

Spring 5-2-2014

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Recommended Citation

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Salvaging A Legacy In Ruin: Why Experts Should Reevaluate Their Position Regarding President Buchanan

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5/2/14

On March 4th, 1857, James Buchanan was sworn in as the 15th President of the United States of America. Now, more than 150 years later, he is remembered as a presidential failure if he is remembered at all. During his presidency, many events transpired that directly led to the Civil War, and many historians believe that Buchanan's inaction or inability to prevent the Civil War is evidence that he was an unworthy president. Based on the many rankings of United States Presidents that have been released over the past decade, President Buchanan is the worst president the United States has experienced. My research is aimed at disproving this theory. I have examined the criteria by which the presidents were ranked and the judges who participated in the making of these rankings in order to prove that President Buchanan was a better president than he is given credit. His poor presidential rankings are due to the circumstances that he inherited rather than his leadership skills and ability. He was a successful politician and an able president who is harshly judged because of the time period in which he occupied the oval office. I have challenged the ranking systems that put too much emphasis on aspects of the presidency where Buchanan's influence was hindered either due to a split congress, the delicate state of the union, or the ineffectiveness of Buchanan's cabinet and political advisors. However, I do not want this dissertation to act as an excuse for President Buchanan. I am arguing that he was not the worst president that the United States had to endure, not that he was the best president with which the United States has been blessed. I will be looking at situations where Buchanan was successful and deserving of recognition regardless of whether or not he received it. Overall, I portray James Buchanan's presidency as a perfect storm of unfortunate circumstances. He is ruthlessly judged for his shortcomings and denied a fair evaluation as a president because of the time period during which he was in power. He should be remembered with a sense of empathy, for he was a man in a lose-lose situation.

Introduction:

In the United States, it is well known that anyone who runs for public office should expect to be in the spotlight at all times. This is especially true for presidents. The President of the United States is always being monitored, judged, and scrutinized. Throughout their terms in office, and even afterwards, United States Presidents are subject to being evaluated by many different historians, political scientists, and economists. It is human nature to compare and contrast people, even more so when we are dealing with public figures. Therefore, presidents are inevitably evaluated and ranked. This raises the question of “how should a president be ranked?” What criteria constitutes a fair ranking system and who should be in charge of rating the presidents in each individual category? Before attempting to answer to answer this loaded question, it is important to understand why we rank our presidents and who is creating the rankings.

We as a society, whether we acknowledge it or not, are obsessed with rankings. People are constantly ranking and comparing sports teams, colleges, and movies. Perhaps this is due to the competitive human spirit. Maybe there is more to it than that. Rankings exist in order to make decisions easier for people. A heavily favored sports team will have more people betting on it than a lower ranked sports team. A positively reviewed movie will sell more tickets than a poorly reviewed movie. Therefore, rankings directly affect how the general public makes decisions. Some sort of ranking system influences every simple decision we make throughout our day. When grocery shopping, a customer will subconsciously make their purchases based on certain rankings. For example, when someone is buying milk, he or she picks a carton based on characteristics such as brand, price, expiration date, etc. They have the option of buying 2%

milk, 1% milk, skim milk, whole milk, chocolate milk, and many other varieties. A person makes the decision to buy a carton of store brand skim milk based on how they rank that milk. It is not something that the consumer thinks about. The consumer does not sit at home and make a list of ranking criteria, but internally he or she knows that he or she wants what they consider to be the “best” milk. This style of thinking also applies to voters. When electing a president, the American people weigh both their options before casting a vote for the candidate that they believe is more suited for the position.

Presidential rankings have a major affect on the general public. When Americans rank the presidents, the rankings reflect the qualities that the American public admires in a political leader. They provide the people with a template for what makes a good president. This affects their future decisions in presidential elections. A president who is compared to FDR is much more likely to get elected than a president who is compared to George W. Bush because it is widely agreed upon that FDR was an effective president and leader. Consequently, presidential rankings are important.

