

Ostend Manifesto, title of a document drawn up at Ostend, Belgium, on October 9, 1854, by James Buchanan, the U.S. minister to Great Britain, later the 15th U.S. president; John Young Mason, U.S. minister to France; and Pierre Soulé, U.S. minister to Spain. Soulé had previously entered into negotiations with the Spanish government for the purchase of Cuba by the United States. His diplomatic blunders incurred the censure of his superiors, who ordered him to consult with the other two envoys. The result of this conference was the Ostend Manifesto, which urged Spain to sell Cuba to the U.S. and implied that the U.S. would use force if Spain refused. Publication of the manifesto caused a sensation among antislavery forces in the U.S., who feared that the acquisition of Cuba, where slavery was a well-established institution, would strengthen the proslavery forces. The controversy soon abated, however, and new grounds for conflict between the North and South were avoided, when the U.S. government repudiated the manifesto.

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Buchanan, James (1791-1868), 15th president of the United States (1857-1861). He was a prominent figure in American political life for nearly half a century, holding some of the nation's highest offices. As president he played a role in the split that developed in his own Democratic Party. The split allowed the election of Republican Abraham Lincoln as president in 1860.

Buchanan tried to conciliate the Southern states to keep them from seceding from the federal Union over the issue of slavery. He failed, and his term in office was followed by the Civil War between the North and the South. He has been criticized ever since for not taking a more active stand against secession. However, although Buchanan was not a heroic figure, his policy of compromise was not unreasonable. Most presidents before him had taken the same approach, and even his decisive successor, Lincoln, tried conciliation as long as he could. Buchanan hoped that his policy would at least prevent the border states—the northern tier of slave states—from seceding. It is perhaps to his credit that, indeed, the states of Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, and Missouri and the western part of Virginia (which split off as the state of West Virginia) did not join the Southern cause.

Early Life

Buchanan was born in 1791 near Mercersburg in south-central Pennsylvania. He was the son of James Buchanan, a well-to-do businessman, and Elizabeth Speer Buchanan. He attended school in Mercersburg, and in 1807 he entered Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania. He graduated two years later and began the study of law. In 1812 Buchanan was admitted to practice. Before long, he was a prosperous lawyer in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

During this period, Buchanan fell in love and became engaged to be married. However, his fiancée, Ann Coleman, died suddenly after breaking off the engagement, and he remained a bachelor all his life.

Political and Diplomatic Career

State Legislator

Buchanan held his first public office at the age of 23, when he was elected to the Pennsylvania state legislature. He also served as a volunteer in the defense of Baltimore, Maryland, against the British during the War of 1812.

In 1818 Buchanan ran as a Federalist Party candidate for U.S. congressman. He was defeated in his first attempt, but two years later he won the election. When the Federalist Party disintegrated in the 1820s, Buchanan became a supporter of General Andrew Jackson and a leader in the political faction that became the Democratic Party. Relations between the two men became strained, however, during the election of 1824. Jackson received the most popular votes in the presidential election that year, but, because no candidate got a majority, the election was decided by the House of Representatives. House supporters of candidate Henry Clay shifted their votes to John Quincy Adams, which gave Adams enough votes to defeat Jackson. Later, Jackson charged that Clay had entered into a "corrupt bargain" with Adams and that Buchanan had been involved in it.

Diplomat to Russia

Buchanan was such an efficient organizer of the Democratic Party in Pennsylvania that the grievance against him was soon forgotten. After ten years in the House of Representatives, Buchanan planned to retire from politics, but Jackson, who had been elected president in 1828, persuaded him to accept the post of U.S. diplomatic representative to Russia. Buchanan served at

Saint Petersburg (then the Russian capital) for two years, from 1832 to 1834. During that time he negotiated a valuable commercial treaty with Russia.

United States Senator

After returning to the United States in 1834, Buchanan was elected to the U.S. Senate (the upper chamber of the Congress of the United States) by the Pennsylvania legislature. He told the legislators that it was "the only public position I desire to occupy." He became a leading spokesman for the Democratic Party in the Senate and consistently supported the policies of Jackson and, later, of President Martin Van Buren. Van Buren offered him an appointment as U.S. attorney general in 1839, but Buchanan refused. Instead he remained in the Senate where, after 1841, he opposed the Whig Party administrations of William Henry Harrison and John Tyler.

