1876

Rutherford B. Hayes vs Samuel J. Tilden

A 20-minute lesson on the 1876 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA Gilded Age	ELECTORAL VOTES 369 total
WINNER Rutherford B. Hayes (Republican) · 185 EV	RUNNER-UP Samuel J. Tilden (Democratic) · 184 EV
KEY ISSUE Reconstruction's end; Southern redemption; electoral integrity; railroad corruption	TURNOUT 82.6%

CONTENTS

1. Cover
2. Story (with a picture)
3. Three questions
4. Teacher notes

1876

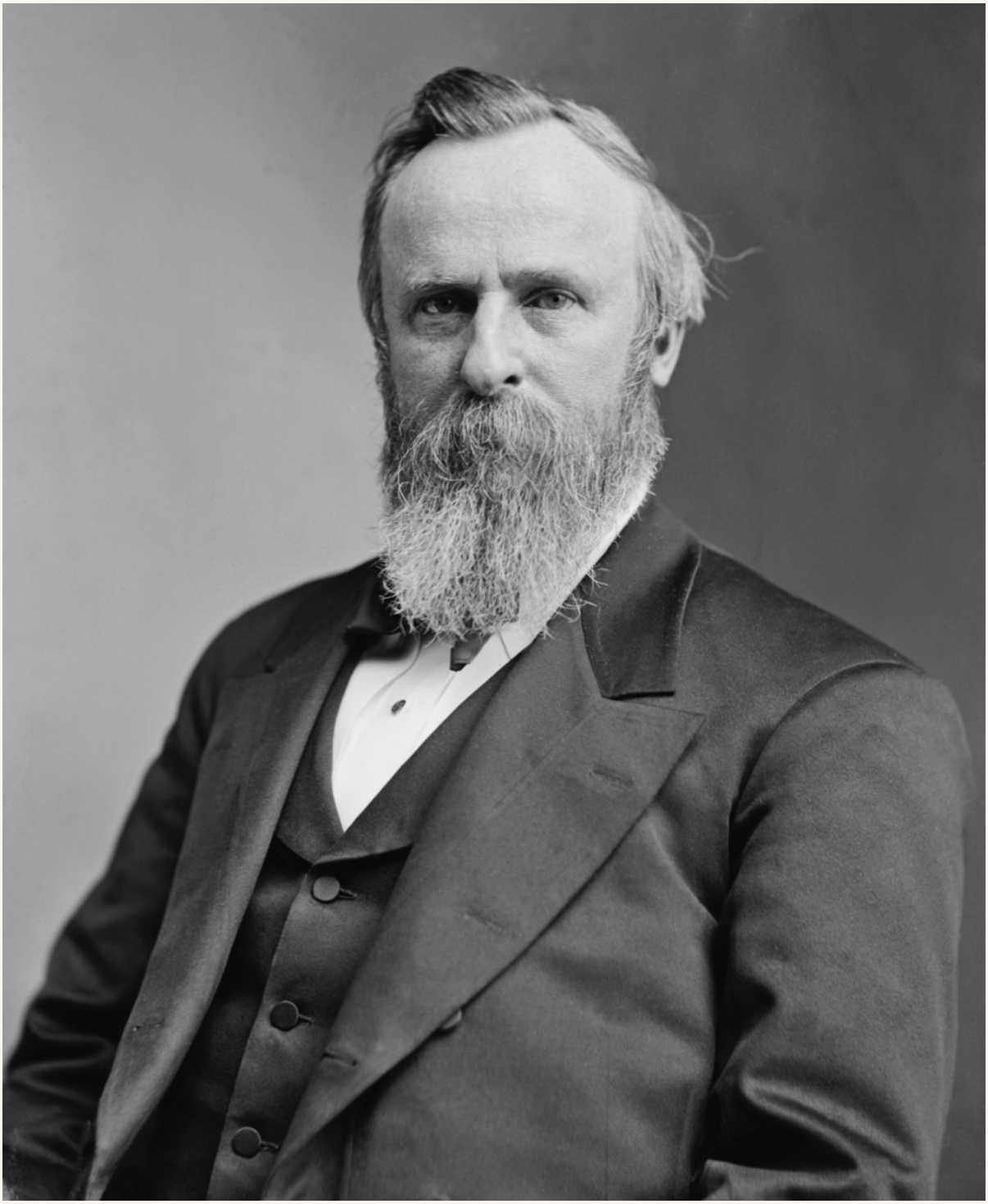
In 1876 the country was tired of Reconstruction. The Civil War had ended eleven years before. Many Americans wanted to put the war behind them.

The Democrats picked Samuel J. Tilden, the governor of New York. Tilden had become famous for fighting corruption. The Republicans picked Rutherford B. Hayes, the governor of Ohio. Look at the picture. That is Governor Hayes.

When the votes were counted, Samuel Tilden seemed to have won. He had more popular votes. He had 184 electoral votes - one short of the 185 needed. Rutherford Hayes had 165 electoral votes. There were 20 more electoral votes from three Southern states - Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina - plus one disputed elector from Oregon. Both sides claimed these votes.

Congress had a big problem. Who would the disputed votes go to? If Tilden got just one of the 20, he would win. If Hayes got all 20, he would win.

Congress set up a special Electoral Commission of 15 people - 7 Democrats, 7 Republicans, and one independent. But the independent quit and was replaced by a Republican. The Commission voted 8 to 7 on every single dispute. Hayes got every disputed



Rutherford B. Hayes, the nineteenth U.S. president. He won the disputed 1876 election by one electoral vote.

MATHEW BRADY (1822-1896), VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Let's talk about the story

1.

Who won the 1876 presidential election?

2.

What was the Electoral Commission, and what did it decide?

3.

What was the Compromise of 1877?

Warm-up (5 min)

The 1876 election was the most contested in U.S. history before 2000. Three states gave votes to both candidates! Congress had to make a special commission to decide who won.

Answer key

1.

Rutherford B. Hayes. He won by 185 electoral votes to Samuel J. Tilden's 184 - a one-vote margin after the Electoral Commission decided 20 disputed electoral votes.

Hayes is one of only five U.S. presidents (1824, 1876, 1888, 2000, 2016) who lost the popular vote but won the presidency.

2.

The Electoral Commission was a special group of 15 people that Congress set up to decide who won the 1876 election. The Commission had 7 Democrats and 8 Republicans (after the independent member was replaced by a Republican). It voted 8 to 7 on every single dispute - giving every disputed vote to Hayes.

The Electoral Commission is the only such body in U.S. history. The 8-7 partisan voting along Republican lines damaged the political legitimacy of the result.

3.

The Compromise of 1877 was an informal political deal between Republicans and Democrats. Democrats agreed to accept Rutherford Hayes as president without further challenges. In exchange, Hayes withdrew federal troops from the South - effectively ending Reconstruction. The deal included other promises about federal money for Southern railroads and a Southerner in the Cabinet.

The 1877 Compromise effectively ended Reconstruction. Without federal military protection, Southern Reconstruction governments fell to white Democratic "Redemption" between 1877 and 1879.