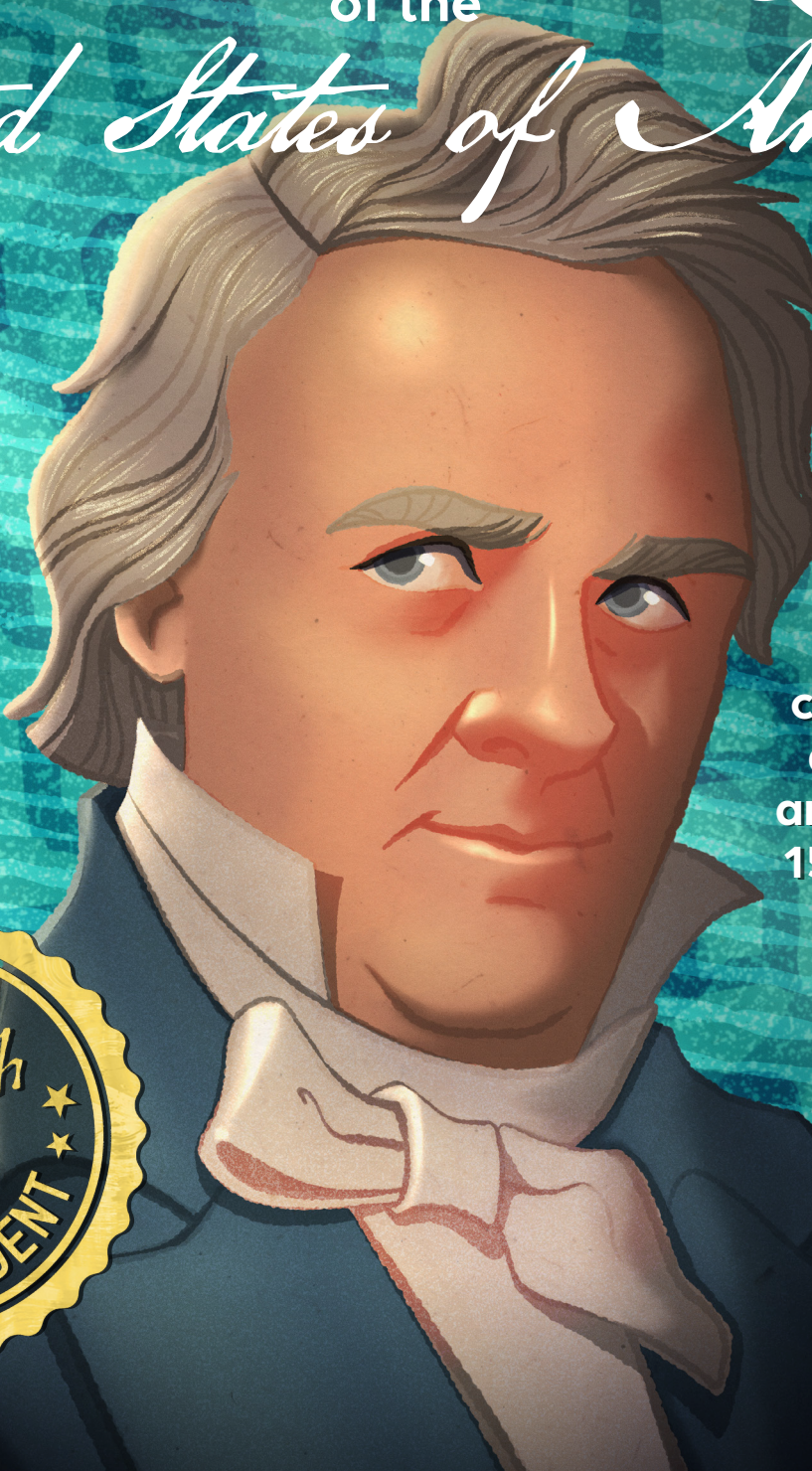


# presidents of the *United States of America*

A stylized illustration of James Buchanan, the 15th President of the United States. He is depicted from the chest up, wearing a dark blue suit jacket, a white shirt, and a white bow tie. He has light brown, wavy hair and a serious expression. The background is a textured, teal-green pattern.

"I had a long career in politics and diplomacy and served as the 15th President of the United States."