At this time, Buchanan took his stand on slavery, the most controversial issue of the day. He maintained that slavery was morally wrong, but he also believed that the federal government had an obligation to protect it in the Southern states where it already existed. In this view he differed from the abolitionists, who demanded an end to slavery and whom he despised as fanatics. Buchanan tolerated the existence of slavery on the grounds that the Constitution of the United States permitted it. Therefore, he argued, it was the duty of the federal government to protect the institution of slavery wherever it existed in the country.

Secretary of State

In the election year of 1844, Buchanan hoped to receive the Democratic nomination for president. He was disappointed when James Knox Polk was nominated instead, but he supported Polk in his successful campaign. After taking office, Polk appointed Buchanan as secretary of state. Buchanan had been reelected to the Senate, but he resigned to accept the new post in 1845. Buchanan made significant contributions to U.S. foreign affairs, particularly with regard to two major problems facing the country: the Oregon boundary claim and the dispute with Mexico over Texas.

Oregon Boundary Claim

An agreement between the United States and Great Britain, the Convention of 1818, had provided for joint occupation of the Oregon country. Within a few years, however, many Americans began to demand that the U.S. government claim all of the territory north to the latitude of 54°40', even if it meant war with Britain. One of Polk's most effective campaign slogans had been "54-40 or fight!" Buchanan showed diplomatic skill in negotiating a compromise treaty that gave the United States most of the territory south of 49° north latitude.

Texas Question

In the dispute with Mexico, Buchanan carried out the president's orders that the U.S. envoy to Mexico take a firm stand. Buchanan wrote the instructions for the envoy, John Slidell. Slidell was instructed to insist that Mexico recognize the annexation of its former province, Texas, and that it pay certain long-standing claims of United States citizens. As payment for the claims, Slidell was told to press for the Mexican territory lying between Texas and the Pacific Ocean. The American demands were not met, and soon afterward the Mexican War broke out in 1846.

Cuba

While secretary of state, Buchanan also tried to further one of his favorite projects, the purchase of Cuba from Spain. Spain turned down his offer of \$120 million. However, for the remainder of his

public career, Buchanan continued to urge that the United States acquire Cuba.

Diplomatic Representative to Great Britain

When Polk's administration ended, Buchanan retired to his home at Wheatland, a country mansion outside Lancaster, Pennsylvania. He worked unsparingly to win the presidential nomination in 1852 and was the leading contender at the Democratic national convention that year. But the weary, deadlocked delegates nominated Franklin Pierce for president on the 49th ballot. In 1853 President Pierce appointed Buchanan as U.S. envoy to Great Britain.

The following year Secretary of State William L. Marcy instructed Buchanan to meet with the envoy to Spain, Pierre Soulé, and the envoy to France, John Y. Mason. The envoys met at Ostend, Belgium, and later at Aachen, Germany, and exchanged views on the best way to convince Spain to sell Cuba to the United States. They drafted their recommendations in a diplomatic dispatch that became known as the **Ostend Manifesto**. It declared that if Spain refused to sell Cuba, "then, by every law, human and divine, we shall be justified in wresting it from Spain if we possess the power." Word of the Ostend Manifesto reached the American press and became an effective campaign document against the Democratic Party. It was an explosive issue because Cuba, if it became a U.S. possession, would presumably be admitted to the Union as a slave state.

Election of 1856

Buchanan returned from his diplomatic post in London to take part in the Democratic national convention of 1856. His political strength was formidable. He had become well known because of the many high offices he had held. Because he had been abroad, Buchanan had not been involved in the dispute over the controversial Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, which opened new territories in the West to slavery. Other leading Democrats, especially Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, were no longer considered potential presidential candidates because they had supported the act. Buchanan had the full backing of his home state, Pennsylvania, then the second largest state in the Union. Moreover, his record of compromise on the slavery issue made him acceptable to the South.

Aided by the strong and skillful support of his Southern backers, Buchanan gained the Democratic nomination. He campaigned on a conservative platform, stressing his belief that Congress should not interfere with slavery in the territories. His major opponent was John C. Frémont, the first presidential candidate of the newly organized Republican Party. Frémont campaigned on the principle that Congress should prohibit slavery in the territories. A third candidate was Millard Fillmore, a former president and now the candidate of the American Party.