According to the almost every ranking system that I have researched, President James Buchanan is either the worst, or one of the worst presidents the United States has ever elected. Because of President Buchanan’s poor placement in the existing ranking systems, I am looking to reevaluate his rank within the current existing systems and discuss specific categories in which Buchanan’s score should increase. It is important to have an accurate ranking of our presidents in order to ensure that American people are well-informed voters. Learning from the past helps to shape the future. I will not be attempting to prove that Buchanan was the best president, or even that he was a great president. Instead, I am going to be evaluating his presidency from an

objective standpoint in hopes that his ranking will increase within the existing systems. In order to do so, I must be well-versed on all things concerning the ranking systems and President Buchanan.

Literature Review:

In order to do so, I will be reading biographies of President Buchanan, examining the political factors of his era, and referencing various articles discussing what criteria should be considered when ranking a president. The biographies of President Buchanan will be important in evaluating scores given to Buchanan in qualitative categories such as the 'Background/youth' category seen in most rankings (the ranking systems assume this category to include family, education, and experience). It is important to know as much as possible about President Buchanan's administration and history in order to validate or disprove the scores given to him in the more subjective categories such as luck, imagination, and racism. The more that I learn about James Buchanan, the better I will be able to support him and refute his poor rankings. Michael Birkner's "*James Buchanan and the Political Crisis of the 1850s*" is a book that explicitly explains the political situation that Buchanan was thrust into upon being elected. It also outlines specifics about his presidency such as certain laws that were passed, the state of congress, presidential appointments that were made, and important meetings Buchanan attended with other politicians. Similarly, Ebert Smith has written a history of James Buchanan's term in office titled "*The Presidency of James Buchanan*". This shorter biography discusses more of the qualitative traits of a good president. It discusses the tension between the political parties at the time, the public's opinion of both controversial issues and how Buchanan was handling them, and how much of Buchanan's inadequacy as a president was a product of bad timing.

For insight on Buchanan's personality, one would have to search through Buchanan's personal memoirs and letters. By looking at Buchanan's inaugural address, states of the union address, and farewell address, historians have been able to pinpoint political tactics and flaws. "*The Works of James Buchanan: Comprising his Speeches, State Papers, and Private Correspondence, Volume X 1856-1860*" is just one volume of a series of large manuscripts written by John Bassett Moore with everything James Buchanan wrote from the beginning of his political career until the end of his life. It lends evidence that President Buchanan was well educated and a critical thinker. There is no way to tell whether or not he was a good public speaker, but his speeches were always eloquently written. Finally, Lauriston Bullard's "*The Diary of a Public Man*" gives insight to Buchanan's personality. In this hardback, Bullard has compiled a wide selection of letters from Buchanan, both personal and professional, which shed light on the type of person he was and how he thought. Bullard makes a point not to analyze the material she has compiled, but others have deduced from the readings that Buchanan was confident about his decisions while in office. For example, one historian has observed "to his dying day, he felt that history would treat him favorably for having performed his constitutional duty," (Tolson 2007).

I will also be looking into the works of some of the 'experts' who helped create the various different rankings. It is important to know whether these experts are biased towards other presidents. Many of the creators of these ranking systems are deeply invested in presidential history to the point where a majority of them have written biographies on other presidents. It is also important to understand the background of these experts in order to distinguish whether these experts specialize subjects such as economics, or law (Tolson 2007). This could explain

patterns within the rankings. For example, most economists who participate in the judging of the presidents will rank Presidents Hoover and Van Buren very poorly because of the poor economic environments during their respective administrations. On the other hand, economists tend to rank Presidents FDR and Clinton higher than other judges. This is due to the booming economies the United States experienced during each of their terms. A similar problem is demonstrated in a historical ranking submitted by the African American Leadership Institute (Walters 2004). The institute seemed biased towards presidents who supported African American movements (such as Lincoln with abolition and Kennedy with the civil rights movement). There are many ways in which these rankings can be molded in order to fit an agenda or support a personal opinion, and they can leave certain presidents victims of the system. James Buchanan is one of these victims.