**James Buchanan**



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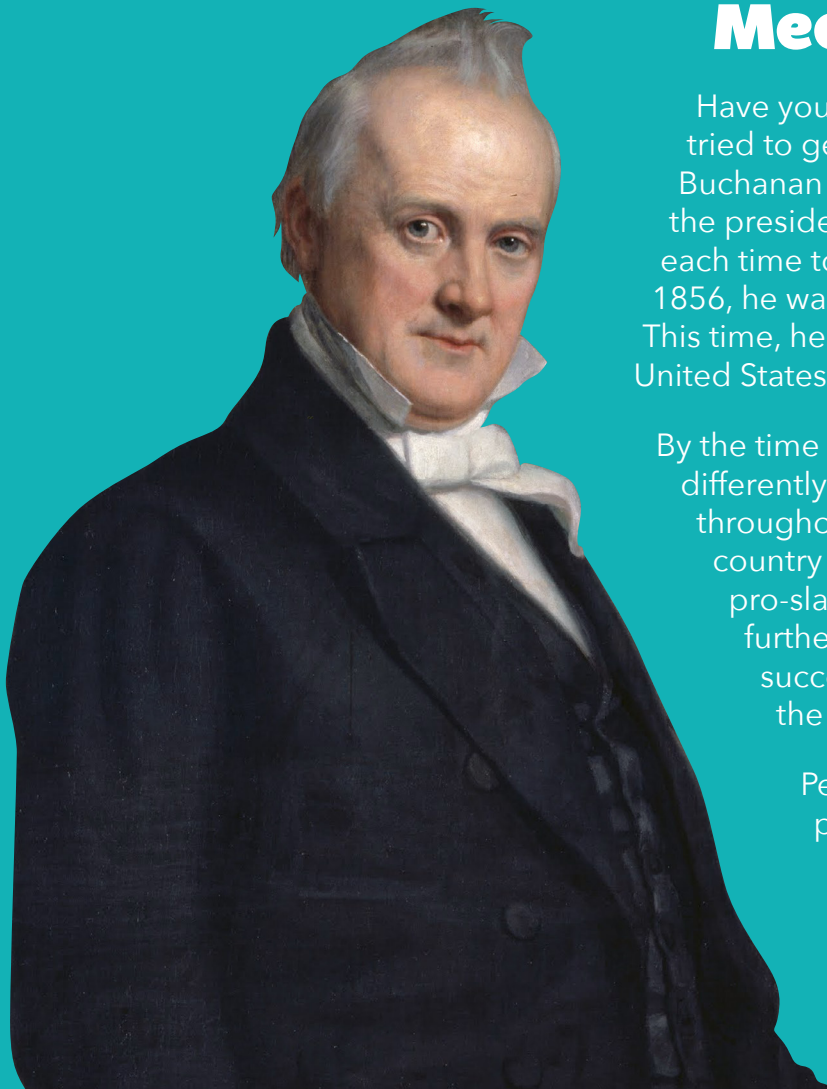
# Become a Presidential Historian by Solving This Puzzle

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

He owned a very patriotic pet, but we need your help to find out what kind of animal it was. Your task is to 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 Buchanan

Have you ever wanted something so badly that you tried to get it over and over again? That's how James Buchanan felt about the presidency. He tried to win the presidency in 1844, 1848, and 1852, but he failed each time to get the Democratic Party's nomination. By 1856, he was 65 years old and he tried one last time. This time, he won and became the 15th President of the United States in 1857.

By the time his term ended in 1861, he felt very differently about the job. He was miserable throughout his presidency. He tried to keep the country united but his support for Southern pro-slavery policies only helped divide the country further. When he handed the office to his successor, Abraham Lincoln, the nation was on the verge of civil war.

Perhaps no American leader could have prevented that conflict from breaking out, but many historians believe James Buchanan's actions only made things worse. He is considered one of America's least successful presidents.

# Young James

James Buchanan was born on April 23, 1791 in Cove Gap, Pennsylvania. He was the second child and eldest son of James Buchanan, Sr. and Elizabeth Speer. James Sr. was an Irish immigrant who worked hard and became a successful merchant.

