



James Buchanan and the Coming of the Civil War

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"Provides scholars with a fresh and thoughtful examination of the first administration that had to deal with Southern secession."--Jonathan M. Atkins, author of *Politics, Parties, and the Sectional Conflict in Tennessee, 1832-1861*

As James Buchanan took office in 1857, the United States found itself at a crossroads. Dissolution of the Union had been averted and the Democratic Party maintained control of the federal government, but the nation watched to see if Pennsylvania's first president could make good on his promise to calm sectional tensions.

Despite Buchanan's central role in a crucial hour in U.S. history, few presidents have been more ignored by historians. In assembling the essays for this volume, Michael Birkner and John Quist have asked leading scholars to reconsider whether Buchanan's failures stemmed from his own mistakes or from circumstances that no president could have overcome.

Buchanan's dealings with Utah shed light on his handling of the secession crisis. His approach to Dred Scott reinforces the image of a president whose doughface views were less a matter of hypocrisy than a thorough identification with southern interests. Essays on the secession crisis provide fodder for debate about the strengths and limitations of presidential authority in an existential moment for the young nation.

Although the essays in this collection offer widely differing interpretations of Buchanan's presidency, they all grapple honestly with the complexities of the issues faced by the man who sat in the White House prior to the towering figure of Lincoln, and contribute to a deeper understanding of a turbulent and formative era.

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