Although the combined popular vote of his two opponents was greater than his own, Buchanan won the election. He polled 174 electoral and 1,832,955 popular votes, compared to 114 electoral and 1,339,932 popular votes for Frémont and 8 electoral and 871,731 popular votes for Fillmore. Buchanan owed his election to the support he received from the South and from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Indiana, Illinois, and California. John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky became Buchanan's vice president.

President of the United States

Panic of 1857

During Buchanan's administration the country suffered a short but severe economic depression. The South escaped the worst effects of the so-called Panic of 1857, and this convinced many

Southerners of the superiority of their slave-supported economic system. Senator James Hammond of South Carolina claimed triumphantly, "Cotton is King." The panic heightened the conflict between the North and South.

Slavery Controversy

The most important issue during Buchanan's presidency was the growing division between the North and the South over slavery. On this issue, Buchanan followed the recommendations of the members of his Cabinet, who supported the South. Although he defended the rights of the states and declared that continued agitation by abolitionists would justify secession, at the same time he believed in the Union and sought to prevent secession. His general policy for resolving the conflict was one of compromise and conciliation, and he hoped that by these means the question could be settled peacefully. Unfortunately his efforts at compromise were inadequate, and he only aggravated an already explosive situation.

The Dred Scott Decision

Only two days after Buchanan's inauguration, the Supreme Court of the United States handed down its decision in the *Dred Scott Case*, which Buchanan in his inaugural speech had predicted would lay to rest the question of slavery in the territories. It did not do so. The case was a test of congressional power to restrict slavery. One of the chief questions was whether Scott, a black slave, had become a free man when his owner took him to reside in a territory (Minnesota) where Congress had barred slavery. The answer, in the opinion by Chief Justice Roger B. Taney (each justice wrote a separate opinion), was no, because slaves were property and the U.S. Constitution forbade Congress to deprive persons of their property without due process of law.

This answer did not settle the political and moral questions. The Republican Party vigorously attacked the decision and the court. Many antislavery Democrats deserted the Democratic Party, leaving it more in the hands of proslavery elements than it had been before. The decision made the breach between North and South wider, and thus brought the nation closer to war.

Lecompton Constitution

Under the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Kansas could be organized as a slave or free territory, depending on the choice of its settlers. When the act passed in 1854, settlers on both sides of the issue moved to Kansas to influence the vote. The antislavery forces formed a legislature in Topeka, Kansas, while those favoring slavery made their capital at Lecompton. Both Buchanan and his predecessor, President Pierce, recognized the proslavery territorial legislature in Lecompton as the legitimate government. When the proslavery body drafted its so-called Lecompton Constitution and submitted it to Congress for statehood in 1857, Buchanan pressed for its acceptance, even after the constitution failed a popular vote in Kansas. Douglas protested bitterly that the president was trying to override the will of the people. In an effort to compromise, Congress decided to admit Kansas if another popular vote was taken and the constitution ratified. The vote was taken, the constitution was rejected again, and Kansas remained a territory for the time being.

Meanwhile, the rift between Buchanan and Douglas was putting great strain on the Democratic Party. Buchanan tried in 1858 to block Douglas's candidacy for reelection to the Senate, but offered to reconcile if Douglas would stop attacking him. Douglas reluctantly agreed, and got the nomination. He then went on a campaign tour that included a series of debates with his opponent, Abraham Lincoln. Douglas believed that his position was more popular in the North than Buchanan's, and began to criticize the president again. He spent almost as much time criticizing

Buchanan as he did answering Lincoln. Douglas won reelection, but the debates made Lincoln a well-known spokesman for the Republican Party.

John Brown's Raid

In 1859 an event occurred in Virginia that made many people see the use of force as inevitable. Radical abolitionist John Brown, who had become a fugitive for leading a guerrilla band in Kansas (Buchanan had put a price on his head of \$250), had conceived a plot to establish a stronghold and refuge for escaped slaves in the Appalachian Mountains. He needed weapons. On October 16, 1859, with 18 men, he seized the town of Harpers Ferry, Virginia (now in West Virginia), and occupied the U.S. arsenal there. He expected to be joined by other followers, but instead the arsenal was surrounded by the local militia. The militia kept Brown and his men pinned down until a troop of U.S. Marines, led by Colonel Robert E. Lee, attacked and captured them with much bloodshed.

