

John Seigenthaler

# James K. Polk



THE AMERICAN PRESIDENTS

ARTHUR M. SCHLESINGER, JR., GENERAL EDITOR

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Historian  
His administration  
approached "greatness"

His discrepancy P156  
starts to his  
smallness as a  
human being

His greatness of his  
achievements

4 goals 1846

- ① Agreement with  
British on Oregon
- ② signed tariff bill
- ③ passage of  
Constitutional recession
- ④ California

Polk a slave owner

perfectionist  
micromanager  
workaholic  
brooding  
humorous

angry  
arrogant

unforgiving  
called himself - "the  
hardest working man  
in the country"

humorous straight faced  
little prig from TW p91

1828 - Jackson

Rep. / Gov. / Pres.  
Speaker of House

1824 - Corrupt Bargain  
JQA loses pop vote to Jackson but Clay delivers  
LA, Missour, Ohio and Ky (not voting for JQA) to JQA.

Clay becomes Sec State  
April 26, 1844 Van Buren (Liberal) and Clay (Whig) came  
out strongly against annexation of Texas.

That catapulted Polk into Pres. in Baltimore convention  
to 1785 - N. Carolina - Jefferson was their Jesus  
went unbaptized - converted Methodist on deathbed  
Paid for a pew in Presb. church but never joined  
Religion was second to politics in Polk's life.

Sent priests to Mexico  
Mother - very religious  
Grandfather Enghel (grandf.) deists / believed in separation  
of church and state  
Enghel moved west to Columbia, TN. staked out land - son  
Sam followed - Jim Polk was !! had strong stomach disorder

at 17 - urinary stones - had operation - sterility  
Headed for Phila for operation but stopped at Danville, Ky.  
Went to Presb. school - 1816 or so he entered V. of N.C. Chapel Hill  
gray imagination / intellectual rigidity / ability to think  
outside the box.

Best student at VNC / gave commencement address.  
read law with Felix Grundy  
Clerked for State Senator 1820  
1823 - defeated William Gougeon for State Rep. provided whiskey  
at polling place.

Joined Mason. / Became Colonel in militia  
Married Sarah in 1824 she was 21 he 29  
Panix of 1819  
How did Jackson become a candidate for Pres. p 32  
voted to U.S. Senate by 35-25 - Polk voted twice that year

in Aug 1824 Polk ran for Congress wins 3,664 to 2748  
He stood opposed to Federal Projects he was 30 yrs old  
March 23 - Polk's maiden speech - subject direct election

1826 - Jackson started newspaper V.S. Telegraph p 39  
to attack Adams - Jackson put in \$3000

1828 - Clay and Co. tried to smear Jackson - accusing  
to Rachel - bigamy 40 yrs earlier -  
Jackson won 176 to 83 JQA.

Chap 3 Polk defender of Jackson - He was a young idealist

Peggy Eaton scandal - Calhoun and Jackson publicly broke their relationship

The Marshall Highway - Marshall Ky to Lexington, Ky

Multiplication issue with Calhoun and S.C.

Second Bank of U.S. - included Biddle - Jackson would not Polk in chain of ways and means comm. to paper corrupted

The Telegraph switched to The Globe

The Nashville Banner - an instrument of the National Bank of

Jackson beat Clay 57% of popular vote 688,000 to 413,000  
Electoral 219-49

House floor - Polk gives speech indicting Biddle - gets national coverage

1834 4 way race for speaker - including Tenn John Bell

Polk lost his first election for speaker - Polk then won in fall 1835 and again 1837

Van Buren wins in 1834 - picked by Jackson against  
Samuel Webster, William H. Harrison and Ulster

Dec. 7, 1835 Polk becomes speaker - most divided ever  
108 - Democrats 107 Whigs and 24 independents

\* P 57 - embraced the very excesses he once condemned  
Warning ~~not~~ federal money from Biddle's bank to the "pet" bank was slow

Panic of 1837 - Before leaving office Jackson issued  
Specie Circular - an executive order requiring hard currency  
for land sales to end inflation.

House defeating Polk supported Treasury Bill - eventually passed in 1838 w/o Polk's support

Disorder in House

\* National Intell ad labeling Polk a coward, a puppy,  
Albin and a scoundrel generally  
Sam Houston street fight w. O'Hara, William Staub,  
P 61 Henry Wise - verbal attack on Polk p 62 +

Polk returns to Tenn - run for Governor - takes back  
state for Jacksonians 1839

Polk beat Gov. Cannon 54,012 to 51,396

Things don't go well in state for Polk  
Next election 1842 Sean Jimmy Jones beat

Polk by 3,243 votes out 102,000 cast Jones  
was 30 yrs old.

