Our Worst Presidents

A Rough Course Schedule

- Lecture 1: Intro and Methods
- Lecture 2: Post-Jackson: Van Buren, W. Harrison, Tyler
- Lecture 3: Sectional Tensions: Zach Taylor, Millard Fillmore
- Lecture 4: Impending Crisis: Pierce, James Buchanan
- Lecture 5: Reconstruction: Andrew Johnson, Grant, Hayes
- Lecture 6: Gilded Age: Garfield, Arthur, Ben Harrison
- Lecture 7: The 1920s: Harding, Coolidge, Hoover
- Lecture 8: The 1970s and Our Times

Post-Jacksonian Era Presidents, 1837-1845

Sectional Tensions, 1849-1853
President Harrison’s Agenda

- Following Whig principles, promised Congress would lead
- Criticized excessive executive branch power; use veto only if legislation was unconstitutional; pledged to serve one term
- Would sign into law the American System of canals, roads, harbors, railroads, etc.; re-charting the Bank of the US

Map of Washington: White House (A), above, its water supply (B), and a field of “night soil” (C) that likely harbored deadly bacteria. Harrison was bled, leeched, blistered, given Virginia snake weed, opium, etc.
Death of a President

- How different might the history of the 1840s look had Harrison not died?
- He would have signed into law much of the Whig legislative program advocated by Clay
- Instead, the vetoes of “his accidency” John Tyler
- No Texas annexation in ’44

Notable Scholar Surveys

- Schlesinger, 1948: X
- Schlesinger, 1962: X
- M-B 1982: X
- CT 1982: X
- Siena 1982: 26 (C)
- Siena 1990: 35 (F)
- Siena 1994: 28 (C)
### Siena College Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>24 (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Leadership</td>
<td>30 (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Com. Ability</td>
<td>25 (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rel. w/Congress</td>
<td>31 (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court Appointments</td>
<td>33 (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling Economy</td>
<td>27 (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luck</td>
<td>42 (F)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Siena College Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to Compromise</td>
<td>35 (F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to take risks</td>
<td>24 (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointments</td>
<td>24 (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall ability</td>
<td>37 (F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagination</td>
<td>35 (F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>36 (F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>30 (C)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### C-Span Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Ability</td>
<td>33 (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Policy</td>
<td>39 (F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Ability</td>
<td>24 (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligence</td>
<td>31 (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid Mistakes</td>
<td>33 (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts’ View</td>
<td>34 (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>35 (F)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Persuasion</td>
<td>28 (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis Leadership</td>
<td>38 (F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Management</td>
<td>38 (F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Authority</td>
<td>31 (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Relations</td>
<td>42 (F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Skills</td>
<td>40 (F)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### C-Span Criteria

- Relations w/ Congress: 38 (F)
- Vision/Setting agenda: 36 (F)
- Pursued Equal Justice: 37 (F)
- Performance in Context: 38 (F)
- Overall: 38 (F)

### Historical Assessment: William Henry Harrison

- Shortest time in office: 31 days [Garfield, the second-shortest, served 199 days]
- Served too briefly to be assessed
- Likely would have struggled with Henry Clay

### Historical Assessment

- As a genuine Whig, would not have clashed with the Whigs to the degree of his successor, Tyler, an opponent of the Whig program
- The election of 1840 was, in retrospect, a great Whig tragedy
- We'll never know what might have happened had the Whig agenda of economic development and internal improvements prevailed

### Our Worst Presidents
Tyler’s Predicament

- Tyler had an opportunity to achieve success
- But he became a man without a party in a two-party system
- The Whigs expelled him; the Democrats didn’t want him back (he was a defector)
- He was seen as a “double double-crosser”: first the Democrats, later the Whigs

The Very Bottom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Aggregate</th>
<th>Siena</th>
<th>C-Span</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Tyler</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fillmore</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Pierce</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harding</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Johnson</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buchanan</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Significance of John Tyler

- The first to ascend from the vice presidency through the accident of a president’s death
- The first to be driven from his party before departing the presidency

Challenges of Post-Jackson Era

1837-1845

- Fundamental disagreements over the role of government (Hamilton vs. Jefferson; Whig vs. Jacksonian)
- Growing Sectionalism
- Polarization over the ongoing bank mess
- Tensions over expansion (Texas)
- Weak presidencies (Harrison, Tyler), strong Congresses (Clay, Calhoun, Benton, Webster)

“His Accidency” was a gaunt, meticulous Virginia aristocrat, with rigid notions about the “original intent” of the constitution.