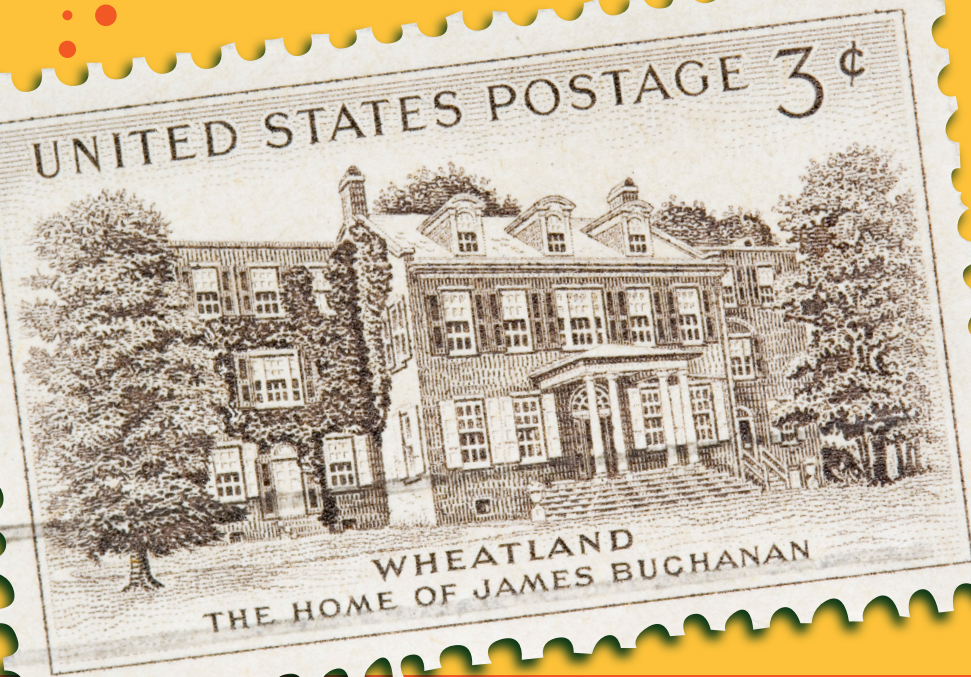
Young James studied at a local school, Old Stone Academy. In 1807, when he was 16, he began attending Dickinson College. James was a bit of a troublemaker and almost got expelled for breaking school rules. Despite this, he was also a strong student and ended up graduating with honors.

# Interesting Facts

- He was the last president born in the 18th century.
- He was a member of the Federalist and Democratic parties.
- He was the first president from Pennsylvania.
- He is the only president (as of 2023) to never marry.
- He was the last Secretary of State (as of 2023) to serve as president.

Memorial to James Buchanan at his birthplace in Cove Gap, PA.