Within six weeks Brown was tried for criminal conspiracy, murder, and treason. He used the trial as a platform for his views, stating eloquently that his action was ordained by God. Brown was convicted and was hanged on December 2, 1859. He immediately became a martyr to the abolitionists, and to the South he was a symbol of the chaos that could occur if the blacks were not held firmly in check.

Election of 1860

The Buchanan-Douglas enmity continued into the presidential election year of 1860, when it had serious consequences for the Democrats. The party nominated Douglas for president at its national convention. However, because the party would not adopt a proslavery platform, most of the Southern Democrats walked out and held a separate convention of their own. They nominated Buchanan's vice president, John C. Breckinridge, for president. The Republicans nominated Lincoln, who was now a national figure, and adopted a platform opposing the spread of, but not seeking to abolish, slavery. A fourth party, the Constitutional Union Party, nominated John Bell of Tennessee on a platform of simply preserving the Union.

Buchanan refused to support Douglas. The resulting split in the Democratic vote gave Lincoln a plurality of the popular vote and a majority of the electoral vote, and he was elected. Despite the moderation of the Republicans' antislavery stand, Southerners had warned that if a Republican became president, they would break away. Within days of the election, Southern legislatures were considering secession.

Secession

In his last annual message to Congress, December 3, 1860, the president blamed the abolitionists and the North's unrelenting agitation against the South for the critical condition of the nation. He contended that the South asked only to be let alone to manage its own affairs. Secession, he insisted, was not a remedy.

But it was too late. On December 20, 1860, South Carolina held a state convention and voted to secede from the Union. Mississippi followed on January 9, 1861; Florida on January 10; Alabama on January 11; Georgia on January 19; and Louisiana on January 26. On February 4 delegates from these states met in Montgomery, Alabama, and formed what they declared was a new nation—the Confederate States of America, also called the Confederacy.

As the states of the Deep South seceded, Buchanan found himself at a loss to stop them. He was firmly convinced that any violence toward the South would only precipitate war. A policy of compromise, he believed, would see the nation through the secession crisis. So determined was he that his administration not risk a civil war by committing an overt act that he did nothing. His policy of inaction toward the seceded states averted war for the remainder of his administration, giving various compromise efforts a chance to develop. His policy also offered the incoming Republicans an opportunity to work out their own plans of conciliation, should that be their intention. Avoiding any recognition of the Confederacy, he made no commitments that would seriously embarrass his successor, Lincoln, who the nation assumed would try to preserve the Union.

Meanwhile, Buchanan's Cabinet began to dissolve. Secretary of State Lewis Cass of Michigan resigned because of the president's passive policy toward the South. The Southern members—Secretary of the Treasury Howell Cobb, a Georgian; Secretary of War John B. Floyd, a Virginian; and Secretary of the Interior Jacob Thompson, a Mississippian—also left and were replaced by strong Unionists.

In January 1861 Buchanan sent a merchant vessel, *Star of the West*, to Charleston, South Carolina, with supplies for a federal fortress in the harbor, Fort Sumter. Upon arrival there, the ship was fired on by Confederate shore guns and was forced to withdraw. All the while the president eagerly waited for the expiration of his term on March 4.

As Buchanan left office, the crisis was acute. He had permitted the Confederates to occupy the federal forts, arsenals, and navy yards and to take U.S. government property within the seceded states. He did nothing because, as he later explained in his published defense, he had inadequate military forces and personnel. Some army officers and enlisted men had seceded with their states. A good number of regiments and companies were stationed on the nearly inaccessible Western frontier. Although Buchanan's policy was criticized, it was continued without change by President Lincoln until April 12, 1861, when the Confederate guns fired on Fort Sumter itself. Lincoln defined this action as an insurrection that had to be met with force.

