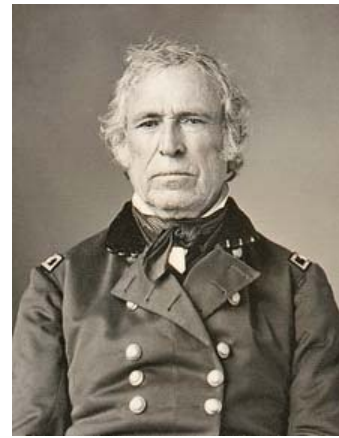


President	Zachary Taylor
Chronological Order	12
Life Span	1784-1850
Home State	Louisiana
Elected	1848
Political Party	Whig
Vice President	Millard Fillmore
First Lady	Margaret MacKall Smith Taylor
Children	1 son, 5 daughters
Physical Attributes	5'8" tall, stocky, scruffy dresser, black hair, hazel eyes
Undergraduate Education	None
Military Service	Captain in the army during the War of 1812, Major General during the Mexican War
Profession	Soldier, Planter
Political Offices	None
Nickname	Old Rough and Ready or Old Zack
Family Lineage	English
ReligiousAffiliation	Episcopalian



1. Taylor was frank, honest, self-reliant, and somewhat stubborn. He was not a politician; he never ran for or held any political office before becoming president. The Whigs nominated him for president in 1848 because of his popularity as a Mexican War hero. They ran him without a platform to avoid the polarizing question of the status of slavery in the territory gained in the Mexican Cession. (Southerners assumed he would be for it because he was from Louisiana and owned scores of slaves. They were wrong.) The Democratic Party split over this issue, which allowed Taylor to eke out a victory. Taylor died suddenly after only sixteen months in office.

2. Taylor's ancestors settled in Virginia in the 1640s. His father, Richard, and his mother, Sarah Dabney Strother, were from socially prominent and wealthy Virginia families. Richard was a planter who served meritoriously in the Revolutionary War for six and a half years, mustering out as a lieutenant colonel in the fall of 1781. He was a graduate of the College of William & Mary and served in the Virginia Assembly. His plantation, Hare Forest, was located in Orange County, Virginia, thirty-three miles from Thomas Jefferson's Monticello and nine miles from James Madison's Montpelier.

After the war, Richard Taylor decided to sell Hare Forest and move his family to 1,000 acres of land on the frontier near Louisville, Kentucky. He had received the land from the United States government as payment for his war service. The new land was much more fertile than his Virginia land, which had begun to wear out from excessive tobacco raising.

Richard traveled solo to Louisville and erected a log cabin on a four-hundred-acre farm five miles east of town; he named the farm Springfield. Richard then returned to Virginia and escorted the family to their new home in 1785. Louisville was on the wild frontier; it bore no resemblance to the sophisticated Orange County the Taylors had left. Wild animals roamed the woods surrounding Springfield, and wild Indians were in the vicinity. As a result, Zachary grew up in an atmosphere where danger was a fact of life.

Richard Taylor thrived in Kentucky. By 1800 he owned 10,000 acres of land, town lots in Louisville, and twenty-six slaves. Richard served as collector of the port of Louisville, a delegate to Kentucky's State Constitutional Convention, and several terms in the state legislature. He was a presidential elector four times.

3. Zachary Taylor's formal education was scanty, even though both his parents were upper class and his father was a college graduate. He learned to read and write, like many frontier children, from his mother. His handwriting, spelling, and grammar were crude and unrefined throughout his life. But given the circumstances of the frontier, his training in farming, hunting, self-defense, and other frontier survival skills was far more important than formal education. He grew up to be a successful farmer and a shrewd businessman like his father.

4. In 1808, in response to the *Chesapeake-Leopard* Affair, the Jefferson administration expanded the U.S. Army, and Zachary was commissioned as a first lieutenant for the new Seventh Infantry Regiment. Taylor was fortunate; usually, a young man lacking formal military experience could never enter the service at that rank. Precisely what efforts were exerted by the family to secure the appointment do not show up in historical records. However, Richard Taylor's position in Louisville, his Revolutionary War service, and his political connections may have helped obtain the appointment.

Zachary was assigned to command the garrison at Fort Pickering, located near modern-day Memphis, Tennessee. Except for a brief period in 1815, Taylor was in the military continuously from 1808 until he became president in 1849. Much of the time, he served at frontier outposts.

