

presidents of the *United States of America*

"I was the 11th President and I expanded America all the way to the Pacific Ocean."



James Polk



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Become a Presidential Historian by Solving This Puzzle

In this book, you'll learn all sorts of facts about James Polk's amazing life and accomplishments. But there's still one last thing we need to know about him.

When Polk was president, a young congressman attacked him for starting the Mexican-American War. That congressman would one day become president, and we need to find out just who he was. You can help us uncover the answer! Hidden in the text are bolded letters. Read this book carefully to find them and fill the letters into the blanks below in the order they appear.



Once you've solved this puzzle, you'll be a
true PragerU Kids presidential historian!

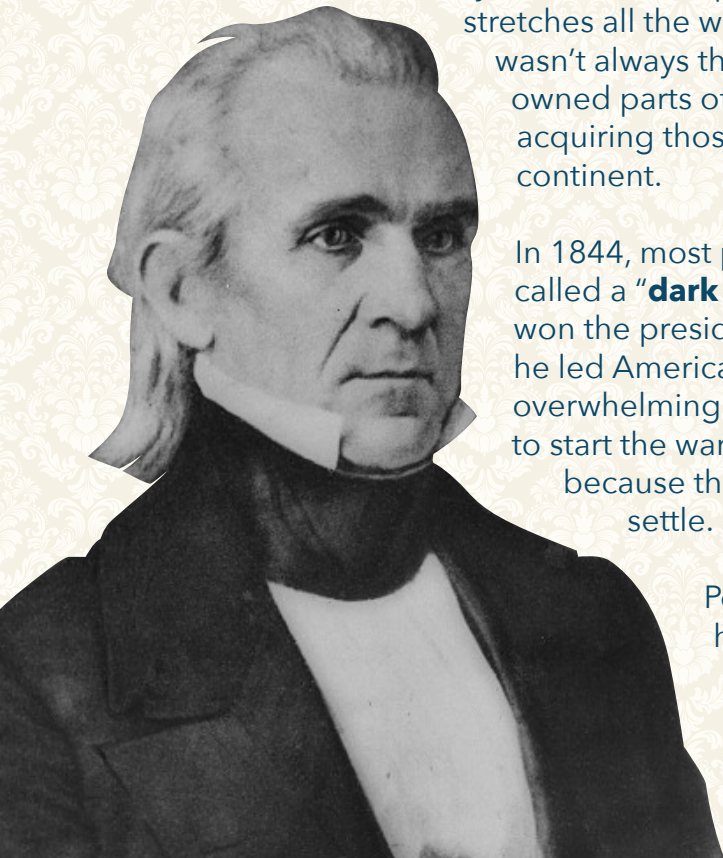
Meet James K. Polk

Did you know that **A**rizona, California, Nevada, and Utah are American states because of President James Knox Polk?

When you look at a map of the United States, you'll see that the country stretches all the way from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. This wasn't always the case—there was a time when other countries owned parts of what today is the USA. Polk played a big role in acquiring those territories and expanding America across the continent.

In 1844, most people in America didn't know who Polk was. He was called a "**d**ark **h**orse" candidate and surprised everyone when he won the presidency that year. They were even more surprised when he led America into a war against its neighbor, Mexico, and won an overwhelming victory. Although some people felt Polk was wrong to start the war, most Americans were happy with the outcome because their country had more land for them to explore and settle.

Polk was a very hardworking president. Even though he isn't as famous as other presidents, he is considered by many to be one of the most important. Few presidents have done more to transform America into a major world power than James Polk.





Young James

James Polk was born on November 2, 1795 in Pineville, North Carolina. He came from a **b**ig family. He was the oldest of ten children. His father Samuel was a hardworking farmer from North Carolina. His mother, Jane, raised James and his siblings, teaching them the importance of a strong work ethic and discipline. When James was 11, he and his family moved to the new **frontier** state of Tennessee where there was plenty of land to build farms. They travelled almost five hundred miles by wagon to get **there**. The trip was worth it: Samuel became a successful farmer and eventually owned thousands of acres of land and many slaves. He also got involved in local politics. While eating dinner, young James often heard his father discuss the major issues of the day with guests.