Physical Appearance

- 6 feet tall and thin, blue eyes, wavy hair, rather large ears, thin lips, a rather weak chin; his dominant feature was a prominent nose
- His health generally was poor: He caught viruses easily, suffered frequently from indigestion and chronic diarrhea
The Rise of John Tyler

- Born and bred to be a Virginia gentleman
- Educated at William and Mary, studied law, entered state politics
- Served in the VA House of Delegates, U.S. House, and the governorship of Virginia before going to the U.S. Senate in 1827

Tyler’s Political Ideology

- Consistent advocate of states’ rights, “originalism”
- Staunch defender of slavery
- On several occasions, Tyler spoke out against Clay’s American System
- Initially supported Jackson in 1828 as the lesser of evils

Senator John Tyler

- Senatorial tenure coincided with Jackson’s presidency
- Tyler opposed Jackson’s “imperial pretentions”
- In 1836, the Jacksonian-controlled Virginia legislature secured Tyler’s senatorial resignation
John Quincy Adams

- “Tyler is a political sectarian, of the slave-driving Virginian Jeffersonian school”
- … “Against all improvement, with all the interests and passions and vices of slavery rooted in his moral and political constitution”

Like Jefferson earlier, Tyler too faced allegations of having mixed-race children

- Charges of Tyler’s sexual exploitation of his slaves appeared in the press
- Accused of fathering slave children: In December 1841 a story ran titled “Tyler-Ising”
- It claimed Tyler had slave children and sired at least two sons by one of his slaves

Tyler and Slavery

- The story charged that Tyler supported his white family, and his budding political career, by selling members of his slave family
- This was a very common practice in Virginia, the epicenter of the slave-breeding industry

Tyler implored his brother-in-law to sell “Ann Eliza” as quickly as possible because he needed the money from her sale to begin his duties in Washington as a United States Senator
Tyler was not given second place on the 1840 ticket because of his abilities

- Rather, he as seen, ironically as it would turn out, as a fervent supporter of Henry Clay!
- It was alleged that Tyler had been seen at the Whig convention weeping over Clay’s defeat
- Also, he had been an anti-Jackson Democrat (the old dilemma of “balancing the ticket”)

Whig Running Mate, 1840

- Whig managers sought a vice presidential nominee who would placate Clay’s southern supporters and possibly bring Virginia into the Whig column
- But Tyler’s relationship to the Whig Party was tenuous
- He thought much of the Whig agenda “unconstitutional”!

Daniel Webster requested that Chief Justice Roger B. Taney advise on the constitutionality of Tyler’s status. The chief justice predictably refused to do so.
### Vice President, Vice President Acting as President, Acting President, or President?

- Tyler insisted that the constitution clearly stated that he was now president, in name and in action.
- Did it?: “Article II, Section 1: In Case of the Removal of the President from Office, or of his Death, Resignation, or Inability to discharge the Powers and Duties of the said Office, the Same shall devolve on the Vice President”

### Presidency of John Tyler

- Succession Crisis
- Special Session to address the economic depression
- Bank Vetoes
- Impeachment drive
- *Princeton* Disaster
- Annexation of Texas

### Tyler Clashes with the Whigs

- Congressional Whigs believed they could work together and attempted to mitigate their differences.
- It was not until Tyler had twice vetoed their bills for a national bank that most Whigs turned on him.

### Tyler Breaks with Clay

- “Go you now, Mr. Clay, to your end of the Avenue, where stands the capital, and there perform your duty to the country as you shall think proper. So help me god, I shall do mine at this end as I shall think proper.”
Tyler Blocks the Whig Program

- Twice Clay drove bank bills through Congress
- Twice Tyler vetoed them (first 2 of 9 vetoes thwarting the Whig program)
- The second time, the entire cabinet, save Secretary of State Daniel Webster, resigned
- Whig congressional caucus expelled Tyler from the party
- Impeachment proceedings began