What Makes a Good President?:

What makes a good president? This question seems simple at first glance. Most people can tell when they do or do not like a president, but it is not always easy to answer why. Also, it is much easier to list what doesn't make a good president than to list what qualities do make a good president. However, there seem to be some general characteristics that most Americans agree to be important for a president to possess. These characteristics include, but are not limited to, charismatic, experienced, well spoken, attractive, confident, and honest. Americans also look for trends in the economy, politics, and pop culture when judging a president. For example, Americans appreciate a flourishing economy, strong foreign relations, and a functioning congress. A president's economic success is perhaps the easiest subcategory to measure. Some political scientists even consider it the most important section of the presidential rankings system. This is typically because it can be measured quantitatively. It takes a lot of work, but the

“data on economic growth, unemployment, inflation, government debt, balance of payments, income inequality, currency strength, interest rates, and stock market returns” (Taylor, Oct. 2012) during a president’s term in office are all measureable statistics.

A president’s success in the field of international relations is not as easily measured. Perhaps the largest indicator of a president’s ability in the field of international relations is whether or not he was able to avoid, end, or win wars. There is much disagreement over the impact of war on a president’s ranking. The factors affecting whether or not a war is detrimental to a president’s ranking include who was involved in the war, why the United States has joined the war, how long the war has been going on, and the outcome of the war. Political scientist David Nice has accumulated data suggesting that presidents who are in office during a war tend to be ranked higher in the rankings than those who do not fight in wars. These presidents include Washington, F. Roosevelt, and Lincoln (Nice, Sept. 1984). Each of the previously mentioned presidents is ranked in the top five of almost every list. David Nice would attribute this to the fact that these presidents were in office when three of the most important wars in our nation’s history were fought and won (the American Revolution, the Civil War, and WWII). Of course winning wars is not the only indicator of a president’s success in the international relations field. It is important for a president to be internationally revered and an able diplomat. By using public opinion polls, international treaties, and “surveys of ‘experts’ in reflecting presidential images and prestige”, political scientists can try to measure how effective a president was as “Diplomat in Chief” (Plishke, Oct. 1985). This idea focuses on the belief that the president is not only the figurehead of our military, but he is the figurehead of our democracy. The President of the United States must be amicable and able to get along with the diplomats of other countries.

Finally, other factors used to measure a president's success with international relations include "crisis leadership" and "moral authority" (C-SPAN 2009). These two categories, however, are not measured, rather they are judged by the survey participants in the context of the C-SPAN Poll. Overall, ranking a president's prowess as a diplomat consists of both qualitative and quantitative measurements in the existing ranking systems.

When ranking the presidents it is important to keep in mind the factors that are out of the control of the president. For example, a functioning congress is crucial to a president's success. If laws are not getting passed or the president is butting heads with the people who are in charge of making most major decisions for the country, then the president is not likely to have a successful term. According to Prof. David Nice, a president is more likely to be popular with his party when either the party is just starting out, or when the party has an overwhelming majority. President Buchanan did not get to experience either of these luxuries as he began his term in a time of intense turmoil and disunion (Bauer 1968).

Other analysts who study presidential rankings put extra emphasis on the qualitative traits of presidents. Some do this by trying to measure the personality traits of each president through either polling the public or polling other professional historians (Kowert, Sept. 1996). Others leave the measuring up to the opinion of a group of judges (made up of historians, political scientists, economists, etc.), who grade each president individually, and then rank the presidents based on their average score (Siena 2010). These qualitative traits tend to deal with personality aspects and public appeal. Some of the traits include public speaking, willingness to take risks, leadership ability, and the ability to avoid crucial mistakes (Siena 2010). Overall, there is a vast bank of criteria from which experts can pick and choose material for judging the presidents.

Research has found some unlikely connections between presidential success and publishing multiple books before assuming office. It has been proven that presidents who do publish books before becoming president tend to “enjoy more political consensus and prosperity during their terms, being more positive and possibly more active, being more assertive on foreign policy issues, and possibly having power orientations which are greater than their affiliation and achievement orientations” (Elder and Holmes 1989). This just goes to prove that there may be other indicators of successful presidents that have not yet been comprehensively tested. Ranking presidents is made difficult by the fact that there are many different ways in which an individual can judge a president. This makes finding the ‘right’ way impossible and finding an sensible way difficult.

