

*Millard Fillmore*  
13th President

*Millard Fillmore*



Terms: 1850-1853

Political Party: Whig

First Lady: Abigail Powers Fillmore

Vice President: None

Overview

Born: January 7, 1800, Locke Township (now Summerhill), New York... Like several other presidents, Millard Fillmore was born in a log cabin. He was an uninspiring individual with no particular talents (he refused an honorary degree from Oxford claiming to have "neither literary or scientific attainment"). Ascending to the presidency after the death of [Zachary Taylor](#) < [www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-taylor/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-taylor/) > in 1850, Millard found the politics of his era dominated by Henry Clay and Daniel Webster's Compromise of 1850 and its ramifications. Fillmore's supportive position, however, deprived him of the Whig nomination in 1852... Died: March 8, 1874.

The Era

- Levi Strauss "bibless overalls," Singer sewing machines, and Otis elevators invented (1850, 1851, 1852)
- First American public library opens in Boston (1852)
- *The New York Times*, *Moby Dick* and *Pop Goes the Weasel* are published (1851, 1851, 1853)
- The schooner *America* wins the first America's Cup yacht race

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## Domestic Policy

The [Compromise of 1850](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/lincolns-political-landscape/) <www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/lincolns-political-landscape/>, hammered out by Daniel Webster and Henry Clay in an attempt to forestall or prevent a civil war over the issue of slavery, was making its way through Congress while President Taylor lay on his deathbed. As vice president, Fillmore informed Taylor that he would cast a tie-breaking vote for the measure. Upon his inauguration, he appointed Daniel Webster Secretary of State, an act that publicly aligned Fillmore with the moderate Whigs. Although the bill passed, the Compromise was soon recognized as a stop-gap measure that would be short-lived.

## Foreign Affairs

Fillmore proposed paying Texas to abandon claims on New Mexico, and supported the admission of California into the Union. Further afield, he authorized Commodore Matthew Perry's expedition to Japan, and encouraged increased foreign trade.

## Presidential Politics

Following the nomination of Zachary Taylor for president in 1848, the Whigs chose the modest Fillmore as vice president to capitalize on his moderate positions and New York roots. Campaigning for his party's presidential nomination in 1852, Fillmore found himself in a three way race with Daniel Webster and Winfield Scott. Fillmore's position on the Compromise, particularly the [Fugitive Slave Act](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/lincolns-Jacobs/) <www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/lincolns-Jacobs/>, alienated the anti-slavery wing of the party and he was left to split the conservative Whig vote with Webster, leaving Scott with the nomination. Fillmore ran again in 1856 as a third-party candidate and won eight electoral votes.

*"I determined from the moment I entered upon the administration of the Government, to take the Constitution and laws for my guide, and, in the execution of the powers confided to me, to know no North, no South, no East, no West, but my country, my whole country, one and indivisible."*

— Millard Fillmore, 1851

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