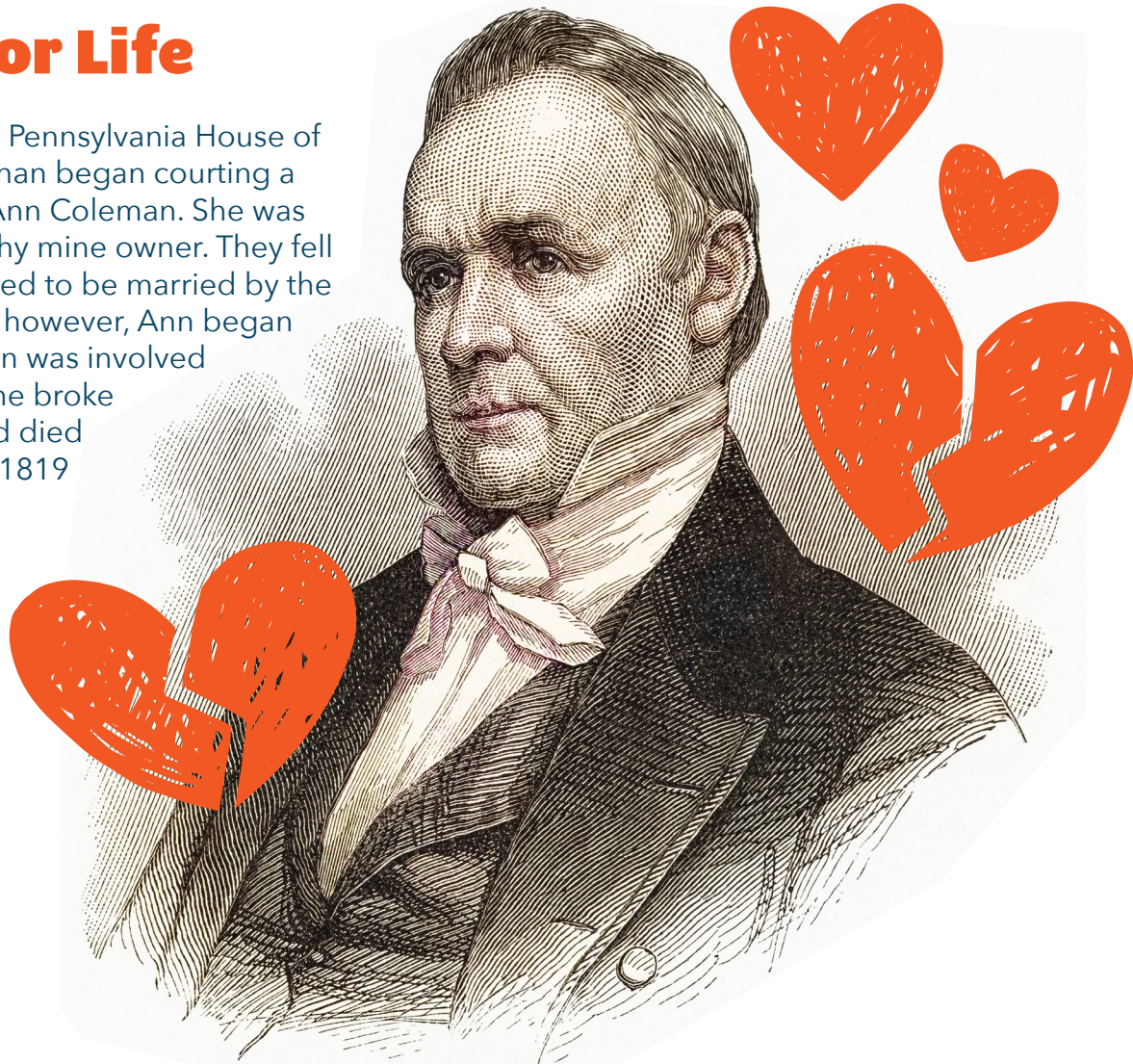
## Early Career

After finishing college, he moved to Lancaster, Pennsylvania. He built a home there, named Wheatland, and owned it for the rest of his life. Buchanan became a successful lawyer, but he was more excited about getting into politics. He was elected to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives in 1814 as a member of the **Federalist Party**.

## Bachelor for Life

During his tenure in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, Buchanan began courting a young woman named Ann Coleman. She was the daughter of a wealthy mine owner. They fell in love and were engaged to be married by the summer of 1819. Soon, however, Ann began to believe that Buchanan was involved with another woman. She broke off the engagement and died suddenly in December 1819 at the **age** of 23.

Buchanan was crushed. He never courted another woman for the rest of his life. He was the only president in American history to remain a lifelong **bachelor**.



# A Loyal Jacksonian

In 1820, Buchanan was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, where he would serve until 1831. He eventually rose to become the chairman of the powerful **House Judiciary Committee**.

By this time, Buchanan's party, the Federalists, had collapsed. He joined a new party, the Democratic Party, which was led by the popular war hero from the War of 1812, Andrew Jackson. Buchanan strongly supported the Jacksonian principles of limited government and **states' rights**. He also believed in **strict constructionism** when it came to interpreting the Constitution.



Andrew Jackson, leader of the Democratic Party

## Rise to Power

President Jackson rewarded Buchanan for his loyalty by appointing him in 1832 as the U.S. Minister to Russia. Buchanan traveled to the icy country and was an effective diplomat. He even helped negotiate a trade agreement with the Russian government.

In 1834, Buchanan was chosen as a U.S. senator from Pennsylvania, where he served until 1845. Since he had plenty of diplomatic experience, Buchanan became the chairman of the **Senate Foreign Relations Committee**.

During this time, slavery became a major issue that threatened to divide the country. Many Southerners wanted to spread it across the country, while many Northerners wanted to keep it from spreading. Although Buchanan was a Northerner and believed slavery was wrong, he supported the Southerners in their **g**oal to keep

their enslaved servants. Many people called Northerners like Buchanan who supported Southern policies **"doughfaces."**

Buchanan hoped to win the 1844 Democratic nomination for president, but the party chose James Polk of Tennessee instead. Although this was disappointing, Polk, as president, chose Buchanan as his Secretary of State—the highest ranking officer in the Cabinet. Buchanan supported Polk's policies to expand America, but they had a tense relationship and disagreed on many issues. In 1848 and 1852, Buchanan again sought the Democratic nomination but fell short both times.

