Three Unknown Presidents Alternate

* 1. The 8th President of the USA was Martin Van Buren. He had been a close friend of Andrew Jackson’s. He was also the first President to be born after the Revolutionary War. He had been born and raised in Kinderhook New York, a community dominated by Dutch settlers from the Netherlands. As such, he had been raised speaking Dutch first.
  2. When he was growing up, Van Buren studied to be a lawyer. He became active in politics as a young man. He started out by joining Jefferson’s Democrat-Republican Party. In his first few elections, he promised supporters jobs if they voted for him and he got elected. This was normal back then. As a result of making bargains like those, he became famous and powerful. In 1821 he was elected a Senator for New York State. By 1824, the old Democrat-Republican Party was breaking apart, and the old Federalist Party was dead. Two new parties would form to take their place. Conservative business interests and the remains of the old Federalist Party came together to become the Whig Party. The Whigs supported industrialization, development of infrastructure like roads and canals, and powerful banks. They thought the future of the country should involve manufacturing, shipping, and corporations. They thought the federal government should help support those industries and businesses.
  3. The other major faction to emerge was the Democrats. Van Buren joined to become one of the first Democrats. Democrats believed the future of America should be like its past, with people earning money through farming. They believed in an ideal of “gentlemen Farmers” leading the nation. Because they supported farming, they pushed to expand the US south and westwards to provide the necessary living space. They also believed slavery was a necessary evil to make those farms profitable. They were suspicious of banks, government spending, and industry. Before he was elected as President, Van Buren was Jackson's Secretary of State. He helped President Jackson destroy the Second National Bank. He also remained loyal to Jackson during the Eaton Affair. As a reward, Jackson made Van Buren the Vice-President when Jackson ran for and was elected to a second term. He supported the central government during the Nullification Crisis, and was basically hand-picked to succeed Jackson as President.
  4. Unfortunately for Martin Van Buren, he became President of a country with a lot of problems. In his first few months, the Panic of 1837 struck. This was an economic depression that he had helped cause. After destroying the Second National Bank, he and Jackson had insisted everyone pay the government only in gold and silver. When there wasn’t enough gold or silver to do this, the economy crashed. He also ordered the Cherokee off their lands. The resulting Trail of Tears happened on Van Buren’s watch, even though the process had begun under Jackson. But his biggest problem was slavery. Northern and Southern States were fighting furiously over the future of the country.
  5. At the end of the dramatic Nullification Crisis, Andrew Jackson had said that the crisis was not really over. He said that it wasn’t really an argument about taxes. In Jackson’s opinion, the Nullification Crisis had been a conflict about control and authority. He thought that some states were afraid of getting told what to do if they were outnumbered in Congress. He said that the next issue to cause a similar crisis was already known: slavery. Van Buren must have agreed, because he did his best to avoid any arguments about slavery in 1837.
  6. Earlier, Mexico had ended its war for independence from Spain. After the victory during 1821, the new government that emerged was relatively weak and poor. Land in Mexico was cheap. Because the central Mexican government was weak, settlers on Mexican land were left to create their own militias and defend themselves. Mexico hoped that settlers would drive out the natives and start earning money to build the economy. To encourage settlers from America to come to Mexico, they passed legislation making it cheap and easy to emigrate from the USA into the northern Mexican state of Tejas.
  7. As a result, settlers swarmed south across the border. They were looking for cheap land, economic opportunity, and a better life. Within a few years, legal and illegal immigrants from the United States had swollen from a stable minority to a large majority. Many of the settlers were also bringing slaves with them. By 1830, the Mexican government was worried that Americans were taking over Tejas. They outlawed further Americans from settling in Tejas, increased taxes, and threatened to free slaves using military force. This irritated and angered the American settlers. Many began to demand that Tejas get split into two smaller states. They thought that one of the new states should be mainly populated with Americans. They wanted their own local government, and more self-rule. For years, the settlers argued with the Mexican government. Ultimately, no compromise was reached, and the American faction began preparing to declare their independence. By 1835 the ongoing disagreement became violent. The Mexican Army arrived in the area now called Texas to retrieve a cannon that had been loaned to a "Texian" militia. The war would last a little over six months. The most famous battle of the war was near the town of San Antonio. A small force of Americans was cornered at a mission by the name of the Alamo. The American force was wiped out, leading to the Texans to use the battle cry, “Remember the Alamo!” A few months later, the Texans forced a Mexican Army to surrender at the Battle of San Jacinto.
