
Subject: Pre-War (Civil War, that is) Presidents
Posted by [elektratic](#) on Mon, 23 Jan 2006 17:57:08 GMT
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Sorry I missed the thread as it developed. Rather than get into a further GWB fight, I thought I'd comment briefly on the pre-Lincoln presidents. I haven't seen the History Channel series you're referring to, but over the past year or so I've been doing a good deal of reading about the 1820-1861 period. I, too, had had the impression that the pre-Lincoln presidents were uniformly dreadful, and there certainly were some stinkers, primarily Lincoln's immediate predecessors Franklin Pierce (1853-57) and James Buchanan (1857-61) -- Buchanan was probably the worst president we've ever had. But I've also been pleasantly surprised to find that a number of the pre-War presidents were of higher quality than typically portrayed. My favorite example is Millard Fillmore, whose name is usually trotted out only as a late-night television joke (Johnny Carson abused him all the time). In fact, after growing up in abject poverty (his father was basically a tenant farmer), by virtue of intelligence, hard work and a little luck, Fillmore became a lawyer and leading citizen of Buffalo, NY. The Whigs unexpectedly nominated him for the vice presidency in 1848 on a ticket with Zachary Taylor (also an admirable and accomplished man) because he was almost universally respected and admired. When Taylor died without warning in mid-1850, Fillmore's vigorous support helped accomplish the passage of the Compromise of 1850, which put off the Civil War for ten years. If anyone wants a recommendation on the generally-recognized single best book on the period immediately leading up to the War, the link is below.
David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis 1848-1861*