In 1853, the new president, Franklin Pierce, appointed Buchanan as Minister to the United Kingdom. During his time in **L**ondon, again he was a successful diplomat.

1820

Elected to the U.S. House of Representatives

1832

Appointed as the U.S. Minister to Russia

1834

Chosen as a U.S. Senator

1844

Sought the Democratic Presidential Nomination

1848

Sought the Democratic Presidential Nomination

1852

Sought the Democratic Presidential Nomination



# 1856 Presidential Election

Pierce's presidency fell apart when he was unable to stop violence between the supporters and opponents of slavery in the Kansas territory. By this time, Buchanan was 65 years old and tried one last time to win the White House. The Democrats abandoned Pierce and chose Buchanan as its nominee. They also chose former Kentucky Congressman John C. Breckinridge as his running mate.

## Quote

*"Let me implore my countrymen, North and South, to cultivate the ancient feelings of mutual forbearance and good will toward each other."  
- December 1859*

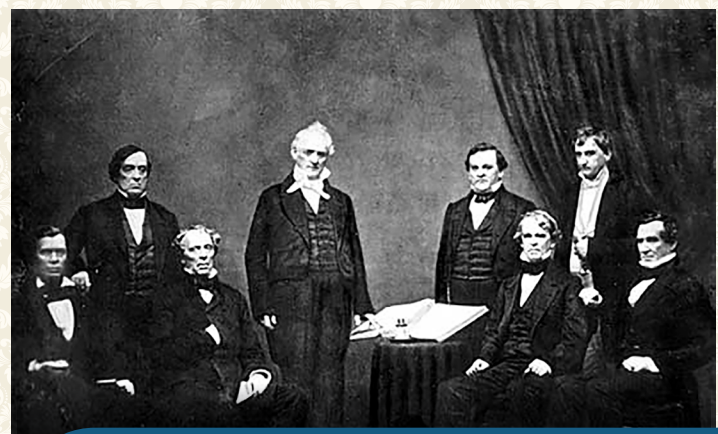
As the nation continued to divide over slavery, many hoped that Buchanan, a Northerner friendly to the South, could keep the country together. He won the election by a comfortable margin that November.

## President

As Buchanan entered office, the Supreme Court was about to decide an important case—**Dred Scott v. Sandford**. An enslaved servant named Dred Scott had sued for freedom because his owner had taken him to Minnesota and Illinois—both free territory. Just prior to his own inauguration, Buchanan had privately written to members of the Supreme Court, urging them to rule against Dred Scott and in support of slavery. Buchanan believed that this would settle the issue of slavery once and for all, allowing him to unite the country.

On March 4, 1857, Buchanan was inaugurated president. Two days later, the Court gave him exactly what he wanted: it rejected Scott's claim and declared that African-Americans did not have the rights of U.S. citizens. Instead of allowing him to unite the country, however, the decision further divided America. Northerners, especially, were outraged.

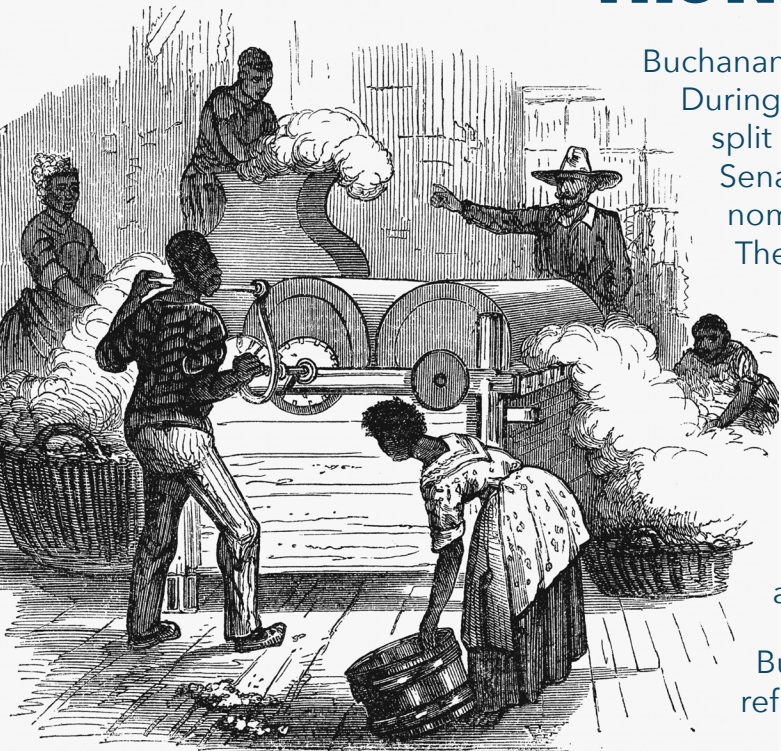
In October 1859, an extremist **abolitionist** named John Brown seized a federal **armory**, Harpers Ferry. He planned on giving slaves weapons and starting an armed rebellion. Although he was quickly arrested and executed, many Southerners now feared that Northerners were plotting to end slavery through violence and destroy their way of life.



