



# Zachary Taylor: Soldier, Planter, Statesman of the Old Southwest

*K. Jack Bauer*

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Considering the course his life took, one might wonder how Zachary Taylor ever came to be elected the twelfth president of the United States. According to K. Jack Bauer, Taylor "was and remains an enigma." He was a southerner who espoused many antisouthern causes, an aristocrat with a strong feeling for the common man, an energetic yet cautious and conservative soldier. Not an intellectual, Taylor showed little curiosity about the world around him. In this biography -- the most comprehensive since Holman Hamilton's two-volume work published more than thirty years ago -- Bauer offers a fresh appraisal of Taylor's life and suggests that Taylor may have been neither so simple nor so nonpolitical as many historians have believed.

Much of Taylor's adult life was spent in the army, although his military career proved unexceptional until circumstances thrust him into command of the troops sent to occupy Texas. That role projected him into the first clashes with Mexico on the northern bank of the Rio Grande. With minimal advance planning, Taylor led his men against the northern Mexican center of Monterrey, where he displayed little confidence as a battlefield commander. Nevertheless, he forced the defender to request terms. The ensuing armistice brought him the disapprobation of the government but greater public renown. His fame was later assured by his troops' victory at Buena Vista, a battle that cleared the path to the White House.

Taylor's sixteen months as president were marked by disputes over California state-hood and the Texas-New Mexico boundary. Taylor vehemently opposed slavery extension and threatened to hang those southern hotheads who favored violence and secession as a means to protect their interests. He died just as he had begun a reorganization of his administration and recasting of the Whig party.

Balanced and judicious, forthright and unreverential, and based on thoroughgoing research, this is likely to be for many years the standard biography of Zachary Taylor.

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