Research Design:

My research will be testing the judging criteria that make up current presidential rankings in order to prove that President James Buchanan was incorrectly ranked as one of the worst presidents in United States history. I have examined exactly fifteen different ranking systems throughout my research. However, in order to limit my discussion, I will be talking about two specific ranking systems: the Siena College Presidential Ranking Poll and the C-SPAN 2009 Historians Presidential Leadership Survey (please note that the Siena Poll includes current President Barack Obama while the C-SPAN rankings do not). I have chosen these two ranking systems for various reasons. For starters, they both include a full list of each president’s final score and ranking. In addition to the final score, both sets of rankings include each president’s score and ranking in each individual ranking category. This means I was provided with the criteria used by each system to rank the presidents. I was also provided with the scores given to

each president in each criterion. It is important to have this data to understand how the judges came to their final ranking of each president.

In addition, these two surveys include the people who were picked to participate in the ranking of the presidents. The Siena Poll surveyed 238 presidential scholars, historians, and political scientist in order to get the opinions of many different experts for its ranking system. The C-SPAN Poll surveyed 64 total historians, political scientists, and economists in order to compose its ranking system. The C-SPAN Poll also lists the names of all of the survey's participants. This has allowed me to do background checks on some of the judges in this poll in order to confirm that they were both qualified and unbiased. All of this is important to understanding President Buchanan's ranking.

As I have mentioned, the existing ranking systems have President Buchanan ranked as one of the worst, if not the worst president the United States has ever sworn into office. The institutions that have created these ranking systems have judged each president based on criteria such as luck, overall ability, ability to avoid crucial mistakes, imagination, integrity, and ability to compromise. These are criteria that are very difficult to measure quantitatively, and therefore should not be viewed as reliable indicators of a president's success. When the presidents are ranked based on qualitative data, they are pretty much being ranked based on the personal opinions of the judges. I would prefer to have a ranking system based on fact rather than opinion. After breaking down the current ranking systems and reevaluating President Buchanan's scores based on quantitative data, his ranking should increase. I will specifically be recalculating President Buchanan's score using the Siena President Survey system. It uses a much more straightforward method for ranking the presidents as opposed to the system used by the C-SPAN

rankings. The changes that I make in the scores will be objective, and will not be made with the intent of raising President Buchanan's ranking. They will be changes to the way we judge all presidents based on our nation's values and overall qualities of good leadership. I plan on doing this by adding quantitative aspects to some of the existing qualitative categories and possibly by adding weight to each category. I am hypothesizing that by the end of my renovations, President Buchanan will be ranked much higher than he is in the rankings currently (or at least outside the worst five presidents).

The independent variable is the criteria used to critique the presidents in the various surveys and rankings. The criteria can be changed and is different in almost every ranking system. Depending on which criteria is included and excluded from the rankings, the dependent variable, (Buchanan's ranking) will rise and fall. Buchanan's ranking will also be affected by how each criterion is judged. I will be challenging the existing ranking systems, which rely heavily on qualitative data. I will be trying to measure some of the qualitative categories with some type of quantitative scale. This way, the rankings will be based on fact rather than opinion. Based on many of the biographies of Buchanan and the countless number of official presidential documents that he has written to congress, his friends, and other political leaders, it can be argued that Buchanan deserves higher scores in certain qualitatively measured categories.

In order to restore Buchanan's legacy, I will initially need to examine the existing ranking systems. Both of the ranking lists that I have researched come from reliable, educated, and respected sources (the Siena Poll and the C-SPAN Poll). My argument is not based on the assumption that the judges and facilitators of these rankings were inadequate or unable to do the research necessary for each president. Instead, I am arguing that the criteria used by these

arbitrators are ineffective for measuring the greatness of a president and are not given the proper weight when calculating the results. For example, the rankings from the Siena College ‘Presidential Experts Poll’ thought it would be best to assign “equal weight to each of [the] twenty categories” (Levy, July 2010). It does not seem logical to me to give categories such as ‘luck’ and ‘foreign policy accomplishments’ equal weight. The number of treaties passed during a presidency, involvement in foreign wars, and a president’s relationships with other foreign political leaders can measure ‘foreign policy accomplishments’. The category titled ‘luck’ is simply a matter of opinion. There is no way to measure luck. It is categories such as ‘luck’, which are given equal weight to categories that can actually be quantitatively measured (such as ‘executive appointments’), that ruin the integrity of the existing ranking systems. A rankings system automatically loses esteem when it relies on opinions rather than information, even if the opinions belong to experts in the field of presidential history.