Buchanan's Cabinet



# The Nation Splits Apart



Buchanan had originally pledged not to run for a second term. During the 1860 presidential election, the Democratic Party split into a Northern faction, which nominated Illinois Senator Stephen Douglas, and a Southern faction, which nominated Buchanan's vice president, John Breckinridge. The split in the party handed the election to the Republican Party's nominee, Illinois politician Abraham Lincoln.

Lincoln opposed the expansion of slavery. This greatly angered the Southerners and they refused to accept Lincoln's election. In the weeks after the election but before Buchanan left office, seven Southern states **seceded** from the Union. They formed a new nation – the Confederate States of America.

Buchanan believed that secession was illegal, but he refused to take any action to stop it.

## Predicting the Future

Decode the following quote from President Buchanan in December 1860.



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## Retirement

Buchanan was miserable as president and couldn't wait to leave office. He supposedly told the incoming president, "If you are as happy in entering the White House as I shall feel on returning to Wheatland, you are a happy man indeed." In April 1861, one month after Lincoln took office, Southern forces fired on Fort Sumter. The Civil War had begun.

Many Americans blamed Buchanan for failing to prevent the war. During his retirement, he was often attacked as a **traitor**. Throughout the war, Buchanan supported the Union cause, but he still blamed Northerners and anti-slavery activists for provoking the conflict. He even wrote a memoir in 1866 defending his decisions as president, but most Americans ignored him.

Two years later, he developed pneumonia and died in his home on June 1, 1868 at the age of 77.