Unfortunately, **J**ames spent much of his childhood sick in bed, which made it difficult for him to attend school. He once had very painful surgery to remove gallstones from his body. Fortunately, he recovered. His mother taught him at home and also hired several tutors for him. James overcame his illnesses and did well in **h**is studies, especially in reading, writing, and math.



Interesting Facts

- He was a member of the Democratic Party.
- He and his wife Sarah never had any children.
- He is considered the first “dark horse” candidate to win the presidency.
- He is the first president to be elected under the age of 50.
- He is the only **Speaker of the House** to serve as President of the United States.
- He and his **cabinet** are depicted in the first photograph ever taken inside the White House.
- He is the first president to serve a full term and refuse to run for reelection.
- He is the first president to die under the age of 60. This made him the first president to die before one of his parents died.
- He only lived three months after leaving the White House, which is the shortest retirement for any president.
- His wife Sarah was widowed for 42 years, the longest of any first lady.

Rise to the Presidency

When Polk was 20 years-old, he enrolled in the University of North Carolina. He was one of the top students in his class and learned how to speak well in front of other people. Out of his entire class, he was chosen to give the **commencement** speech at his graduation in 1818.

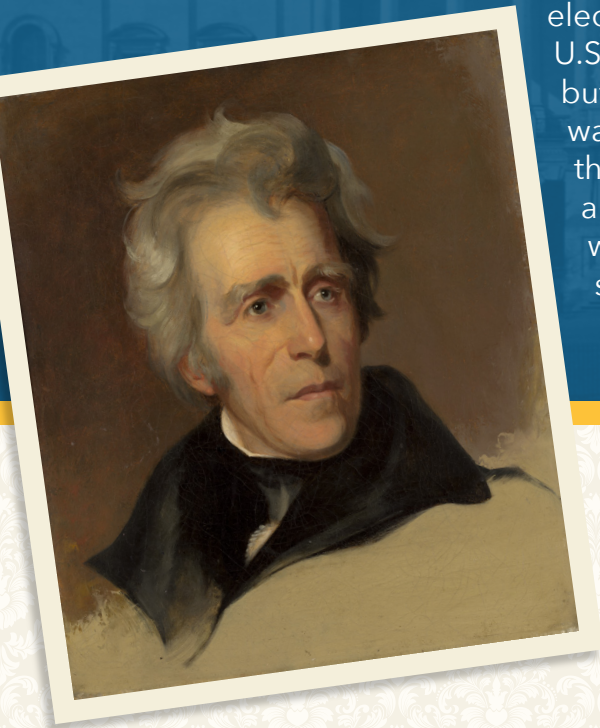
After graduating with honors, Polk became a lawyer, but he was mainly interested in politics.

In 1824, he was elected to the U.S. Congress, but politics wasn't the only thing he cared about. He also wanted to settle down,

so that same year, he married a beautiful and intelligent woman named Sarah Childress.

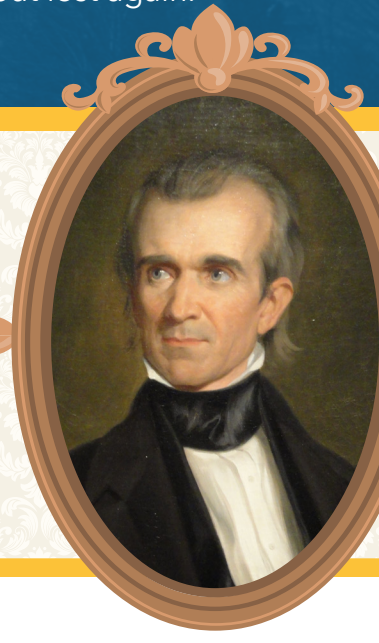
One of Polk's close family friends was a man named Andrew Jackson, who was a military hero from the War of 1812 and a politician. In 1828, Jackson was elected president. Polk strongly supported President Jackson and the new **Democratic Party** he had formed. During Jackson's presidency, Polk rose to become the Speaker of the House of Representatives, which meant he was the highest-ranking congressman in the country.