There are many examples of categories such as ‘luck’ throughout each of the ranking systems. Unfortunately for Buchanan, he ranks poorly in all of them. I plan to prove that Buchanan deserves higher scores in these categories due to Buchanan being incorrectly evaluated. The Historian Presidential Leadership Survey uses the category ‘Economic Management’ when ranking the presidents (C-SPAN 2013). This category is not absurd, or out of place, however; there are many ways to measure this category. Did the judges rank the presidents’ economic management based on the unemployment rate, or based on the GDP per capita? Or did they base their economic management rankings on something else? There are many examples of categories similar to ‘Economic Management’ that are also incredibly ambiguous.

Another issue, specifically with the Siena College Experts' poll, is a pattern of overlapping criteria. There are many criteria that seem as if they could fall under another category or that share qualities with another category. For example, there are four different categories that measure the presidents' 'ability'. The four categories are Overall Ability, Executive Ability, Leadership Ability, and the Ability to Compromise. Overall Ability is a category that sounds like it should be the final average score of the poll. The whole point of the rankings is to calculate the individual's 'overall ability' as a president. What comprises a president's Overall Ability? Do the other three 'ability' categories fall under the Overall Ability category? Are some of these traits being counted twice? If so, then this is a clear violation of overlapping categories. Based on the table below, it is obvious that adding these four categories scores to the overall ranking hurt President Buchanan. He managed to score poorly in all of these categories.

Table 1: Examples of Overlapping Ranking Criteria

<u>President</u>	<u>Overall Ability</u>	<u>Executive Ability</u>	<u>Leadership Ability</u>	<u>Ability to Compromise</u>
<i>James Buchanan</i>	42	42	43	41

Source: Siena College Research Institute. "*Siena's 5th Presidential Expert Poll 1982-2010*" (2010)

If these categories were removed or combined so that they were to only count once or twice, President Buchanan's ranking would improve. This is supported by the fact that presidents directly above President Buchanan in the rankings (such as President Harding and President Pierce) scored in the high-twenties to low-thirties in some of these categories. I would like to believe that Executive Ability and Leadership Ability are very similar. If we assume that a good executive must exhibit strong leadership qualities, then Leadership Ability should be a

subcategory of Executive Ability. There is no need for President Buchanan to receive two poor grades for his perceived lack of Executive Ability. Of the twenty categories used by the Siena College poll, only about half are unique, measureable, and relative enough to be included in a reliable ranking system.

There are some categories used by the ranking systems that are quality standards by which we should judge presidents. In these cases, I will not so much be disagreeing with the inclusion of these categories in the ranking system, rather; I will be disagreeing with how each category is measured and the consequent ranking given to President Buchanan. In particular, the ranking systems use criteria such as how the presidents ‘avoid crucial mistakes’ and ‘international relations’. President Buchanan was elected into office at a very fragile time in American history. Our nation was in a delicate state due to the subject of slavery.

Many historians rank President Buchanan poorly in the ‘avoid crucial mistakes’ category solely because he did nothing to prevent the Civil War. President Buchanan did nothing to prevent the Civil War because there was nothing he could do. I am not arguing that the Civil War was inevitable, because that is another issue entirely, but I am saying that there is nothing Buchanan himself could have done to prevent the war. Many of the well-known causes of the Civil War occurred either before Buchanan entered office or were controlled by factors that he had no power over. All of these political, economic, and social circumstances are laid out by Michael Birkner in his book *James Buchanan and the Political Crisis of the 1850s* (1996). It could be argued that by avoiding the Civil War during his administration and keeping the union together made Buchanan exceptional at avoiding crucial mistakes. The ‘international relations’ category is also interesting in Buchanan’s case. It is very difficult to worry about international

issues and foreign relations when your own country is on the verge of disunion and a Civil War. President Buchanan was ranked 41 out of 43 in this category. There are records of Buchanan's communication with foreign powers and his strong relationships with diplomats from foreign nations (Bullard 1946). Considering the state of the union Buchanan inherited from Pierce, it is impressive that the United States did not fall prey to invasion or miss important international forums. Britain, at the time, was looking to regain its foothold in the western hemisphere and aided the confederates during the Civil War. The French took advantage of the American Civil War by establishing a stronghold in Mexico. Buchanan avoided all international catastrophes and certainly did not deserve a ranking of 41 out of 43.

