

Benjamin Harrison

23rd president of the United States

Benjamin Harrison (born August 20, 1833, North Bend, Ohio, U.S.—died March 13, 1901, Indianapolis, Indiana) was the 23rd president of the United States (1889–93), a moderate Republican who won an electoral majority while losing the popular vote by more than 100,000 to Democrat Grover Cleveland. Harrison signed into law the Sherman Antitrust Act (1890), the first legislation to prohibit business combinations in restraint of trade.

Nominated for the presidency by the Republicans in 1888, he lost the popular vote by 5,439,853 to Cleveland's 5,540,309 but won the election by outpolling Cleveland in the electoral college by 233 electoral votes to Cleveland's 168. Harrison's victory in the electoral college owed much to lavish spending by his campaign in the crucial swing states of New York and Indiana.

In 1890 Republicans controlled both houses of Congress, but an economic depression in the agrarian West and South led to pressure for legislation that conservative Republicans normally resisted. The result was an accommodation in which conservatives gained the McKinley Tariff Act (1890), which substantially raised duties on most imports, but yielded to agrarians and reformers in measures such as the Sherman Antitrust Act (1890), which outlawed "every contract, combination...or conspiracy in restraint of trade or commerce," and the Sherman Silver Purchase Act of the same year, which required the government to buy 4.5 million ounces of the metal every month. Farmers and debtors in the Free Silver Movement had long advocated a bimetallic (gold and silver) standard for the nation's currency in the belief that an increase in the amount of money in circulation would raise crop prices and allow for easier debt repayment.