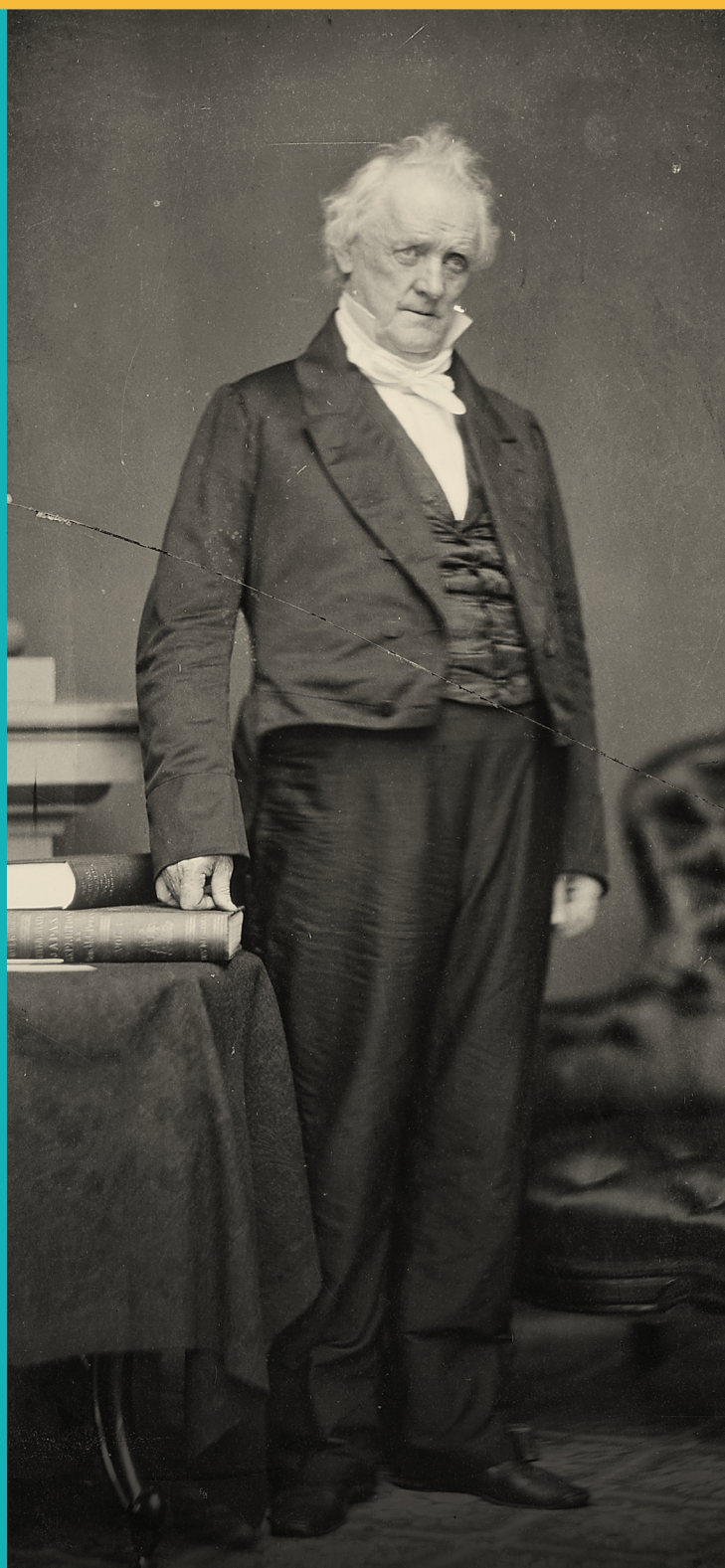
## Quote

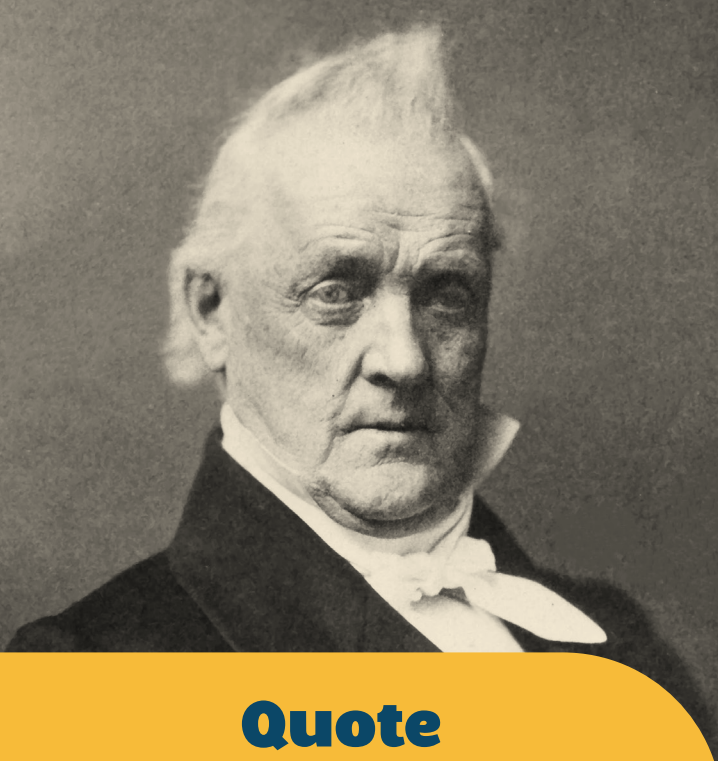
*"Next in importance to the maintenance of the Constitution and the Union is the duty of preserving the Government free from the taint or even the suspicion of corruption."*

*- March 1857*



Presidents of the United States of America: James Buchanan





## Legacy

Like Franklin Pierce, James Buchanan was considered a doughface who believed that he could keep the nation together by compromise. Although he personally believed slavery was wrong, he worried more about the issue dividing the country. This led him, however, to support policies that favored Southern slaveholders. He supported the *Dred Scott* decision, believing it would settle the issue of slavery once and for all. It was a major miscalculation. The opposite occurred—the nation continued to split apart, resulting in the Civil War.