A large percentage of the criteria used by presidential ranking systems are measured qualitatively. The presidents are judged based on the opinions of a small group of historians and political scientists. I plan on disproving these qualitative judgments with quantitative analysis. I can check the records for unemployment rates in the United States during Buchanan's administration, or the success of international trade during his term. These are the numbers that should be used to calculate a president's 'economic management' and 'international relations'. Many of the categories that are judged qualitatively could arguably be measured quantitatively and remove opinions from the equation completely. By doing so, President Buchanan's presidential ranking should increase. There exist surveys and public opinion polls during his administration that could be used to measure his relationship with his constituency, and the number of bills passed (that were also supported by the president) could measure a president's relationship with congress. All of this data is available, and yet most experts who judge presidents do so based on qualitative analysis. This is not to say that some qualitative categories

are not important. I do believe that a president's 'integrity' and 'intelligence' are important to include in any ranking system even though they are harder to measure quantitatively.

Overall, many of the criteria currently in use by widely esteemed ranking systems can be discarded, combined, or reevaluated. Too many of the categories either should not be considered when ranking a president, or are skewed to give advantages to respected presidents. In order to find all of the information to prove the current ranking systems flawed, I will need to use the information provided by the scholarly presidential rankings, the extensive available information concerning Buchanan and his administration, and the varying opinions regarding what qualities make a good president. Buchanan is currently ranked horrendously low on every rankings list available even though he was intelligent, experienced, and in good health. Therefore, a change in the ranking criteria is in order. Buchanan was a much better president than he is given credit and his under appreciation is due to a poorly constructed rankings system, a divisive government, and his misunderstood actions as president.

A Force of Habit:

Something interesting about the Siena Poll and the C-SPAN Poll is that even though they come out with new rankings periodically, the same presidents seem to be rounding out the bottom of the rankings every time. One of the directors of the Siena Poll noted, "Aside from the newest entry in the 'Bottom Five', George W. Bush, the others have a firm hold on this ignominious distinction" (Levy 2010). Throughout the Siena Poll's thirty-year existence, four of the worst five presidents have reliably been Warren Harding, Andrew Johnson, Franklin Pierce, and James Buchanan. The fifth spot has shuffled between President Ulysses Grant, President Millard Fillmore, and most recently President George W. Bush. Professor Tom Kelly, while

discussing the rankings, sheds light on the “Lincoln Effect” when he pointed out, “Three, Pierce, Buchanan and Andrew Johnson wrap around one of our finest presidents, Abe Lincoln and those three perennial poorly ranked are held responsible for a failure to avert the Civil War in the case of Pierce and Buchanan, and perhaps even more shamefully in Johnson, prolonging the national disgrace with a prejudiced, Jim Crow, reconstruction” (Levy 2010). The C-SPAN Survey is worse than the Siena Poll. The C-SPAN ranking has had the same five presidents in its bottom five spots of its survey since its creation (these five presidents being Buchanan, A. Johnson, Pierce, Harding, and W. Harrison). Other rankings that I have looked at have shown similar patterns.

The rest of the rankings in both cases are constantly changing (granted not drastically, but there is evident shuffling). The top ten positions on the Siena Poll have been home to fifteen different presidents throughout the Siena Poll’s thirty-year existence. This means that the group of presidents who are considered the best is constantly changing. The same cannot be said for the group of presidents who are considered the worst. One theory on why Buchanan scored so poorly in each of the ranking systems is because the ranking criteria was based on characteristics of specific good presidents as opposed to coming up with criteria that would indicate a good president. What this means is that the criteria for judging presidents are based on characteristics displayed by those who the creators of the survey deemed “good” presidents. Consequently, the criteria are based on Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln. This raises the question of “should the criteria for judging presidents define what makes a good president, or should a good president decide the criteria used in judging of other presidents?”. In my opinion, the former should be true. Otherwise the rankings will continue to be bias towards certain