Democrats and Whigs criticized Tyler for nepotism

- John Tyler, Jr. became his father’s private secretary (he was fired for alcoholism and incompetence) [J.Q. Adams story]
- Nominated daughter-in-law’s father
- Son Robert appointed to the land office; son-in-law James Semple a navy post
- Nephews received treasury and diplomatic posts; other relations granted lucrative posts as assistant postmaster general and clerk in the US Circuit Court for NY

1842 Midterms: Whigs lost 69 House seats!
Opposition Democrats gained 49 seats.
27th Congress, 1841-43: Whigs 142, Dems 99
28th Congress, 1843-45: Dems 148, Whigs 73
(Enormous Consequences for Texas)

Explosion of the “Peacemaker,” USS Princeton, February 28, 1844: Six killed, including Navy Secretary Thomas Gilmer, Secretary of State Abel Upshur, and Mr. David Gardiner
No fool like an old fool: Tyler’s ardent courtship

When Tyler’s friend Henry Wise learned that the 54 year old president planned to marry 24 year-old Julia, he asked, “Have you really won her?”

> “Yes,” Tyler replied, “and why should I not?”
> Wise responded: “You are too far advanced in life to be imprudent in a love scrape.”
> Indignant, Tyler demanded: “How imprudent?”

“I am just full in my prime!?”

> Wise replied: “Easily. You are not only past middle age, but you are President of the United States, and that is a dazzling dignity which may charm a damsel more than the man she marries.”
> Exclaimed Tyler. “Why, my dear sir, I am just full in my prime!”
The Texas Controversy: In the early 1840s, both major parties opposed annexing the Texas Republic as a slave state, fearing a possible war with Mexico and a provocation of North-South sectional tensions.

Tyler’s scheme to annex Texas:
- Tyler conspired to exploit the Texas issue: It might propel him to another term.
- He was prepared to ram annexation through Congress without a treaty.
- Tyler’s rationale of “originalism” was largely a pose to do as he pleased.

The “Marx of the Master Class”

In June 1844 the Senate rejected the annexation treaty with the Texas Republic. Tyler pushed annexation by joint resolution.
Clay’s Prophetic Warnings

- Clay warned that Tyler’s dubious actions would lead to war with Mexico.
- Clay would courageously oppose war with Mexico (and lose his beloved son, Henry Clay, Jr.).
- “Among my fears,” Clay warned, “is that it will, if annexed, disturb the territorial balance of the Union and lead to its dissolution.”

Tyler: A Man Without a Party

- Tyler first of 5 sitting incumbents denied nomination:
  - John Tyler, 1844; Millard Fillmore, 1852; Franklin Pierce, 1856 (re-nomination!); Andrew Johnson, 1868; Chester Arthur, 1884.
  - (Van Buren, Grant, TR denied re-nomination after four year intervals; Polk, Buchanan, Hayes, Coolidge did not actively seek re-nomination)

Post-Presidency

- He subsequently voted for disunion in the Virginia secession convention and was elected to the Confederate House of Representatives.
- He died in 1862.

John Tyler: Notable Scholar Surveys, 1948-1982

- Schlesinger, 1948: 22 (C)
- Schlesinger, 1962: 25 (F)
- M-B, 1982: 28 (F)
- Chi Tribune, 1982: 28 (F)
- Siena 1982: 34 (F)
John Tyler
Notable Scholar Surveys, 1990s
- Siena 1990: 33 (F)
- Siena 1994: 34 (F)
- R-McI, 1996: 34 (F)
- Schlesinger, 1996: 32 (F)

John Tyler
Notable Scholar Surveys, 2000-2009
- C-SPAN, 2000: 36 (F)
- WSJ, 2000: 34 (F)
- Siena, 2002: 37 (F)
- WSJ, 2005: 35 (F)
- C-SPAN, 2009: 35 (F)

John Tyler
Notable Scholar Surveys, 2010-today
- Siena, 2010: 37 (F)
- USPC, 2011: 37 (F)
- APSA, 2015: 36 (F)
- C-SPAN, 2017: 39 (F)
- APSA, 2018: 37 (F)
- Aggregate: 37 (F)

Siena College Categories
- Background: 33 (C)
- Party Leadership: 42 (F)
- Communication: 39 (F)
- Relations w/Congress: 42 (F)
- Court Appts.: 39 (F)
- Handling of Economy: 31 (C)
- Luck: 22 (B)
Siena College Criteria
- Ability to Compromise: 39 (F)
- Willing to take risks: 26 (C)
- Appointments: 34 (D)
- Overall ability: 35 (F)
- Imagination: 29 (C)
- Domestic Policy: 34 (D)
- Integrity: 33 (C)