Couldn't get enough votes for Quann to vote on Tenn.  
two Senators

Polk lost bid to replace Richard Johnson as V.P. on B. Van B. ticket  
in 1840

Polk loses again Jimmy Jones by 3833 out 110,500

Texas

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California

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Oregon

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Mexican War

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1836 Martin Van Buren

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1840 William Henry Harrison  
John Tyler

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1844 James Polk

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1848 Zachary Taylor  
Millard Fillmore

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1852 Franklin Pierce

Polk b Nov 2, 1795  
grad U. of N.C. 1818  
Tenn. State Leg. 23 to 25  
U.S. House 25 to 39 (4 yrs. as speaker)  
Gov of TN 39 to 41  
44' - first dark horse candidate



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Marney - to the victors belongs the spoils.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Seigenthaler is the founder of the First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University. An administrative assistant to Robert F. Kennedy, he was an award-winning journalist for The Nashville Tennessean for forty-three years, finally serving as the paper's editor, publisher, and CEO, and was named founding editorial director of USA Today in 1982. He lives in Nashville, Tennessee

Chap<sup>t</sup> War April 1846 - dragged on for 2 years  
lack of confidence in Winfield Scott and Zachary Taylor  
they were whipsplanned terms for office.  
called them names in his diary p133

June 15 Sent Gen Taylor to Corpus - if Mexican  
crossed Rio Grande commenced hostilities

Dec 29, 1845 Texas becomes 28th state

Taylor called Old Buff and Ready - Maj. Gen  
Vertenris for Taylor - Polk elevated him to Maj. Gen

Puena Vista - stunning victory

Polk locked Taylor - said he disobeyed orders to  
remain in Monterey

Polk was a micromanager - said neither  
Taylor or Scott were worthy of command

Scott ordered to Mexico - wouldn't go - Polk removed him  
from command

30,000 troops to attack Vera Cruz - Scott leads attack to Mex. City

V.S. moved on California - Navy in Monterey and S.F.

Colonel John C. Fremont - son-in-law Maria Hart Benton

Gen. Stockton gave Fremont title of Gov. of Calif.

Fremont challenged Col. Mason to a duel

Polk upheld removal charge of subordination - Fort Benton  
Fremont - one of the first Senators as a friend



Dem's lose House in midst of War  
Abel L. criticized war - Whigs Critical - Scott and Taylor  
public disenchantment with casualties/cost.

13,000 died - 1700 from wounds other disease

JQA opposed war. died Feb 23, 1848

Quoted R.F.K. in Indonesia 1962 - brought criticism from LBS

Declaration of War House 174-14 Senate 40 to 2

House condemned it 82 to 81 - after war started

Abel L. on war p 146

Virtual Proviso - no slaves in Mexican territory

Calhoun prop. vint to Polk who opposed arbitrary extension  
of slave to Mex. territory and Calif. His stance with Calhoun  
Does him credit. p 149

He would have spoken out with no risk but didn't

Sarah lived 42 yrs after his death at which time ~~the~~ his  
slave would have been freed. 13th Amendment came first.

44' Elections  
Clay lost it instead  
of Polk winning  
Clay's position on Texas  
went him in hands  
2 1/2 million men cast votes  
won by 38,000 - 1.4%  
15 states to 11 for Clay  
170 to 105 Electoral  
lost Penn.

Chap 4 May 1842 - Van B. meets in Ky with Clay for a week

Both oppose annexation of Texas. Therefore -

Polk's launching is launched  
Van B. also visited Jackson and Polk in Tenn.  
Van B. wanted the Pres. again - he won in '36 lost in '40  
Panic ship explosion - Sec. State and Navy looked  
Tyler wanted to appoint Polk to Navy - he declined -  
Tyler called for annexation of Texas on 27th. Polk  
Polk was favored. April 27, 1844. p 16

1844 - Baltimore - Whig choice - Clay  
Dem/Rep - Tyler  
Dem. - Polk  
① promise of internal improvements  
② protection tariffs  
③ return of single banks

8th First Dark  
Ballot Horse

Sam Polk gave his son a slave boy Elias as a wedding present.  
Hot issue of '44' Texas  
Slavery  
Tariffs  
Jackson urges Tyler  
to get out - he does

Young Hickory

One term president - a promise  
changes - Polk's grand father E. Mehill supported twice in war  
John C. Calhoun - branded initial in '40 slave

Chap 5 -

Van Buren told Polk not to name William Henry  
to Sec. of State - he did it anyway

Bad feelings persisted

Buchanan, Sec. of State - Aaron Brown great rumor  
that William Rufus King and Buchanan were lovers - called  
him Aunt Nancy

Went to Jackson for advice on Cabinet - didn't  
follow everything - Francis Blair editor of Globe -  
would protect Admin in return get printing contracts

Tariff bill passed 28-27 with Geo. Dallas breaking tie  
Lobbyists upset Polk - threatened to write a book  
Sarcas - drank and vit - only wine - Twice a week opened  
down of W. H. to visitors. Encourage going to church

Henry Clay came calling p 118

Polk's diary - after 5 months - a brooding and humless  
Constitutional Treasury was passed April 2, 1846  
Senate June 8 28 to 25

Polk and Buchanan disagreed over Oregon  
Polk wanted 54th parallel Manifest Destiny  
Buchanan and Polk constantly fought over this  
S. Court appointment