5. Although Taylor was a soldier, he was simultaneously a planter. When he married Margaret ("Peggy") Mackall Smith in 1810, his father presented the couple with 324 acres of land. Taylor was able to balance soldiering and farming because of the army's particular nature at that time. The army was scattered in small detachments along the western frontier and at peace, except for occasional Indian disturbances. The authorities were generous in granting long leaves of absence whereby an officer could return to his ranch or farm for extended periods.

In 1816, Taylor sold his original farm and reinvested the money in a 1,400-acre farm near Louisville. He sold this farm four years later at a handsome profit. In 1823, Taylor purchased a 380-acre plantation in West Feliciana Parish on the Mississippi River, about 35 miles north of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. In 1831, he inherited some land following his father's death, sold it, and bought a 137-acre plantation in Wilkinson County, Mississippi, adjacent to his West Feliciana plantation. In 1838 he added a third plantation, again in West Feliciana Parish, to his holdings.

In 1841, Taylor sold these three plantations and bought the 1,923-acre Cypress Grove Plantation and its eighty-one slaves. The Cypress Grove Plantation was on the Mississippi River near Newellton, Louisiana, about 30 miles southwest of Vicksburg, Mississippi. Peggy moved to Louisiana when Zachary assumed command of the fort at Baton Rouge in 1840, and she lived at Cypress Grove during the Mexican War. Taylor grew cotton, tobacco, corn, wheat, and lumber at Cypress Grove and raised hogs, sheep, cattle, and poultry. The Taylor home on the plantation had an extensive library. By 1850, Taylor's net worth was around \$120,000 – equivalent to \$6 million today. At the time of his death, he owned 131 slaves.

6. As a professional soldier, Taylor served in forts on the frontier in various parts of the U.S., and often his family could not accompany him. He found these separations very difficult and vowed that none of his daughters would marry a military man.

However, his eldest daughter, Sarah Knox Taylor – known as Knox – fell in love with Lieutenant Jefferson Davis, the future president of the Confederacy. An impasse resulted, and personal animosity grew between Taylor and Davis. Davis was not even allowed inside Taylor's house. In June of 1835, Davis resigned from the army, and the couple was married, with Taylor still unhappy about it. Shortly after they were married, Jefferson and Knox contracted malaria, and she died after only three months of marriage.

Davis rejoined the army when the Mexican War broke out. He served under Taylor as the leader of the elite "Mississippi Rifles" division made up of volunteers from his home state armed – at Davis's insistence – with modern rifles, not muskets like most of the army. At a critical moment in the Battle of Buena Vista, when Santa Anna's numerically superior force seemed poised to overrun the Americans, Davis led a ferocious counterattack by the Mississippi Rifles that turned the tide of the battle. The division began the war with 1,000 men, but only 376 survived. When the Mississippi Rifles were shipping out to go home, Taylor – for the first time anyone could remember – put on his dress blue uniform to send them off. And he admitted that he had been wrong in opposing Davis's marriage to Knox by telling him, "My daughter, sir, was a better judge of men than I was." From then on, despite their political differences – Davis was a Democrat – they would behave almost like father and son.

By 1849, Davis was a U.S. Senator from Mississippi and one of the foremost proponents of the extension of

slavery into the lands acquired in the Mexican Cession. But his strong disagreement with Taylor on this topic did not affect their friendship. Taylor told Davis: "I wish you to pursue that course ... which your good sense, interest, and honor prompt you to do ... Even if not in accordance with my views ... it will not interrupt our personal intercourse or my esteem & friendship for you."

7. During the War of 1812, in which U.S. forces battled the British Empire and its Indian allies, Taylor successfully defended Fort Harrison in Indiana Territory from an Indian attack commanded by Tecumseh. The September 1812 battle represented the first land victory of the war for the American forces, for which Taylor received wide praise.

During the Black Hawk War, Taylor campaigned under General Henry Atkinson to pursue and later defend against Chief Black Hawk's forces throughout the summer. The end of the war in August 1832 signaled the final Indian resistance to U.S. expansion in the area.

During the Second Seminole War, Taylor fought against the Seminole Indians in the Christmas Day Battle of Lake Okeechobee, which was among the largest U.S.-Indian battles of the nineteenth century; as a result, he was promoted to brigadier general. In May 1838, Brig. Gen. Thomas Jesup stepped down and placed Taylor in command of all American troops in Florida, a position he held for two years. Taylor's willingness to share his troops' hardships in Florida earned him the nickname "Old Rough and Ready."

