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The Worst President-The Story of James Buchanan

Garry Boulard

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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 conclusion: 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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