Last Years

On inauguration day in March, Buchanan escorted President-elect Lincoln to the ceremonies and then accompanied him to the executive mansion, the White House. Returning to the more peaceful atmosphere of Wheatland, Buchanan told his neighbors that he had parted from Lincoln with the comment: "If you are as happy, my dear sir, on entering this house as I am in leaving it and returning home, you are the happiest man in this country."

Buchanan was an honest, sincere man, who by hard work achieved the highest offices in the country. Unfortunately he became president at a time when extraordinary leadership was needed if the Southern states were to remain in the Union. Under more normal circumstances his qualities as a hardworking politician of compromise and accommodation would have served the country admirably.

Throughout the war the former president supported Lincoln's administration in its fight for the Union. He lived quietly at Wheatland and wrote a vigorous defense of his own administration. It was first published in 1865 under the title *The Administration on the Eve of the Rebellion*. Buchanan died at Wheatland in 1868.

Pierce, Franklin (1804-1869), 14th president of the United States (1853-1857). He came to office in the decade before the Civil War. Although his roots and home were in the Northern, largely antislavery, state of New Hampshire, Pierce sided with the South on the slavery issue. His position on this issue caused him, in the words of a friend, "to immolate himself on the altar of slavery." Yet Pierce was devoted to the federal Union of the states, his chief aim being to uphold the Constitution of the United States as a sacred and therefore unchangeable document and to avoid civil war at all costs. Although he was a weak, but well-meaning and honest, man with a social nature, few presidents have led so tragic a personal life or have left office so publicly hated and discredited. However, it is uncertain that even a president of superior ability could have dealt effectively with the great problems of the pre-Civil War era.

Early Life

Pierce was born in 1804 of pioneer stock, his ancestors having settled at Charlestown, Massachusetts, in the 1630s during the great Puritan migration from England. He was the second son of Anna Kendrick Pierce and Benjamin Pierce, who was a militia general, a veteran of the American Revolution (1775-1783), and, at the time of Pierce's birth, a passionate Jeffersonian Democrat. Benjamin Pierce exerted great influence on his son, imbuing him with his own devotion to public service and sense of patriotism.

Pierce was educated at the local Hillsborough school until the age of 12 and prepared for college at academies in Hancock and Franconstown, New Hampshire. Franklin's older brother was at Dartmouth College, but General Pierce disagreed with the political philosophy at Dartmouth and sent Franklin to the newer Bowdoin College at Brunswick, Maine. When he entered Bowdoin, Pierce was a sociable and friendly 15-year-old. He quickly made friends, among them future American novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne, who was to be his friend for life.

Pierce graduated from Bowdoin in 1824 and the following year entered the law office of Levi Woodbury in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. In 1826 he transferred to a law school in Northampton, Massachusetts, and completed his studies with Judge Edmund Parker at Amherst, New Hampshire. Pierce proved to have a keen aptitude for the law.

Early Career

In 1827 Pierce's father ran successfully for governor of New Hampshire. The same year, Franklin was admitted to the practice of law. It was inevitable that, as the governor's son, he should be drawn into politics. In 1828 he was elected moderator of the Hillsborough convention, one of five county conventions called to nominate members of the five-man governor's council. He served as moderator for six successive years.

In 1829 when his father was elected governor for the second time, Pierce was elected to the New Hampshire legislature. He was twice reelected and was speaker of the house in 1831 and 1832. In 1833, at the age of 29, he was elected to the Congress of the United States as representative from Hillsborough.

United States Congressman

Pierce had inherited his father's devotion to the Democratic Party of President Thomas Jefferson (1801-1809), which by that time had become the party of President Andrew Jackson (1829-1837). Pierce joined the Jacksonians in Congress in their fight against a national bank and established himself as an unwavering party supporter.

On November 18, 1834, Pierce married Jane Means Appleton of Amherst, Massachusetts. Although he remained devoted to her, the marriage was an unfortunate one. Mrs. Pierce was a shy, reserved, deeply religious woman who shrank from the rough-and-tumble life of politics. For years chronic poor health kept her at Concord, New Hampshire, most of the time, while Pierce needed her in Washington D.C. In addition, Pierce had a tendency toward alcoholism that his wife could neither understand nor help him to fight. Thus, the wife of the future president hated both the career he had chosen and the problem he fought valiantly all his life.

