

# The Worst President: The Story of James Buchanan

James Buchanan, the 15th President of the United States, is often regarded as one of the worst presidents in American history. His presidency, which spanned from 1857 to 1861, was marked by a series of failures and poor decision-making, ultimately contributing to the nation's descent into the American Civil War. This article delves into the life and presidency of James Buchanan, exploring the reasons behind his controversial reputation.

## The Early Life and Career of James Buchanan

Born in 1791 in Pennsylvania, James Buchanan came from a prosperous family. He received a quality education, attending Dickinson College and later studying law. Buchanan embarked on a successful legal career, serving in various positions in Pennsylvania and eventually being elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1820.

His political skills and loyalty to the Democratic Party led to a rapid rise in his career. Buchanan held various diplomatic roles, including Minister to Russia and Secretary of State under President James K. Polk. These experiences propelled him to the forefront of American politics, positioning him as a strong candidate for the presidency.

## The Worst President--The Story of James

**Buchanan** by Garry Boulard(Kindle Edition)

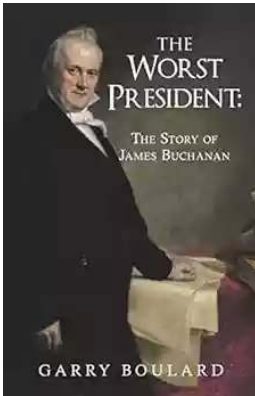
★★★★☆ 4.1 out of 5

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Enhanced typesetting : Enabled  
Word Wise : Enabled  
Print length : 237 pages



## **The Presidency of James Buchanan**

On March 4, 1857, James Buchanan was inaugurated as the 15th President of the United States. However, his presidency would soon be marred by a series of pivotal events that tested his leadership abilities.

### **The Crisis of Sectionalism**

One of the key issues Buchanan faced during his presidency was the growing sectionalism between the North and the South. The debate over slavery had reached a boiling point, and tensions were running high. Rather than taking decisive action to address this divide, Buchanan pursued a policy of appeasement that only served to exacerbate the situation.

His handling of the Dred Scott case further intensified the sectionalism. The Supreme Court's ruling in the case denied the rights of enslaved people, effectively making slavery constitutional. Buchanan, a staunch supporter of states' rights, endorsed this decision, further alienating the northern states.

### **The Panic of 1857**

In addition to the growing sectionalism, Buchanan also faced economic challenges during his presidency. Just a few months into his term, the country experienced a severe financial crisis known as the Panic of 1857. The panic caused widespread unemployment and economic downturn, further fueling the unrest and dissatisfaction among the American people.

## **The Kansas-Nebraska Act**

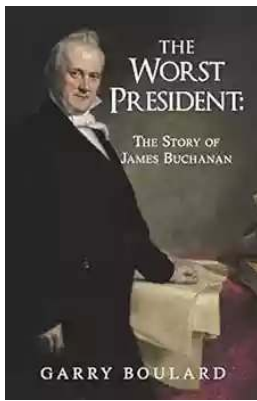
Another controversial decision that defined Buchanan's presidency was his support for the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. This act repealed the Missouri Compromise and allowed for popular sovereignty in determining the slave status of newly admitted states. The resulting violence in Kansas, known as "Bleeding Kansas," deepened the divide between the North and the South.

## **Legacy and Historical Assessment**

James Buchanan's presidency is often criticized for his failure to address the critical issues of his time adequately. His inaction and poor decision-making contributed to the nation's descent into the American Civil War, often regarded as one of the darkest chapters in American history.

Historical assessments of Buchanan's presidency vary, with some arguing that he was a victim of unfortunate circumstances beyond his control, while others view him as someone ill-suited and ill-equipped to lead during such a tumultuous time.

Regardless, James Buchanan's legacy serves as a reminder of the importance of strong leadership in times of crisis. His presidency teaches us the consequences of indecisiveness and ineffective governance, leaving a lasting impact on the annals of American history.



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Just 24 hours after former President James Buchanan died on June 1, 1868, the Chicago Tribune rejoiced: “This desolate old man has gone to his grave. No son or daughter is doomed to acknowledge an ancestry from him.”

Nearly a century and a half later, in 2004, writer Christopher Buckley observed “It is probably just as well that James Buchanan was our only bachelor president. There are no descendants bracing every morning on opening the paper to find another heading announcing: ‘Buchanan Once Again Rated Worst President in History.’”

How to explain such remarkably consistent historical views of the man who turned over a divided and demoralized country to Abraham Lincoln, the same man regarded through the decades by presidential scholars as the worst president in U.S. history?

In this exploration of the presidency of James Buchanan, 1857-61, Garry Boulard revisits the 15th President and comes away with a stunning : Buchanan’s performance as the nation’s chief executive was even more deplorable and

sordid than scholars generally know, making his status as the country's worst president richly deserved.

Boulard documents Buchanan's failure to stand up to the slaveholding interests of the South, his indecisiveness in dealing with the secession movement, and his inability to provide leadership during the nation's gravest constitutional crisis.

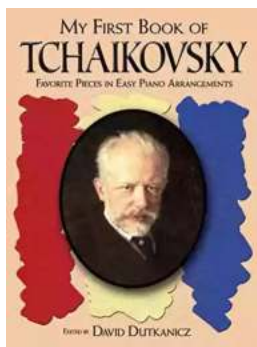
Using the letters of Buchanan, as well as those of more than two dozen political leaders and thinkers of the time, Boulard presents a narrative of a timid and vacillating president whose drift and isolation opened the door to the Civil War.

The author of *The Expatriation of Franklin Pierce: The Story of a President and the Civil War* (iUniverse, 2006), Boulard has reported for the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* and is a business writer for the Albuquerque-based *Construction Reporter*.



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