discharge of the debtor. Approved July 1, 1898. ([30 Stat. 544, Chap. 541](#))

Annexation of Hawaii. Annexed the Hawaiian Islands as part of the United States and provided that, until such time as the Congress provided for a

government in the Islands, all civil, judicial, and military powers should be vested in such persons as the President might appoint. Approved July 7, 1898. ([30 Stat. 750](#))

Source:

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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