8. Zachary Taylor came into national prominence due to his victories in the Mexican War (1846-1848). When Mexico refused to sell California to the United States, President Polk sent Taylor's army into disputed land on the Texas-Mexico border between the Nueces and Rio Grande Rivers. When Mexican soldiers crossed the Rio Grande and attacked a small party of Taylor's troops, Polk asked Congress for a declaration of war, which they granted. Things then escalated in Texas. Taylor's expert use of his superior artillery defeated larger Mexican forces at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma north of the Rio Grande River.

Taylor then crossed the Rio Grande and attacked the city of Monterrey. Unlike the Battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, the Americans did not overwhelm the Mexican forces at the Battle of Monterrey. Both sides suffered heavy casualties, and in the end, the fighting was house-to-house. The Americans won, but not overwhelmingly, and both sides agreed to an eight-week armistice. The Mexicans surrendered the city and all public property except one field battery of six guns. However, the Mexican army was not imprisoned; it was allowed to retreat south.

President Polk disapproved of the armistice and sent a message to Taylor canceling it. Relations between Polk, a Democrat, and Taylor, a Whig, had been strained for some time, especially since American newspapers had begun praising Taylor's military victories. Already, they were discussing Taylor as a candidate for president in 1848.

The next step in the war was to be an assault Veracruz and march inland to capture Mexico City. Initially, the plan was to have Taylor lead this effort, but after Monterrey Polk gave the assignment to General Winfield Scott. Half of Taylor's men were reassigned to Scott, including almost all his regular army troops, leaving him with just 6,000 men, most of whom were poorly trained and undisciplined volunteers, not regulars. This infuriated Taylor. Then, Mexican General Santa Anna intercepted a letter from Scott to Taylor and knew from the contents that Taylor's army was vulnerable.

Santa Anna's army of 20,000 soldiers attacked Taylor's army near a hacienda called Buena Vista, located south of Monterrey. As the Mexicans approached along the road from the south, an impassible ravine was on the west and a plateau on the east. Therefore, Santa Anna would have to go through the narrow pass between them or circle around the plateau. Over the next two days, he tried both but was repelled by the Americans. The advantageous terrain, superior horse-drawn light artillery, and the heroic efforts of Jefferson Davis, Braxton Bragg, John Wool, and others were essential elements of the victory. Taylor also played a key role. He moved from one position to another, encouraging and demanding maximum effort from his men. When the smoke cleared, 1,800 Mexican soldiers lay dead or wounded; Taylor lost 672. Taylor narrowly escaped injury when one bullet tore a button from his uniform, and another grazed his arm. Thoroughly defeated, Santa Anna left the field, and Taylor became an American hero.

9. The news of Taylor's victories at Monterrey and Buena Vista electrified the nation. He was compared to war heroes like George Washington and Andrew Jackson. Newspapers wrote stories about the casual way he dressed and the fact that he liked to calmly sit side-saddle of his horse, "Old Whitey," while observing battles. Future president U.S. Grant served under Taylor during the Mexican War and admired him as a poised and courageous battlefield commander. In his memoirs, Grant wrote:

No soldier could face either danger or responsibility more calmly than he. These are qualities more rarely

found than genius or physical courage. General Taylor never made any great show or parade, either of uniform or retinue. In dress he was possibly too plain, rarely wearing anything in the field to indicate his rank, or even that he was an officer; but he was known to every soldier in his army, and was respected by all.

Grant also commented that Taylor “moved about the field... to see through his own eyes” what was transpiring.

10. Politically, Taylor thought of himself as independent-minded. He was not a Democrat because he disapproved of Jackson’s destruction of the Second Bank of the United States and his use of the spoils system to reward his political supporters. Also, Taylor held a grudge against President Polk, who was a Democrat, because of how the Tennessean had treated him during the Mexican War

Although Taylor did not like the Whigs' stand on protective tariffs and expensive internal improvements, he did believe in core Whig principles. He thought that the president should not and could not use the veto unless a law was unconstitutional. Taylor also felt that the president should not interfere with Congress. He believed the president should consult with his cabinet on all important issues. These were all Whig principles and a reaction to Jackson's strong presidency.

Most importantly, Taylor believed that the Union was indissoluble. He spent forty-one years in the military – including two wars – protecting *all* the United States. As president, he did not tolerate threats of secession from lawmakers.

Despite the fact that he was a slaveholder, he opposed the expansion of slavery to the western lands acquired from Mexico because neither cotton, sugar, or tobacco could be grown there in a plantation economy.

11. At the 1848 Whig National Convention, the leading candidates for president were Taylor, Henry Clay, Winfield Scott, and Daniel Webster. On the first ballot, Taylor led with 111 votes to Clay's 97, Scott's 43, and Webster's 22. All but 26 of Taylor's votes came from the South. Clay's support decreased significantly in the successive ballots, with most of the gains going to Taylor, who won on the fourth ballot with 171 votes.