C-Span Criteria
- Public Persuasion: 39 (F)
- Crisis Leadership: 36 (F)
- Economic Policy: 39 (F)
- Moral Authority: 37 (F)
- International: 28 (C)
- Administrative Skill: 38 (F)

Siena College Criteria
- Executive Ability: 37 (F)
- Foreign Policy: 35 (F)
- Leadership Ability: 36 (F)
- Intelligence: 33 (C)
- Avoid Mistakes: 32 (C)
- Experts’ View: 36 (F)
- Overall: 37 (F)

C-Span Criteria
- Rel. w/ Congress: 41 (F)
- Vision: 37 (F)
- Pursued Justice: 41 (F)
- Context: 36 (F)
- Overall: 39 (F)
Historical Assessment

- Tyler is ranked 38 out of 43 presidents; invariably given “F’s”
- On the plus side, he did possess intelligence and his policy toward Britain achieved much (although perhaps Daniel Webster deserves the credit)

In a more critical vein, he was often arbitrary in his views, yet always claiming the originalist high ground: Claiming originalism to justify his taking of the presidency, his taking of Texas, his opposition to the Bank
- Also, vetoing the Whig program left the nation badly adrift during the ongoing depression

John Tyler: An Assessment

- His Texas policy was duplicitous and fraught with consequences for his successors
- Moreover, his reputation with historians will likely always suffer for having joined the Confederate government
- Has a president ever so openly sided with his nation’s adversaries?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Aggregate</th>
<th>Siena C-Span</th>
<th>Ave.</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nixon:</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Harrison:</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zach Taylor:</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G.W. Bush:</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Hoover:</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. Harrison:</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>37.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Tyler:</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>37.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fillmore:</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Pierce:</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>40.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harding:</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>41.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Johnson:</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buchanan:</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>42.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Historical Overview

- Like Harrison, Taylor served a shortened term (492 days): Third shortest presidency after W.H. Harrison (31 days) and Garfield (199 days)
- Difficult to assess a short term: Taylor has perhaps been judged too harshly
- Opposed the Compromise of 1850, but on the grounds of solid principles: he refused to appease the South

Zachery Taylor: The Big Picture

- The last elected Whig president (of only two)
- The third of four Whig nominations to go to a general (Harrison ‘36, Harrison ‘40, Taylor, ‘48, Scott ‘52)
- Perhaps the least political president ever

The Big Picture: Taylor’s Legacy

- As a general, admired by Jefferson Davis, U.S. Grant; as a president, admired by Lincoln
- In the north he was respected as a principled leader who sought to save the union
- In the south he was distrusted as a southern man with northern principles (a kind of reverse doughface)
**Physical Description**

- 5 feet 8 inches tall and weighed about 170 pounds in his prime, about 200 pounds as president
- An awkward frame, he had long, long arms, a thickly set torso, and short, bowed legs
- His long thin face was dominated by a high forehead and long nose

---

**Physical Description**

- He dressed sloppily, wearing whatever was most comfortable
- His attire and indifference to hardship earned him the nickname Old Rough-and-Ready
- Even as a soldier he typically appeared in a curious hodgepodge of civilian and military dress

---

**Early Zachary Taylor**

- Born in VA, grew up in Kentucky; Father a moderately prosperous planter
- Received little formal schooling; his writing was ungrammatical and he always found reading difficult
- Aided by his family’s political connections, he received an army commission in 1808

---

**A National Military Officer**

- During four decades of army service he was posted on the frontier in areas that would later become 14 states
- Eventually he purchased cotton plantations in Louisiana and Mississippi and became a wealthy slave owner
The Mexican War Created the “Rough and Ready” Legend

- Following the annexation of Texas, he was ordered to move his army to the Rio Grande
- In May, he defeated the Mexican army at Palo Alto and won other victories at Resaca de la Palma and the Battle of Buena Vista

Does Anyone Really Know What Zach Taylor Actually Looked Like?