When Andrew Jackson left the White House in 1837, Polk's career continued to rise. He ran for governor of Tennessee in 1839 and won, but lost his re-election race in 1841. He tried to return as governor in 1843, but lost again.



Speaker of the House

Prior to becoming president, James K. Polk was elected Speaker of the House of Representatives. The Speaker is chosen by the members of Congress and must have the support of a majority of the members voting. The Speaker plays a major role in what legislation is voted on in Congress. For most of American history, it has been in the line of succession to the presidency. As of 2021, the Speaker of the House becomes the President of the United States if the president and the vice president are unable to discharge their duties.



Quote

"I love you Sarah. For all eternity, I love you."
- last words, spoken to his wife,
June 15, 1849.

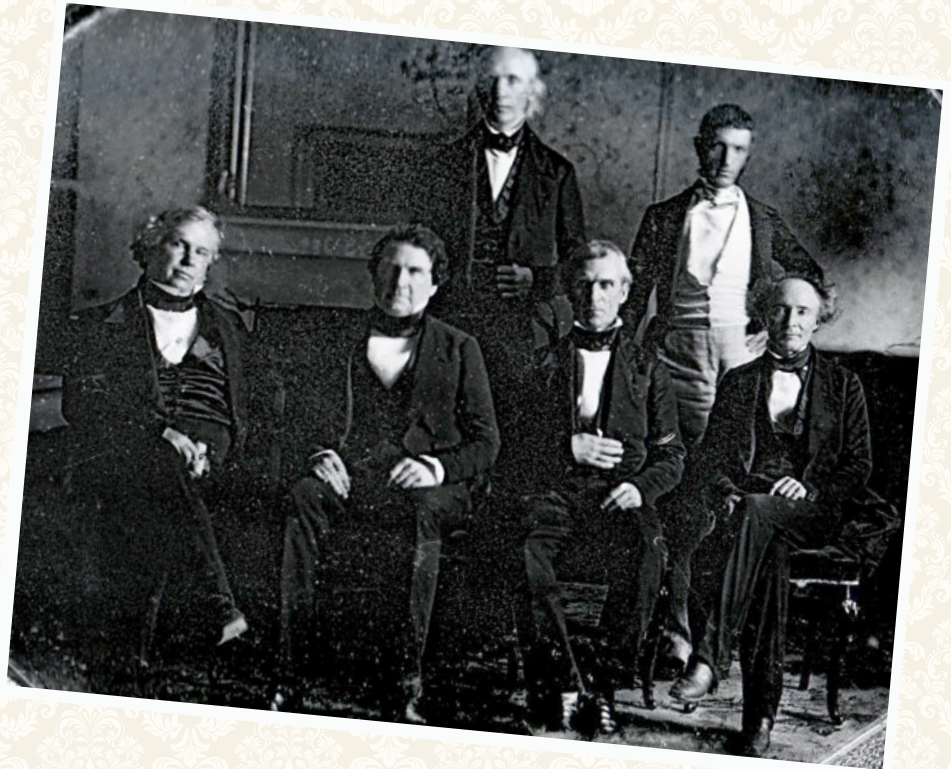
Quote

"Ours was intended to be a plain and frugal government."

- inaugural address, March 4, 1845.

Dark Horse Candidate

After losing twice, Polk was depressed. His career seemed to be over, but he still had an ambition to return to office. As the 1844 presidential election approached, Andrew Jackson felt Polk was the best candidate. The Democrats chose Polk as their presidential **nominee**. He defeated the **Whig Party's** candidate Henry Clay that fall and became President of the United States.



President

Once he moved into the White House in March 1845, President Polk got right to work. Every day, he worked **long** hours into the night.

