

*Zachary Taylor*  
*12th President*

*Zachary Taylor*



Terms: 1849-1850

Political Party: Whig

First Lady: Margaret Mackall Smith Taylor

Vice President: Millard Fillmore

Overview

Born: November 24, 1784, near Barboursville, Virginia... Born in Virginia, raised in Kentucky, with a home in Louisiana and a plantation in Mississippi, Zachary Taylor lived the nomadic life of a career soldier, never casting a vote. Although a slave-holder and Southerner, Taylor was above all a nationalist who threatened to lead the Army personally to recapture any states that seceded from the Union. His presidency was cut short by a sudden illness... Died: July 9, 1850.

The Era

- California gold rush (1849)
- Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell becomes the first American woman to earn a medical degree (1849)

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**Domestic Policy**

The issue of slavery dominated Taylor's presidency, as it did those of his mid-nineteenth century successors. Taylor encouraged New Mexico and California to seek statehood, bypassing the territorial stage, and to write the legal status of slavery into their state constitutions. Southerners objected to the quick admittance of two probable free states and threatened to secede. Taylor, furious at the idea of disunity, vowed to lead the charge into rebellious states. Before any of these ominous threats were realized, Taylor suddenly fell ill and died -- a recent exhumation and autopsy (1991) ruled out poisoning as a cause of death.

*“I am conscious that the position which I have been called to fill, though sufficient to satisfy the loftiest ambition, is surrounded by fearful responsibilities.”*

– Zachary Taylor, 1849

**Foreign Affairs**

The one notable foreign policy achievement during Taylor's short presidency was the signing of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty. This document established that any Central American canal linking the Atlantic to the Pacific would be open to both British and American ships and would not be fortified. Some saw this as a betrayal of the [Monroe Doctrine](#) <[www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/tr-monroe/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/tr-monroe/)>.

**Presidential Politics**

General Zachary Taylor, a hero of the Mexican War, was an ideal Whig candidate -- a military hero (appealing to Northerners), a slave-holder (appealing to Southerners) and a non-politician uncommitted on the pressing issues of the day. In a three-way race against the Democrat Lewis Cass and the Free Soil Party candidate [Martin Van Buren](#) <[www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-vanburen/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-vanburen/)>, Taylor won a narrow victory over Cass. November 7, 1848, was the first time that presidential elections in all states were held on the same day.

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