The years before the Civil War required extraordinary leadership to address the difficult issue of slavery. Although James Buchanan was one of the most experienced men to serve as president, most historians believe he failed to provide the leadership the nation needed.

## Quote

“Public virtue is the vital spirit of republics.”  
- March 1857

## True or False?

**1 T F**

Buchanan was a bit of a troublemaker in school.

**2 T F**

Buchanan married at the age of 23.

**3 T F**

He was the first president from Pennsylvania.

**4 T F**

Buchanan built a home and called it Oatland.

**5 T F**

Buchanan switched from the Whig to the Democratic Party.

**6 T F**

In 1832, he was appointed as the U.S. Minister to Russia.

**7 T F**

Buchanan tried to run for president four times.

**8 T F**

During his presidency, tensions between the North and South lessened.

**9 T F**

Northern states were pro-slavery.

**10 T F**

Some people considered Buchanan to be a “doughface.”

**11 T F**

Buchanan enjoyed being president and was sad to leave the White House.

**12 T F**

After retiring, Buchanan returned to his home in Virginia.

**13 T F**

Abraham Lincoln was the president after Buchanan.

**14 T F**

Buchanan did not support the *Dred Scott* decision.

**15 T F**

Buchanan died of pneumonia when he was 77 years old.

# Glossary

**Federalist Party:** The party that formed in the 1790s in the United States that believed the federal government needed to be strengthened at the time for the country to prosper. It was led by George Washington, John Adams, and Alexander Hamilton.

**Bachelor:** A man who is not, and has never been, married.

**House Judiciary Committee:** The committee in the U.S. House of Representatives that deals with impeachment, the courts, and various other laws.

**States' Rights:** The political powers of the states within the United States.

**Strict Constructionism:** The idea that laws or a constitution should be interpreted literally or narrowly.

**Senate Foreign Relations Committee:** The committee in the Senate that deals with foreign policy legislation.

**Doughface:** A term used in the 19th century in America to describe a Northern politician who supported positions popular in the South, especially the expansion of slavery throughout the country. This was because those politicians were seen as moldable, or able to be manipulated and controlled like dough, by Southerners.

**Dred Scott v. Sandford:** A landmark case in which the Supreme Court decided (in 1857) that African-Americans were not entitled to the rights of U.S. citizens. The case originated when an enslaved servant, Dred Scott, sued for his freedom after his owner took him to free territory. The case angered Americans who opposed slavery and contributed to the start of the Civil War.

**Abolitionist:** A person who wants to stop or abolish slavery.

**Armory:** A special military building where weapons and ammunition are kept.

**Secede:** To leave an organization or government.

**Traitor:** A person who betrays their country, friends, or a group by helping its enemies, especially during a time of war.

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**Images:** Getty Images, WikiCommons, FreePix

## Answers:

**BUCHANAN'S PET:**  
EAGLE

**PREDICTING THE FUTURE:**

I have long foreseen and  
often forewarned my  
countrymen of the now  
impending danger

**TRUE OR FALSE:**

- |  |  |  |   |   |
|--|--|--|---|---|
| <b>1 TF</b><br>Buchanan was a bit of a troublemaker in school.                         | <b>2 TF</b><br>Buchanan married at the age of 23.                          | <b>3 TF</b><br>He was the first president from Pennsylvania.                         | <b>4 TF</b><br>Buchanan built a home and called it Oatland.       | <b>5 TF</b><br>Buchanan switched from the Whig to the Democratic Party. |
| <b>6 TF</b><br>In 1832, he was appointed as the U.S. Minister to Russia.               | <b>7 TF</b><br>Buchanan tried to run for president four times.             | <b>8 TF</b><br>During his presidency, tensions between the North and South lessened. | <b>9 TF</b><br>Northern states were pro-slavery.                  | <b>10 TF</b><br>Some people considered Buchanan to be a "doughface."    |
| <b>11 TF</b><br>Buchanan enjoyed being president and was sad to leave the White House. | <b>12 TF</b><br>After retiring, Buchanan returned to his home in Virginia. | <b>13 TF</b><br>Abraham Lincoln was the president after Buchanan.                    | <b>14 TF</b><br>Buchanan did not support the Dred Scott decision. | <b>15 TF</b><br>Buchanan died of pneumonia when he was 77 years old.    |

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