presidents. People have simply become used to putting James Buchanan at the bottom of the rankings because they do not want to upset the existing order of things. This lie that Buchanan was one of the biggest mistakes our country has ever made needs to be discontinued. When the surveyors do their research on the presidents to prepare for these rankings, they are typically reading material written about President Buchanan that is slanderous and negative. Based on their small sample readings of James Buchanan, they perpetuate his damaging legacy by rating him poorly in their rankings. I am attempting to break the mold. I will not be evaluating President Buchanan based on the opinionated writings of his biographers; rather, I will be evaluating him quantitatively.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to evaluate the presidents solely quantitatively while sticking to the framework provided by the Siena Poll. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, I am choosing just five of the categories used in the Siena Poll to measure quantitatively instead of qualitatively. The categories that I have chosen are 'Background', 'Intelligence', 'Integrity', 'Executive Appointments', and 'Court Appointments'. I have chosen these criteria because some of them can simply be counted (Executive Appointments and Court Appointments) while the others can be measured through easily accessible information (such as with education in the case of the 'Intelligence' category). I will calculate new scores for these particular criteria and input them in place of the Siena Poll scores.

If these categories can be effectively measured in a quantitative fashion and prove to have an impact on President Buchanan's ranking, then perhaps I will be looking for ways to quantify the other fifteen categories used in the Siena Poll. This may prove to be impossible considering there is a category titled 'Present Overall View', which directly asks for the surveyors to

evaluate the presidents qualitatively. However, in the meantime, I will be discrediting either Buchanan's scores in each of the remaining fifteen categories or the categories themselves.

A Nation Divided:

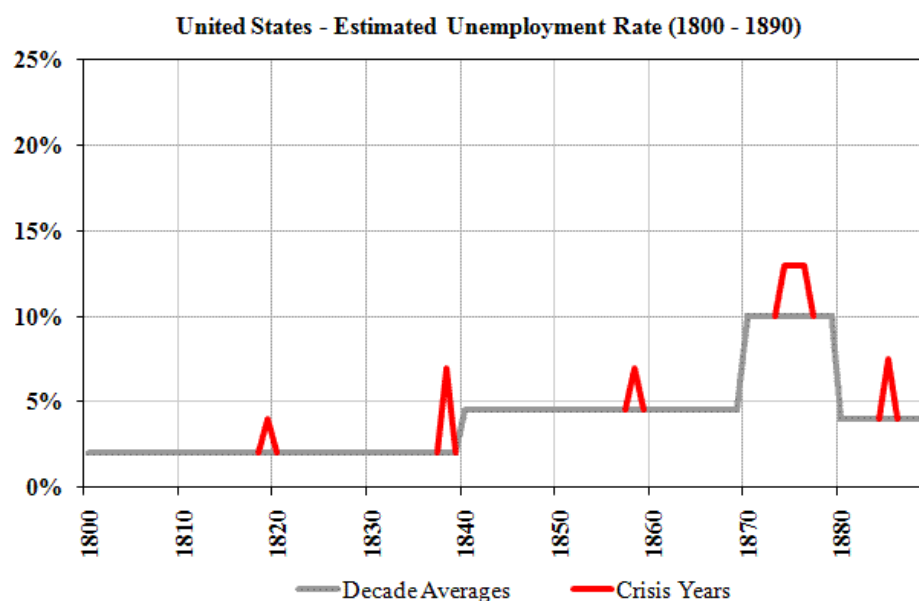
Some background on President Buchanan is necessary in order to fully understand why he was so poorly ranked and why he deserves a higher ranking than the one he was given. For that reason, I have included this short crash-course on Buchanan's term in office. The few people who do know who James Buchanan is typically remember that, "he was single for his entire presidency; he's the only president from Pennsylvania; and he was the president before Abraham Lincoln" (NCC 2013). But there is much more to the 15th President of the United States. When he first started out, Buchanan displayed "courage of the soul, that moral heroism which conquers the nerves, keeps the eye steady, the lip firm, and the brow unruffled...In the dangerous crisis in national affairs which we all foresee, the presence of so ready a gentleman at the head of affairs would be invaluable" (New York Times 1860). Unfortunately, Buchanan's "courage of the soul" slowly deteriorated while he was in office due to the stress and anxiety he had to endure. President Buchanan was forced to handle many high-stress situations, which include, but are not limited to, the split Congress, the abolition movement, and secession.