The Taylor Image

- Taylor had revealed no previous interest in politics; very little was known about him
- As his popularity increased, a number of Whig leaders considered him
- The Whigs promoted him as part George Washington, part Andy Jackson

Gen. Zachery Taylor “Old Rough and Ready”

- Not all Whigs were on board; many distrusted Taylor
- He was seen as crude, lacking sophistication
- Whig Sen. Thomas Corwin wondered how “sleeping 40 years in the woods and cultivating moss on the calves of his legs” qualified Taylor for anything
Daniel Webster on Taylor:

- The great senator and former Secretary of State Daniel Webster called Taylor “an illiterate frontier colonel who hasn’t voted for 40 years”
- Webster was so contemptuous he refused backroom deals to become Taylor’s running mate, missing his one chance to become president when Taylor died

1848 Whig Convention: With the other leading candidates mainly generals who had fought in the recent Mexican War, Clay observed:

“I wish I could slay a Mexican.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zach Taylor:</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Clay:</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winfield Scott:</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Webster:</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Rough and Ready” The Taylor Image

- He was a blank slate upon which each faction of the Whig Party could project its interests
- Moreover, voters would find his military stature appealing and care not about his politics
The “dead letter” controversy

* Taylor’s long delay was worrisome
* Did he really plan to accept the nomination?
* The Whigs had a right to wonder
* A month later, he seemed unapologetic
Gen. Zachery Taylor
“Old Rough and Ready”

- Scathing attack on the Whig tendency to nominate generals
- Here the “available candidate” is Zach Taylor
- He sits atop a pyramid of skulls, holding a blood-stained sword

The Election of 1848

The Challenges of Taylor’s Presidency

- The nation was polarizing over the major question of the day: Slavery’s status in the vast territories taken from Mexico
- 1850 would be a year of major crisis: Civil War was a possibility
- Southerners resisted the prospect of ANY containment of slavery

Henry Clay’s Compromise Plan

- Admit California as a free state
- Create Utah and New Mexico territories with slavery determined by “popular sovereignty”
- Settling Texas-New Mexico boundary dispute
- Ending the slave trade in Washington, D.C., but making it easier for southerners to recover runaway slaves
Taylor’s Compromise Ideas

- Sectional agitation could be best reduced by giving California and NM free state constitutions
- He took a tough stand on Texas’s menacing threats to US troops at Santa Fe
- He believed that the southerners were threatening to hold California hostage for the cession of most of New Mexico into Texas

Compromise of 1850: Taylor’s Balancing Act

- A satire on Taylor’s attempts to balance Southern and Northern interests on the question of slavery in 1850
- Taylor stands atop a pair of scales, with a weight in each hand

Taylor’s Views

- Although a defender of slavery, he nevertheless believed environmental factors should exclude slavery from the territory acquired from Mexico
- He dismissed the issue as pointless (as largely emotional and symbolic)
- He proposed to bypass territorial status and organize the entire Mexican Cession into two huge free states, California and New Mexico

Taylor’s Views on Slavery

- Taylor position:
  1. Maintaining slavery in states where already legal
  2. Concurrently refusing to allow its extension
- (Lincoln’s position)
Taylor’s Compromise

- The President’s plan was opposed by nearly all southern congressmen
- It received the support of every Northern Whig senator except two

The Taylor Paradoxes

- Q: Why would a president who owned slaves and planted cotton take a strong stand against slavery’s expansion?
- A: Taylor was a nationalist; he had lived in all regions of the country
- He was one of the least regional presidents ever

The moment during the heated debate in the Senate over the admission of California as a free state when Mississippi senator Henry Foote drew a pistol on Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri.
Taylor and the Strain of the Antebellum Presidency; Taylor (L) c.1848, (R) c.1850

July 4th 1850
- The big event of the day was a ceremony in the early afternoon at the site of the future Washington Monument, the laying of its cornerstone
- Taylor had to sit through several long-winded political speeches

July 4, 1850
- The main speaker at the event was none other than Senator Henry S. Foote, who delivered a long, pious, self-serving diatribe about the dangers of sectionalism
- Taylor sat through the two hours of Foote’s windy rhetoric
- Taylor afterward admonished Foote that his conduct should live up to his words

Death of Taylor
- Washington’s water and sewage systems were still primitive and unsanitary
- Other prominent people were sick with something like Taylor’s condition at that very moment
The Demise of “Old Rough and Ready”
(Death by Cherries and Cream?)