The previous president, John Tyler, tried to get Texas to join America as a new state. Texas used to be under Mexico but it declared independence in the 1830s because Mexico's government was **corrupt** and it didn't respect the rights of its **citizens**. After Texas won independence, President Tyler tried to convince it to join the United States. Polk made sure to continue this effort, and Texas entered the Union by December 1845. Americans were happy that Texas was now part of their country, but Mexico was upset because it wanted the state back.

Americans wanted more land and weren't happy that much of the western part of North America was still owned by Mexico. They also wanted this land to settle and live on. Tensions between the two countries increased and war broke out in April 1846.

Under Polk's leadership, the U.S. military defeated Mexico and even took over its capital, Mexico City. Polk had to **overcome** many challenges: he didn't get along well with his top generals Winfield Scott and Zachary Taylor.

Still, when the war ended in February 1848, America had won an impressive victory. The United States had acquired half a million square miles of land, which today includes all of Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah and parts of Colorado, New Mexico and Wyoming.

Back in 1844, Polk had promised he would only serve one term. He was true to his word and didn't run for re-election in 1848. That year, one of his generals, Zachary Taylor, was elected to **replace** him as president. He and Sarah left the White House in March of 1849 and moved back to Tennessee.

Quote

"With me it is emphatically true that the presidency is 'no bed of roses.'"
- diary entry,
September 4, 1847.



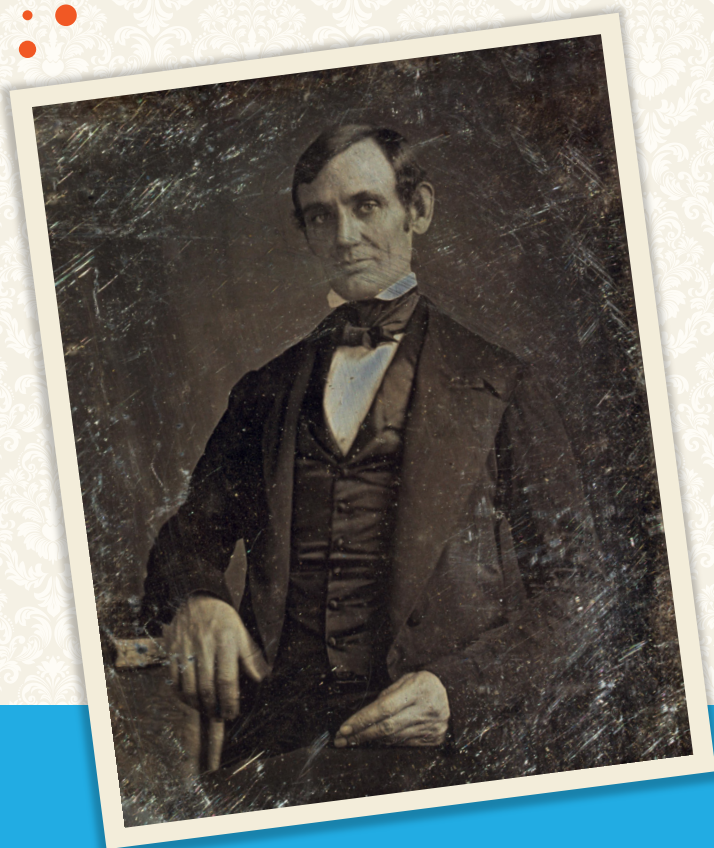
Mexican-American War

Many of the young soldiers that fought in the Mexican-American War would later become the most important generals of the American Civil War. This included Winfield Scott Hancock, Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, Joseph E. Johnston, George McClellan, George Meade, George Pickett, and most famously, Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee. Many of them became close friends, learned about each others' strengths and weaknesses, and gained valuable combat experience. Sadly, they would find themselves fighting on opposite sides when the Civil War broke out.



Retirement

Former President Polk was exhausted after finishing his term. Although he was one of the youngest presidents to enter office at age 49, by now he was 53 years old and in poor health. He contracted cholera and died on June 15, 1849 at his home in Nashville, Tennessee.