The Northern Whigs were furious that their presidential nominee was a southerner who owned scores of slaves. For a few hours, it looked like the party would split between its "conscience" and "cotton" wings. Then, to appease northern delegates, the party searched for a vice presidential nominee more aligned with their views. Daniel Webster – an antislavery senator from Massachusetts – was offered the spot but refused, growling that Taylor was nothing but "an illiterate frontier colonel." Eventually, the convention chose Millard Fillmore, a prominent New York Whig whose views on slavery were moderate. (He believed it was protected in the states where it already existed but was not in favor of expanding it into the territory acquired from Mexico.). Fillmore was a four-term congressman from Buffalo who had chaired the House Ways and Means Committee and been a contender for the vice-presidential nomination in 1844. He was a wise choice because New York was the state with, by far, the most electoral votes. Taylor had to win New York to win the general election

The convention did not put forth a platform because it wanted to avoid addressing slavery in the territories acquired in the Mexican Cession. The Whigs feared this issue might split the party.

12. In the 1848 general election, the Whigs relied on Taylor's national appeal as a war hero. They portrayed him as a leader of men and ran him without any platform. In addition, Taylor minimized his role in the campaign, preferring not to meet with voters or correspond directly regarding his political views. This tactic attracted criticism from many directions. Some thought that Taylor had no positions, while others felt that he lacked political experience and knowledge. Moreover, some people believed that his military success was not enough to qualify him for president. Fortunately for the Whigs, his campaign was skillfully directed by Senator John J. Crittenden of Kentucky and bolstered by a late endorsement from Daniel Webster.

In 1848, the Democratic Party split over the question of slavery. When the party nominated former Michigan governor Lewis Cass, he ran on the principle of popular sovereignty for slavery in the newly acquired territories in the West. Democratic Party founder Martin Van Buren strongly disagreed; he wanted no slavery in these territories. Consequently, Van Buren split from the party and ran as the candidate of the Free-Soil Party. He did not win any electoral votes, but in crucial New York (36 electoral votes), he took enough votes away from Cass to allow Taylor to win the Empire State and the election, 163 to 127 electoral votes.

13. When Taylor took office, five significant problems were facing the country; each had something to do

with slavery. The first was what to do with California, which desperately needed a civilian government. The Gold Rush, which began in 1848, led to an influx of rowdy, hard-working, often angry, and occasionally hard-drinking citizens. No territorial government had been provided, and a state of lawlessness existed that went beyond the military's ability to manage it. For example, individual mining claims, often tenuous at best, sometimes had to be defended by using force. Residents demanded statehood and drew up a state constitution that banned slavery. Southerners reacted to the ban by opposing California statehood because it would upset the Senate's free state/slave state balance of power. (N.B. One reason for the ban was that miners did not want to compete with slave labor.)

The second issue was whether to allow slavery in New Mexico and Utah. The climate (too dry) and topography (too rugged) of both regions were unfavorable for growing plantation crops like cotton, sugar, or tobacco. Hence, it was unlikely that slavery would thrive there. Also, New Mexico and Utah had been part of Mexico, which did not allow slavery. Consequently, slavery did not currently exist in either one. Nevertheless, slave-holding states still did not want slavery outlawed there in the future.

A third issue was the boundary between New Mexico and Texas. When Texas declared its independence from Mexico in 1836, it arbitrarily defined its western border to include 60 percent of present-day New Mexico. But the latter territory remained, by its own choice, under Mexican control until the arrival of U.S. troops in 1846 during the Mexican War. The Taylor administration was sympathetic to New Mexico's interpretation of the border. However, the slave-holding states sided with Texas in the hope of importing slavery into the disputed territory. This disagreement was volatile; Texas threatened to send in the state's militia to maintain its claim, and other southern states threatened to support Texas militarily if fighting broke out.

The fourth and fifth issues both had to do with slave laws. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 permitted masters to track down their fugitive slaves and take them home after receiving a certificate of removal. But enforcement of the law had been relatively weak. Frustrated by the lack of cooperation from the northern states, the South demanded revisions that would force compliance. Northerners, in turn, insisted on the abolition of the slave trade in Washington, D.C., which at the time was the largest slave market in North America. The area around the Capitol was a place where trading was active. It was not uncommon for slave traders to march their chained and shackled slaves just steps from the Congress.

