1843–1901, 25th president of the United States (1897–1901), b. Niles, Ohio. He was educated at Poland (Ohio) Seminary and Allegheny College. After service in the Union army in the Civil War, he returned to Ohio and became a lawyer at Canton. He entered politics and was elected as a Republican to Congress in 1876. As a congressman until 1891 (except for part of one term when his election was declared invalid), he strongly advocated protective tariffs, thus pleasing Ohio industrialists. The highly protective McKinley Tariff Act of 1890 was unpopular and helped to bring about the Republican defeat in 1892. It had already cost McKinley his seat in Congress in the election of 1890, but he had attracted the attention of the powerful capitalist-politician Marcus A. Hanna, who put the force of the efficiently organized Ohio Republican machine behind the ex-congressman. McKinley was elected governor in 1891 and again in 1893.

Two years later Hanna along with Charles Dawes began a skillful and successful preconvention campaign to have McKinley nominated by the Republicans for president in 1896. The Democrats took a radical position and nominated William Jennings Bryan with a platform favoring free silver. Although McKinley had earlier favored bimetallism and voted for the Bland-Allison Act, he accepted a platform endorsing the gold standard, and the issue was squarely joined. Many conservative Democrats viewed their party's stand as reckless, and Hanna's handling of the campaign was a masterpiece of adroitness. Conservatism and McKinley won. The Republicans also had control of Congress, and in 1897 a thoroughgoing Republican tariff was adopted. McKinley's election marked the beginning of a period of Republican dominance in American politics that did not end until the 1932 election of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Interest then swung to external affairs. There was much sympathy in the United States for the rebels in Cuba, who were seeking independence from Spain. The destruction of the battleship Maine gave the advocates of war a rallying cry, and McKinley made the decision to ask Congress for a declaration of war. The Spanish-American War was brief, and from it the United States emerged a world power. McKinley directed the peace commissioners to demand the Philippine Islands for the United States. This resulted in the unsuccessful and bloody Philippine insurrection (1899–1901) led by Emilio Aguinaldo against U.S. rule. Cuba became a U.S. protectorate. The president also signed the bill to annex Hawaii and supported the Open Door policy in China, thus vigorously advancing the interests of the United States and American commerce. The Currency Act of 1900 consolidated the gold standard policy on which McKinley had been elected in 1896. He was reelected in 1900, but his new administration was short. On Sept. 5, 1901, he addressed the Pan-American Exposition at Buffalo, N.Y., advocating commercial reciprocity among nations. The next day he was shot down by an anarchist, Leon Czolgosz, and on Sept. 14 he died. Vice President Theodore Roosevelt succeeded him.
Gould, L. L., The Presidency of William McKinley (1981);
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