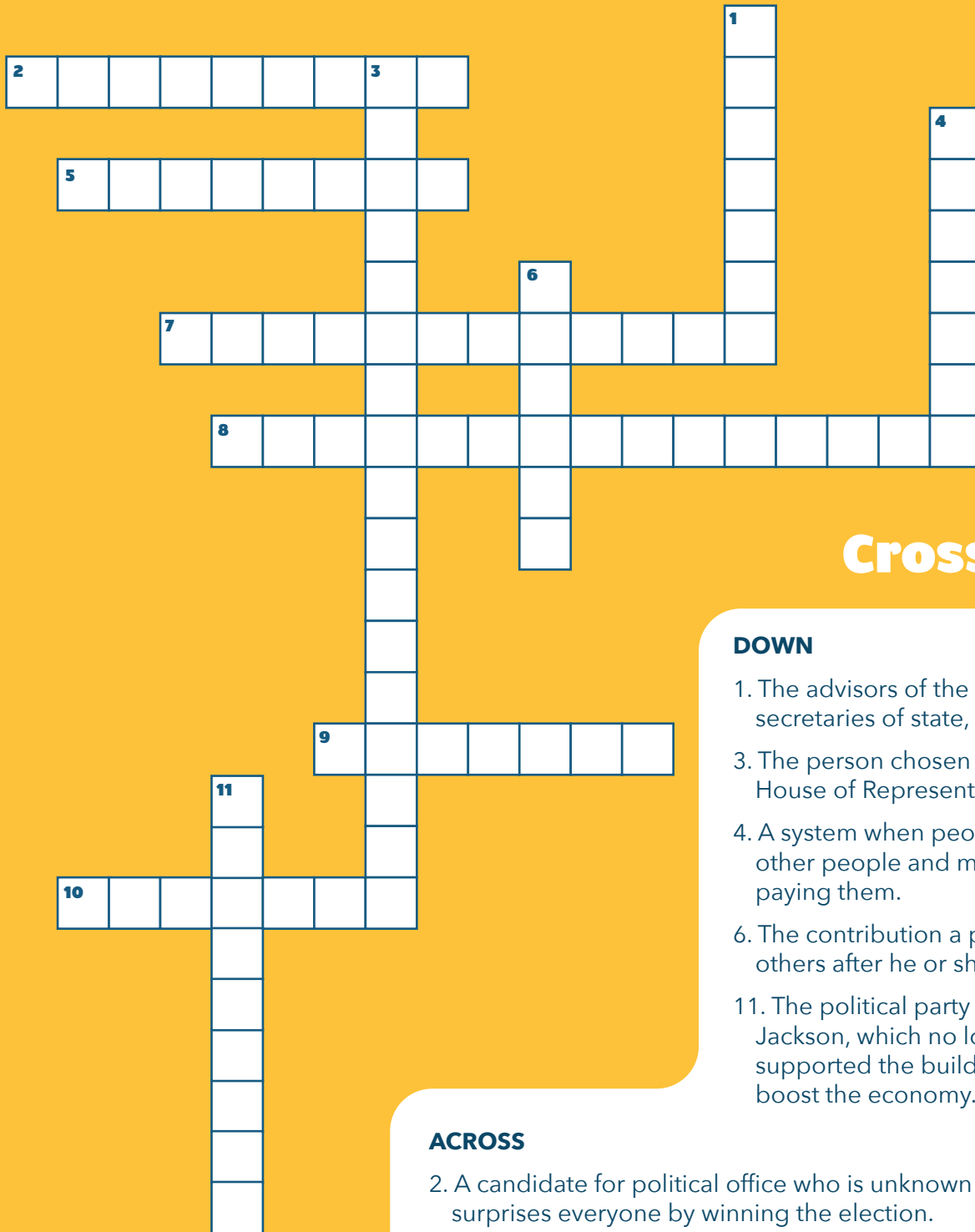
Legacy

James Polk left a very important **legacy** for his country. By expanding America's size, he helped it become a major power in the world. This opened up new territories to Americans, allowing millions of people to prosper, and strengthened the country, but also introduced new problems. At the time, **slavery** existed in the southern United States and some wanted the new territories to have slaves, while others disagreed. For the next twelve years after Polk's death, Americans would argue about this issue, but couldn't come to an agreement. The problem of slavery would only be settled by the Civil War under the 16th president, Abraham Lincoln.