After his first term in the House of Representatives (the lower chamber of Congress), Pierce returned to Hillsborough to establish a law practice. He hired a young apprentice named Albert Baker and took a personal interest in Baker's young sister, Mary, a sickly girl whose chronic ill health prevented her from attending school. Later she became world famous as Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of a new religion called Christian Science.

In the congressional session of 1835 and 1836 a petition to end slavery in Washington, D.C., was brought before the House. Pierce for the first time displayed his proslavery bias by fighting to prevent the petition from being debated on the floor of the House. He also displayed an anti-West bias by voting against the National Road bill and a rivers and harbors bill, both of which were designed to promote expansion in the West. Pierce continued to be a rigid party supporter, and he voted against any investigation of President Jackson's so-called pet banks. In 1836 Pierce met a Mississippi planter, Jefferson Davis, who became his closest political friend and exerted immense influence when Pierce was president.

United States Senator

In 1837 Pierce was elected to the U.S. Senate (the upper chamber of Congress) from New Hampshire. At 33, he was the Senate's youngest member. His career in the Senate was undistinguished. For the most part he followed the direction of the party leaders. Pierce was content throughout his Senate years to be the protégé of older senators, chiefly Southerners, whose kindness to him increased his sympathy for the Southern point of view.

During his years in the Senate, the Pierces had two sons, Franklin and Benjamin, who became their father's chief delight. He moved his family to the New Hampshire state capital at Concord, where he formed a law partnership that was immediately successful. Pierce greatly pleased his wife by resigning his Senate seat in February 1842 and devoting himself to his family and law practice. In 1843, however, a typhus epidemic swept Concord, and both of Pierce's sons became ill. The older boy, Franklin, died.

Mexican War Service

With the outbreak of the Mexican War in 1846, Pierce undertook to raise the two companies of men that were New Hampshire's quota. He enlisted as a private but in 1847 was appointed brigadier general of volunteers. In May of that year he sailed with an invasion force of about 2500 men for Veracruz, Mexico. Pierce and his army marched through 240 km (150 mi) of hostile country and suffered several attacks by Mexican guerrillas before arriving in Puebla to join the army of General Winfield Scott in a march to Mexico City. At the Battle of Contreras in August, Pierce was injured by a fall from his horse, and during his absence the men under his command panicked and broke ranks. This incident from the Mexican War was later raked up by the Whig Party and twisted into an unjust charge of cowardice against Pierce.

At the end of the war, Pierce returned home to his wife and six-year-old son. His law partnership

had been dissolved, and he took a new partner. The new firm, like the old one, was highly successful.

Elder Statesman

Pierce was by nature a politician. Although still in his early forties, as a retired U.S. senator he became New Hampshire's elder statesman and head of a group of lawyer-politicians called the Concord Clique, or the Regency. The group controlled the state's Democratic Party. Pierce saw nothing wrong in political machines. On the contrary, he believed that a political party, like an army, could not be effective without discipline, organization, and a tight chain of command.

All of these were breaking down in the national Democratic Party. In 1848 the first split over the slavery issue appeared in the party's ranks. A group of antislavery Democrats left the party, formed the Free-Soil Party, and nominated Martin Van Buren for the presidency against the regular Democratic candidate, Lewis Cass, and the Whig candidate, Zachary Taylor. Pierce disapproved of party divisions in general and that of Free-Soil Democrats in particular.

Pierce's early and bafflingly consistent proslavery bias was in part a result of his belief that the U.S. Constitution sanctioned the existence of slavery. Pierce considered unconstitutional and therefore wrong any attempt on the part of the North to interfere with slavery or to limit its spread. The moral question involved in selling human beings into slavery seemed never to trouble him.

Election of 1852

Presidential Nomination

Pierce's views were known to Democratic leaders by 1852, when the party was hopelessly split into factions. A deadlock was expected at the Democratic national presidential convention. The leading contenders for the Democratic nomination were Lewis Cass, former Secretary of State James Buchanan, and Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois. None of them was expected to win sufficient strength from the hodgepodge of Southern Union Democrats, States-Rights Democrats, Free-Soil Democrats, and Compromise-of-1850 Democrats. Pierce belonged to the compromise group because the Compromise of 1850, which admitted California into the Union as a free state, also included a strong fugitive slave law. A letter from Pierce, which praised the compromise and defended the constitutional rights of the slave states, was passed around at the convention, held in Baltimore, Maryland.

