

JAMES BUCHANAN

b. April 23, 1791

d. June 1, 1868

U.S. PRESIDENT

“The test of leadership is not to put greatness into humanity, but to elicit it, for the greatness is already there.”

James Buchanan served as the 15th president of the United States.

James Buchanan was the 15th president of the United States, serving from 1857 to 1861. A lawyer and a Democrat, he represented Pennsylvania in the U.S. House of Representatives and later in the Senate. He served as minister to Russia under President Andrew Jackson, secretary of state under President James K. Polk and minister to Great Britain under President Franklin Pierce.

Buchanan was born into a well-to-do family in Cove Gap, Pennsylvania. He graduated from Dickinson College, where he was known as a gifted debater.

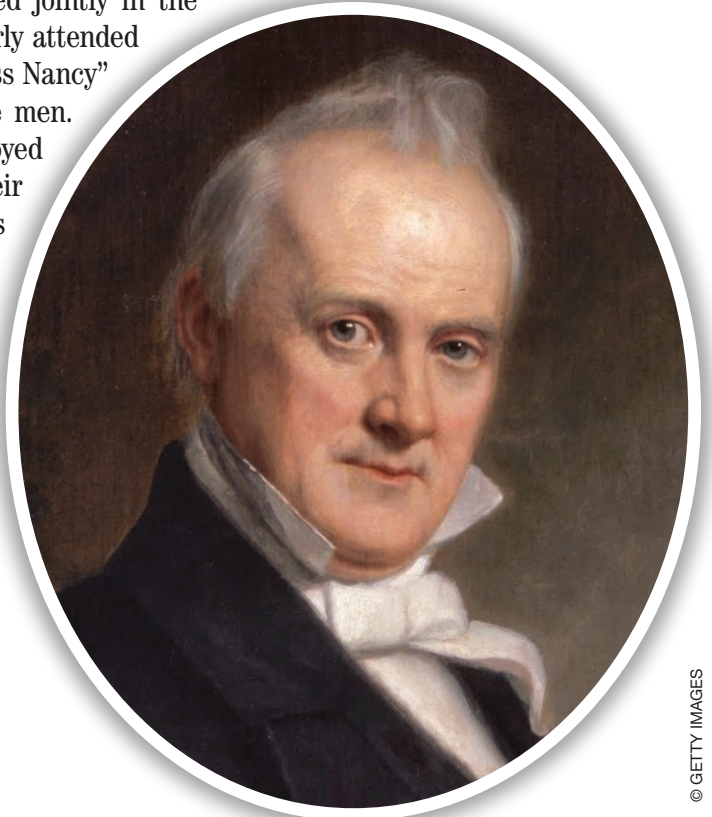
During his presidency, Buchanan led a country sharply divided over the issue of slavery. The Supreme Court issued the controversial Dred Scott decision two days after he took office, asserting that Congress had no constitutional power to ban slavery in the territories. It forced Buchanan to admit Kansas as a slave state, which upset Republicans and alienated some members of his own party.

Abraham Lincoln denounced Buchanan for failing to support the elimination of legal barriers to slavery. Buchanan vetoed both the Morrill Act and the Homestead Act, which Lincoln later signed into law. Near the end of his term, Buchanan declared that Southern states had no legal right to secede, but that the federal government could not actually prevent them from doing so.

Personally opposed to slavery, Buchanan was an ardent Unionist. He undertook numerous efforts to avoid a civil war, which Lincoln as president-elect opposed.

A lifelong bachelor, Buchanan is believed to have had a long-term relationship with William Rufus King, who served as vice president under Franklin Pierce. The two men lived jointly in the same boardinghouse in Washington for a decade and regularly attended functions together. Andrew Jackson referred to them as “Miss Nancy” and “Aunt Fancy,” both popular euphemisms for effeminate men. Biographer Jean Baker believes that King’s nieces destroyed love letters between the men for fear that the nature of their “special friendship” might be revealed. At age 26 Buchanan was engaged briefly to a woman.

A memorial honoring Buchanan was unveiled in 1930 in Washington. It bears the inscription: “The incorruptible statesman whose walk was upon the mountain ranges of the law.” Counties in Iowa, Missouri and Virginia are named after him.



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