Word Scramble

ADKR Osher
BICNAET
ROTEIRFR
MOENTCEMCE
CADREMTIO
EMONIEN
GHIW
CYGALE

ANSWERS ON PG 10



Crossword

DOWN

1. The advisors of the president, including the secretaries of state, treasury, etc.
3. The person chosen by members of the U.S. House of Representatives to be its leader.
4. A system when people are allowed to own other people and make them work without paying them.
6. The contribution a person leaves behind for others after he or she leaves office or dies.
11. The political party that opposed Andrew Jackson, which no longer exists today. It supported the building of roads and canals to boost the economy.

ACROSS

2. A candidate for political office who is unknown to most people, but surprises everyone by winning the election.
5. An area of land that hasn't been settled.
7. A ceremony where students graduate from school and are awarded degrees for completing their studies.
8. The political party that supported Andrew Jackson and now supports liberal or progressive policies.
9. Dishonest, seeking selfish gain.
10. A person chosen by a party to be a candidate for specific political office.

Glossary

Dark Horse: A candidate for political office who is unknown to most people, but surprises everyone by winning the election.

Speaker of the House: The person chosen by members of the U.S. House of Representatives to be its leader.

Cabinet: The advisors of the president, including the secretaries of state, treasury, etc.

Frontier: An area of land that hasn't been settled.

Commencement: A ceremony where students graduate from school and are awarded degrees for completing their studies.

Democratic Party: The political party that supported Andrew Jackson and now supports liberal or progressive policies.

Nominee: A person chosen by a party to be a candidate for specific political office.

Whig Party: The political party that opposed Andrew Jackson, which no longer exists today. It supported the building of roads and canals to boost the economy.

Corrupt: Dishonest, seeking selfish gain.

Legacy: The contribution a person leaves behind for others after he or she leaves office or dies.

Slavery: A system when people are allowed to own other people and make them work without paying them.

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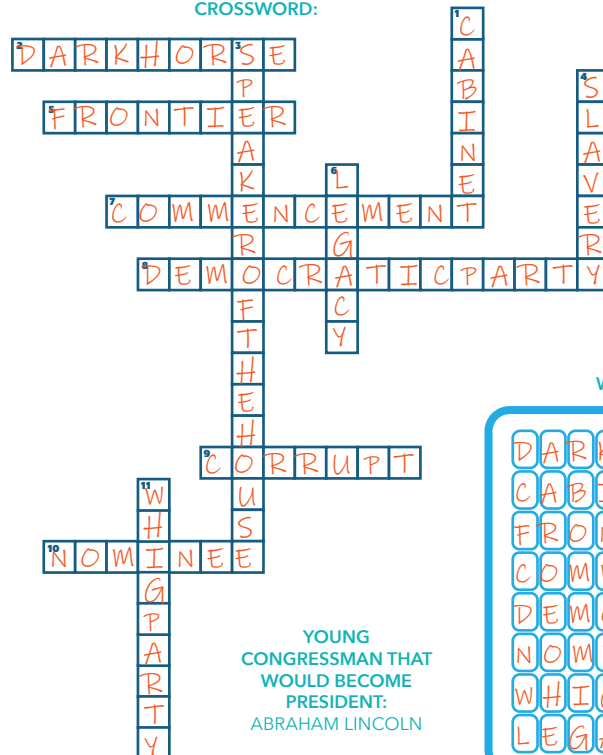
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Answers

CROSSWORD:



WORD SCRAMBLE:

DARK HORSE
CABINET
FRONTIER
COMMENCEMENT
DEMOCRATIC
NOMINEE
WHIG
LEGACY

YOUNG
CONGRESSMAN THAT
WOULD BECOME
PRESIDENT:
ABRAHAM LINCOLN

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