Cass, Buchanan, and Douglas vied for the lead for the first 35 ballots. Former Secretary of War William L. Marcy of New York made his bid for lead on the next 10 ballots. On the 49th ballot the convention nominated Pierce as a Northern politician who was acceptable to the South. The convention chose William R. King of Alabama to be Pierce's running mate and drafted a platform pledging support of the Compromise of 1850 and an end to all further debate on the slavery issue. It was a promise that no president in the 1850s could have kept.

Campaign

Because the Whigs had nominated General Winfield Scott, a popular war hero, the Democrats presented Pierce as the heir to Andrew Jackson. The Whigs countered by starting a whispering campaign branding Pierce a coward, a charge easy to disprove but impossible to silence.

Nevertheless, in November 1852, Pierce won a narrow popular victory over Scott and was elected the 14th president of the United States.

At this supreme moment of Pierce's political life, another tragedy occurred in his personal life. In January 1853, two months before his inauguration, Pierce and his family were riding in a train. Their car was derailed and toppled over an embankment. Pierce and his wife were uninjured, but their young son, Bennie, was killed before their eyes. Neither parent ever recovered from the blow.

President of the United States

On March 4, 1853, Pierce took office as president and moved into the executive mansion, the White House, where he presided alone. Mrs. Pierce, wholly preoccupied with her grief and her ill health, lived there as a recluse, rarely appeared at official dinners, and declined to assume any of the duties of a First Lady.

Cabinet

To reunite the factions of his party and his country, Pierce chose a Northerner, William L. Marcy of New York, as secretary of state, and a Southerner, Jefferson Davis, as secretary of war. These were the Cabinet's most important posts.

Manifest Destiny

The Mexican War had ushered in the era of manifest destiny, a belief that territorial expansion of the United States was inevitable. Pierce shared in this American expansionist fever. He was eager to annex Hawaii and to acquire Alaska. However, he meant first to purchase Cuba from Spain and to acquire additional territory from Mexico. Cuba had long been regarded by the Southern states as a natural addition to their territory, and Mexican land was needed to make possible a planned transcontinental southern railway. Both projects would aid the slave states and were thus bound to bring about a resumption of the slavery controversy.

Gadsden Purchase

In May 1853 Pierce instructed James Gadsden, U.S. diplomatic representative to Mexico, to make a treaty settling boundary disputes and securing additional territory. The treaty that Gadsden presented to the Senate provided for the purchase of what is now southern Arizona and part of southern New Mexico (see Gadsden Purchase). The purchase aroused bitter opposition from Northern congressmen, who feared that the area would become slave territory. However, Pierce managed to bring his party leaders into line, and in the spring of 1854 the treaty was proclaimed.

Ostend Manifesto

In the same year, Pierre Soulé, Pierce's diplomatic representative to Spain, tried unsuccessfully to purchase Cuba from Spain. This purchase had become desperately important to the South, because Cuba had slaves and uprisings had taken place there. The South feared that to avoid a successful slave revolution, such as the one Toussaint L'Ouverture had led in Haiti, Spain might free the Cuban slaves. Whether or not Soulé shared this fear, he made a high-handed move that turned out to be an appalling blunder. He met at Ostend, Belgium, with James Buchanan, who was diplomatic representative to Great Britain, and John Y. Mason, the diplomatic representative to France. They drafted a document known as the Ostend Manifesto, which declared that if Spain refused to sell Cuba to the United States, the United States would seize the island as its only defense against the threat of slave revolution or slave emancipation in Cuba. The document caused an uproar both at home and abroad, and Pierce was forced to disclaim it. However, the

bungled diplomacy put an end to all hope of acquiring Cuba.

Kansas-Nebraska Act

If the Ostend Manifesto severely damaged Pierce's popularity, the Kansas-Nebraska Act destroyed it. Senator Douglas introduced the bill, proposing the creation of the Kansas and Nebraska territories between the Missouri River and the Continental Divide. In each territory the slavery issue was to be decided by vote of the residents. Because both territories lay north of parallel 36° 30', this was an exception to the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which barred the creation of new slavery states north of that line. Douglas told Congress that the organization of these territories was essential to a major national objective, the construction of a transcontinental railroad.