14. Henry Clay proposed to solve these problems with his Compromise of 1850. It had five provisions: (a) the admission of California as a free state, (b) the remainder of the Mexican Cession area to be formed into the territories of New Mexico and Utah, with no restrictions on slavery (hence open to popular sovereignty), (c) the payment of ten million dollars to Texas for giving up its claims to eastern New Mexico, (d) a stringent Fugitive Slave Law, and (e) the abolition of the slave trade (but not slavery itself) in the District of Columbia. (N.B. Texas needed the \$10 million to pay the crippling debt it had incurred while it was an independent republic.)

Taylor opposed the Compromise of 1850. He wanted California and New Mexico admitted as states with no side deals to appease the South. According to Taylor's plan, once New Mexico was admitted as a state, the U.S. Supreme Court could rule on the Texas-New Mexico boundary issue. The opposition of (a) Taylor, (b) northern antislavery senators, and (c) southern secessionist "fire-eaters" caused the Compromise of 1850 to flounder in the Senate for months. It passed only after President Millard Fillmore supported it following Taylor's death. (N.B. The term "fire-eater" refers to the incendiary rhetoric of extreme proslavery advocates.)

15. Taylor accomplished almost nothing domestically during his short presidency. In his first annual address to Congress in December 1849, Taylor suggested that California and New Mexico be allowed to enter the Union as states to circumvent whether the territory gained via the Mexican Cession be declared free or slave by the federal government. This enraged southern senators and motivated Henry Clay to propose the Compromise of 1850. For the next seven months, i.e., until Taylor's death, Congress debated the compromise issues and accomplished almost nothing else. Taylor never engaged and negotiated with prominent Whig senators like Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, or John Bell. He did not take Vice President Millard Fillmore into his confidence and use him to negotiate. He just told Congress what he wanted and left it at that.

In doing this, he was following the advice of Secretary of State John M. Clayton, Secretary of the Treasury William M. Meredith, and Secretary of the Navy William B. Preston. They supported Taylor's uncompromising stance against southern interests during the debate over the Compromise of 1850. They also promoted an alliance between Taylor, antislavery Senator William H. Seward, and Seward's mentor, Thurlow Weed.

Seward and Weed were New York antislavery Whigs who were archrivals of Millard Fillmore. And once they became close with Taylor, he gave them control over patronage in New York state, which significantly

curtailed Fillmore's political power in his home state. As a result of their influence with Taylor, Fillmore played no role in the Taylor administration.

16. Like Andrew Jackson, Taylor was an ardent Unionist who would not tolerate any talk of secession. When a group of Southerners came to the White House and threatened secession unless they got their way on New Mexico and the Fugitive Slave Law, he replied angrily that "if it becomes necessary, I'll take command of the army myself and if you are taken in rebellion against the Union, I will hang you with less reluctance than I hanged deserters and spies in Mexico."

17. Taylor's most important foreign policy move involved delicate negotiations with Britain over American plans to build a canal across Nicaragua. The plan was opposed by the British, who had been acquiring strategic positions on the Mosquito Coast, which is on the eastern side of Nicaragua. Taylor's secretary of state, John M. Clayton, negotiated an agreement, the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, to solve the issue. Both sides agreed that if a canal was built, both sides would have equal access to it. The treaty significantly reduced the tension between the two countries.

18. On Thursday, July 4, 1850, a hot, humid day, Taylor attended the ceremony for the laying of the cornerstone of the Washington Monument. After listening to two hours of speeches, he took a walk along the Potomac and then returned to the White House. During the day, he ate large quantities of green apples and cherries and drank ice water and chilled milk. All were foods and liquids that Washington's inhabitants had been told to avoid because an Asiatic cholera epidemic was sweeping parts of the country.

The president spent an uncomfortable night but felt well enough to sign the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty the next morning. Later in the day, his symptoms worsened, and the White House called in an army surgeon on Saturday. He diagnosed the illness as cholera morbus, a flexible mid-nineteenth-century term for intestinal ailments as diverse as diarrhea and dysentery but not related to Asiatic cholera. The fact is that Washington's water and sewer systems were still primitive and unsanitary; other prominent people – including cabinet members and senators – were sick with something like Taylor's condition at that very moment. No one was sure of the nature of the disease.

On Sunday and Monday, his condition worsened, and three more doctors were brought in. By Tuesday, Taylor knew that he was dying and called for his wife. His last words were: "I am about to die – I expect the summons soon – I have endeavored to discharge all my official duties faithfully – I regret nothing, but am sorry that I am about to leave my friends."

19. Taylor's son, Richard, was a lieutenant general in the Confederate Army during the Civil War.

See the next page for a list of references.

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