



The Presidency of Franklin Pierce (American Presidency Series)

Larry Gara

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Franklin Pierce was one of the least known, least liked, and least successful presidents in American history. In this new study of his administration, historian Larry Gara makes no attempt to revive Pierce's reputation. Instead he provides a clear analysis of Pierce's shortcomings as well as his few successes.

Franklin Pierce's administration (1853-1857) spanned a turbulent period in the life of the nation: North-South polarization reached new extremes due, in part, to Pierce's failure to understand the depth of Free Soil sentiment in the North; the Kansas-Nebraska Act and its aftermath made civil war likely, if not inevitable; and Pierce's apology for southern actions served only to widen the rift. The term "Bleeding Kansas" came to symbolize the failures of Pierce's administration.

Pierce's few achievements were in the realm of foreign policy. In fact, Gara points out, the Pierce years were an important chapter in the history of American imperialism a time when Japan was opened to the West, U.S. trade in Central America and Asia was expanded, and additional land was acquired from Mexico. Pierce also initiated discussions on acquiring Alaska, the Hawaiian Islands, Nicaragua, Formosa, the Dominican Republic, the guano islands of the Pacific, and Cuba.

In this twenty-fourth volume of the *American Presidency Series*, Gara provides a clear, tough-minded analysis of the Pierce administration and a fair, though generally negative, assessment the man and the president.

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