- Washington had open sewers: Food, drink may have been contaminated
- Recovery overwhelmed by doctors: dosed him with ipecac, opium, quinine at 40 grains a dose!; bled and blistered him
### Zachary Taylor: Notable Scholar Surveys, 1948-1982
- Schlesinger, 1948: 25 (F)
- Schlesinger, 1962: 24 (F)
- M-B 1982: 27 (C)
- CT 1982: 26 (C)
- Siena 1982: 29 (C)

### Zachary Taylor: Notable Scholar Surveys, 1990-1996
- Siena 1990: 34 (F)
- Siena 1994: 33 (F)
- R-McI, 1996: 29 (C)
- Schlesinger, 1996: 29 (C)

### Zachary Taylor: Notable Scholar Surveys, 2000-2009
- C-SPAN, 2000: 28 (C)
- WSJ, 2000: 31 (F)
- Siena, 2002: 34 (F)
- WSJ, 2005: 33 (F)
- C-SPAN, 2009: 29 (C)

### Zachary Taylor: Notable Scholar Surveys, 2010-2018
- Siena, 2010: 33 (C)
- USPC, 2011: 33 (F)
- APSA, 2015: 33 (C)
- C-SPAN, 2017: 31 (C)
- APSA, 2018: 35 (F)
- Aggregate: 35 (F)
### Zachary Taylor: Siena College Criteria

- **Background:** 37 (F)
- **Party Leadership:** 35 (F)
- **Com. Ability:** 28 (C)
- **Rel. w/Congress:** 37 (F)
- **Court Appts.:** 37 (F)
- **Economy:** 24 (C)
- **Luck:** 36 (F)

### Siena College Criteria

- **Compromise:** 34 (D)
- **Take risks:** 28 (C)
- **Appointments:** 28 (C)
- **Overall ability:** 34 (D)
- **Imagination:** 27 (C)
- **Domestic:** 37 (F)
- **Integrity:** 21 (B)

### Siena College Criteria

- **Executive Ability:** 31 (C)
- **Foreign Policy:** 34 (D)
- **Leadership:** 25 (C)
- **Intelligence:** 37 (F)
- **Avoid Mistakes:** 25 (C)
- **Experts’ View:** 33 (C)
- **Overall:** 33 (C)

### C-Span Criteria

- **Public Persuasion:** 27 (C)
- **Crisis Leadership:** 28 (C)
- **Economic:** 28 (C)
- **Moral Authority:** 28 (C)
- **International:** 30 (C)
- **Administrative:** 35 (F)
C-Span Criteria

- Relations w/ Congress: 35 (F)
- Vision: 30 (C)
- Pursued Justice: 34 (D)
- Context: 30 (C)
- Overall: 31 (C)

Historical Assessment: Zachary Taylor

- Speculation: what might have happened had Taylor lived and been re-elected
- Had he lived, there might not have been a Compromise of 1850 or even a Civil War
- Or, there might have been an earlier Civil War

The Tragedy of Taylor’s death

- Taylor’s balanced approach might have worked
- We certainly know now, in retrospect and given the examples of Fillmore, Pierce, and Buchanan, that appeasing the south was doomed to failure

Historians Disagree on Taylor: Historian Michael Holt

- Taylor’s presidency was too short to have substantially impacted the nation
- He is not remembered as a great President
- Most historians believe he was too non-political in a day when politics and leadership demanded close ties with political parties
Historian Michael Holt on Taylor:

- Taylor was an enigma
- He was a slave owner who wanted to ban the expansion of slavery into the western territories taken from Mexico
- He was the military conqueror of Mexico who saw little need for Manifest Destiny as a foreign policy

Historian Elbert Smith:

- Taylor put national above sectional interests
- Because he tried to treat both sections fairly, he has often been characterized as pro-northern
- If Taylor had lived, he would probably have been reelected, and the course of American history might have been different

Elbert Smith on Taylor:

- The South was too disunited in 1850 to secede
- His support for immediate statehood for western territories might have changed the course of history
- He might have stamped out the most burning issue that faced the nation in 1850: the expansion of slavery westward
Assessment of Taylor: John Eisenhower

- The Compromise of 1850 might never have become law had Taylor lived.
- He might have vetoed some of its provisions, particularly the Fugitive Slave Act.
- What would have happened then must remain as one of those imponderable “what ifs”