Southerners in Congress began maneuvering when the bill was introduced. If they supported Douglas, they would be giving up their long-held dream of a southern route for the transcontinental railroad. In return they demanded that the bill include an outright repeal of the Missouri Compromise. Since the Southerners belonged to the Democratic Party and Douglas was also a Democrat, it was up to the Democratic president to provide leadership. Democratic President Pierce was no friend of the compromise because of his belief that any federal restriction on slavery was unconstitutional. He not only yielded to Southern demands, he wrote the repeal clause himself, declaring that the Missouri Compromise was "inoperative and void."

The repeal clause brought a storm of protest from Northerners in Congress, but once more Pierce helped bring his party into line. In May 1854 the Kansas-Nebraska bill became law. To make certain that Kansas would vote for slavery, people from Missouri, a slavery state, streamed into Kansas to pack the ballot boxes in favor of a proslavery legislature. The proslavery forces won, but the North countered with the New England Emigrant Aid Company, which sent Northern settlers into Kansas to help organize a rival free-soil (antislavery) government. The two Kansas governments occupied separate capitals, those favoring slavery at Lecompton and the free-soilers at Topeka, and both appealed to Washington for recognition. Pierce recognized the Lecompton group, over the bitter opposition of many congressmen who charged that it was elected through fraud, and condemned the Topeka group as rebels. Meanwhile, bands from both sides made armed raids on each other in a virtual civil war that was known as the Border War, or Bleeding Kansas. The conflict was a recurring nightmare throughout Pierce's administration.

Other Actions

Pierce also became unpopular in the West by failing to support a Western homestead bill that would grant free land to settlers. He also withheld aid from a proposed Western railroad line. Before his term ended, embittered Western Democrats abandoned Pierce and his party to form the new Republican Party.

Pierce's efforts to annex Hawaii failed, as did his attempts to purchase Alaska. However, his last year in office saw an end to a long quarrel with Great Britain over its interference in the internal affairs of Central America. The interference had continued despite the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty that the United States and Britain signed in 1850, by which both powers were to respect the neutrality of Central America. On the American side, the dispute had been aggravated by the political adventuring of a Tennessean, William Walker, who briefly made himself dictator of Nicaragua and whom Pierce tacitly encouraged. In 1856 the two powers came to an understanding whereby Britain would withdraw from disputed parts of Central America. Walker was ousted by Nicaragua in 1857, and in 1859 and 1860 Britain quit the disputed areas, the Bay Islands (Islas de la Bahía) of

Later Years

By 1856 it was obvious that Pierce could not hope to be renominated. The Democrats instead nominated James Buchanan, and with his election the Pierces returned to New Hampshire. However, Pierce's outspoken condemnation of the New England Emigrant Aid Company and his bitter diatribes against abolitionists, especially abolitionist clergymen, had so outraged his home state that Concord refused him a public reception on his return.

In the winter of 1857 the Pierces left for Madeira and then continued on to Europe, where they remained for almost two years. Before he left, however, Pierce declared that the best man to run for president in the election of 1860 was Jefferson Davis.

With the election of Abraham Lincoln as U.S. president in 1860 and the outbreak of the Civil War shortly thereafter, Pierce became a bitter and outspoken opponent of both the Lincoln administration and the war. He spoke of the war as the "butchery of white men" for the sake of "inflicting" emancipation on slaves who did not want it. His last public speech was a diatribe against Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, which freed the slaves in Confederate-controlled regions. Pierce spoke on the day in July 1863 when his audience was being swept by news of a great Union victory at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. With that speech, Pierce lost the last vestige of public esteem and his last friend but Nathaniel Hawthorne.

In December 1863 Mrs. Pierce died, and only Hawthorne came to be with Pierce in his bereavement. In the spring of 1864 Hawthorne died and Pierce was completely alone. For a time he succumbed to alcoholism, but he reformed during the last three years of his life. He died in 1869 at his home in Concord. President Ulysses S. Grant declared a period of national mourning, as if in death, Pierce had finally won a pardon from the Union he had worked zealously, if misguidedly, to preserve.