  8. In 1836, the Treaty of Velasco was signed. Texas formally gained its independence and became a republic. The Mexican government would try to ignore the treaty, but it was too late. In 1837, the Republic of Texas applied to the United States to be annexed. This meant that they wanted the USA to officially take Texas into the Union as a territory.
  9. Van Buren's main problem was this: Texas was still claimed as land by Mexico, and Texas allowed slavery. If he annexed Texas and it became US territory, then he would almost certainly start a war with Mexico. Even worse, if Texas entered as a State, it would give the pro-slave forces in Congress more power. This would destroy the balance of power between pro-slave and anti-slave groups that had been created by the Missouri Compromise. Van Buren was convinced that more fighting about slavery would destroy the USA. Because of this, he refused to annex Texas for fear of starting a new fight. Essentially, he saw his duty to keep things the way they were. He did nothing to either expand or abolish slavery. He hoped that if nothing changed, the Missouri Compromise would keep the peace.
  10. Van Buren ran for reelection in 1840. The Democrat-Republicans and their replacements the Democrats had controlled the Presidency for four decades. In Jackson’s administration, the nullification crisis had turned many southern democrats against the Jacksonians. Those southern Democrats left the Democratic Party and joined the Whig Party. Another Party had formed called the Anti-Mason Party. The Anti-Masons also opposed the Democrats. These political enemies and the bad economy were more than enough to make sure that Martin Van Buren never received a second term.
  11. The man who replaced him ran as a Whig. Like Andrew Jackson, William Henry Harrison was a war hero. He had earned his fame fighting Indians earlier in the century. Famous for winning a victory at Tippecanoe in Indiana, he went on to fight as a general in the War of 1812. Next he entered politics. He became a senator and was later appointed to a variety of government jobs. By the time of the election of 1840, Harrison had been written about in several books. He was largely regarded as a national hero. He ran on the claim that he was a frontiersman who understood the common people. He also promised to restore a national bank. People though a new National Bank would make it easier to get loans and rebuild the economy. Although he was a slave owner himself, Harrison did not publicly support slavery during the campaign. He did not campaign for votes in the majority of the southern states. Instead, he targeted a combination of urban businessmen who wanted a stronger banking system and frontier settlers who recognized him as being like them. (As a wealthy slave-owner background, he wasn’t *really* very similar to the pioneers on the frontier.) His running mate for Vice President was John Tyler. Tyler was a firm supporter of slavery and states' rights who hated the federal government. He was supposed to appeal to slave owners, Democrats and southerners. (It also allowed Harrison to adopt the alliterative and rhyming campaign slogan "Tippecanoe and Tyler too!")
  12. Unfortunately, Harrison would not be President long enough to accomplish any of his goals. He caught a severe cold after less than a month in office, and died after being sick nine days, leaving him with an ineffective total of 32 days as president before he expired. John Tyler suddenly became the nation's 10th president. The problem was that John Tyler believed in totally different things than Harrison had. As president, he would not do what the voters had desired.
  13. At the time, the rules governing a Vice President succeeding a dead President were unclear. Congress began arguing over whether Tyler should be the next President or not. The debate threatened to erupt into a full crisis. Tyler won by simply moving into the White House and taking the oath of office. Whether this was how things were supposed to go became irrelevant. In the remaining years of his Presidency, Tyler would block the agenda of his own Whig party. He prevented a National Bank from being formed, and usually sided with the pro-slave Democrats. As an insult to how he became President, the Whigs nicknamed him "His Accidency” and threw him out of the Whig Party. Overall, his term's accomplishments were limited. He signed some noteworthy treaties with Britain and China. He also made an aggressive push to get Texas annexed. He did succeed in getting Congress to annex Texas and bring it into the USA, but this wouldn’t actually happen until he was replaced by the next President. This would be the most effective president of his era: James Polk.

1. Describe Martin Van Buren's personal and political background.

2. Explain the history of how Texas became an independent Republic settled by Americans.

3. Explain why Van Buren did not want to admit Texas as a state.

4. Briefly describe who President Harrison was.

5. Explain how John Tyler became president, and why.