



Tariff Act of 1890 (McKinley Tariff)

Topic Guide for Chronicling America (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>)

Introduction

The Tariff Act of 1890, also known as the McKinley Tariff after its chief author, United States Representative William McKinley of Ohio, raised the average tax on foreign goods to nearly 50% in an attempt to protect domestic industries from foreign competition. This protectionist measure rose out of “The Great Tariff Debate of 1888”—both Republicans and Democrats agreed that the federal government needed to reduce its revenue to lower its surplus, but disagreed on how this should be done. With Republicans in control, the McKinley Tariff was passed, dramatically increasing taxes on some imports, such as tinplate and wool, and removing them entirely from others, such as sugar and coffee. This legislation was unpopular with Americans because of the increased prices for certain products. With the 1890 and 1892 elections, Democrats gained control of the Senate, House and Presidency and were able to overturn this legislation in 1894 with the Wilson-Gorman Tariff.

Important Dates

- December 6, 1887: U.S. President Grover Cleveland delivers his State of the Union and calls for tariff rates to be reduced. Democrats and Republicans become divided on this issue.
- 1888: Cleveland loses his bid for reelection to Ohio Republican Benjamin Harrison.
- October 1, 1890: The Tariff Act of 1890 becomes law, raising average duty on imports.
- November 4, 1890: Republicans lose their House of Representatives majority.
- November 8, 1892: Former President Grover Cleveland is re-elected to office, defeating President Harrison.
- August 27, 1894: The Wilson-Gorman Tariff, or Revenue Act, becomes law, reducing tariff rates established by McKinley Tariff.

Suggested Search Strategies

- Search the following terms in combination (as an “all” word search), as phrases or in proximity: McKinley, MKinley, tariff, bill, act, law, Wilson Gorman, Napoleon of Protection, protection, great tariff debate.
- Limit your search by date to find information about the debate leading up to the law and reactions after its passage.
- Look for results in both Democratic and Republican newspapers to see varying viewpoints.

Sample Articles from Chronicling America

- [“End of the Memorable Tariff Debate of 1888”](#) *Los Angeles Daily Herald* (Los Angeles, CA), July 20, 1888, Image 4, col. 4-5.
- [“The New Tariff Law”](#) *Belmont Chronicle* (St. Clairsville, OH), October 16, 1890, Image 1, col. 4-5.
- [“The Increase”](#) *Hocking Sentinel* (Logan, OH), October 30, 1890, Image 1, col. 5-6.
- [“The M’Kinley Bill”](#) *Ohio Democrat* (Logan, OH), December 6, 1890, Image 1, col. 2.
- [“Making Knit Fabrics”](#) *News-Herald* (Hillsboro, OH), June 4, 1891, Image 7, col. 6.
- [“Protection’s Fraud”](#) *Democratic Northwest* (Napoleon, OH), October 13, 1892, Image 2, col. 1-3.
- [“Farmer’s Egg Basket”](#) *Perrysburg Journal* (Perrysburg, OH), August 29, 1896, Image 6, col. 1-2.
- [“A Postal Card Campaign”](#) *Stark County Democrat* (Canton, OH), June 10, 1897, Image 7, col. 3.