The United States was in its most delicate state when James Buchanan was elected president. No other president had to deal with the same level of immense instability and tension in the United States as President Buchanan did (with the possible exception of Lincoln). Many of the causes of the Civil War, both direct and indirect, occurred while Buchanan was in office. Therefore, the fault was forced on him regardless of whether or not he could control the causes.

Some of these causes include the Dred Scott case, the Panic of 1857, the repercussions of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and a partisan deadlock.

The Supreme Court case *Scott v. Sanford* was meant to have a big influence on the future of slavery in United States territories. The result of the case was commonly known as the “Dred Scott Decision”. Although the conflict began in 1846, it was not settled until more than a decade later on March 6th, 1857, two days after James Buchanan had been inaugurated as president. Knowing that the result of the case would be have a lasting and influential effect on the American public, Buchanan sent a letter to Supreme Court justice John Catron asking when the decision would be handed down. Buchanan was curious because the case was being settled very close to his inauguration date, and he wanted to know if the verdict would be delivered before he became president, or after he was sworn into office. Many people frowned upon this letter and Buchanan’s supposed interference with the case. The public criticized his letter and viewed it as him trying to rush the decision in an attempt to avoid a major political issue. Michael Birkner claims, “[Buchanan’s] meddling in the Dred Scott case was unfortunate at best and obviously unethical,” (Birkner 1996). In actuality, Buchanan’s letter did not affect either the outcome of the case, or the time in which it took the Supreme Court to write the decision. The decision was handed down two days after Buchanan was sworn into office and forced the fledgling president to deal with the political repercussions. The decision reversed 28 years of Missouri state precedents and angered abolitionists everywhere. The outcome of the case was the exact opposite of what Buchanan was expecting. Therefore, it is outrageous to claim that he had any influence on the decision.

The Panic of 1857 was also blamed on President Buchanan. This is another absurd claim considering the Panic of 1857 was caused by years of poor economic practices and it was a worldwide economic decline, not just an issue in the United States. Most experts, including George Van Vleck, an economics professor from Columbia University, “saw the panic as a result of the decline in British capital inflows to the United States, causing a decline of American securities prices, the failure of the Ohio Life Insurance and Trust (Ohio Life), and a run on other banks,” (Calomiris and Schweikart, Dec. 1991). In fact, when discussing the Panic of 1857, many economists agree that this international economic decline was founded in England. So considering Buchanan had been in office for only a matter of months when this economic downturn hit the United States, there is really nothing Buchanan could have done to prevent the panic. Both the Siena Poll and the C-SPAN poll include economic categories when ranking the presidents. The Siena Poll ranked Buchanan 41st out of the 43 presidents in the category ‘Handling of the Economy’ and the C-SPAN poll ranked Buchanan dead last in the category titled ‘Economic Management’.



In defense of the two ranking systems, the unemployment rate was higher in 1857 than it had ever been in United States history. The closest comparison would be the unemployment rate during the Panic of 1837 when Martin Van Buren was president. Van Buren, although being ranked 23rd by the Siena Poll, received a score of 38th in the category 'Handling of the Economy'. Therefore, the scores given to President Buchanan in these categories are understandable. On the other hand, the scores do not directly reflect Buchanan's abilities as an economic leader as much as they reflect the unfortunate economic environment during Buchanan's administration. The scores given in these categories appear to match quantitative data such as unemployment rates and GDP per capita. Presidents such as Hoover, Bush, and Van Buren ranked poorly in these categories after governing during poor economic times in United States history. Presidents Clinton, F. Roosevelt, and Washington received ranked highly in the categories because of the economic expansion that occurred during their time in office. It is just important to keep in mind why the economy is either doing well or collapsing. How much influence did each president actually have on their economic environments? And if the judges are going to blame the presidents for the economic environments during their administrations, then President Buchanan's score in 'Economic Management' from the C-SPAN poll is absurd. If the presidents are being judged by how well the economy did while they were in office, then President Hoover should be dead last in this category instead of President Buchanan. This is simply because President Hoover was the president during the Great Depression, our nation's worst economic period of all time.

The final insult to Buchanan's legacy came during his lame duck period in 1860. People were so upset with the progress of Buchanan's administration (or lack there of) that Congress

founded the Covode Committee. The committee's purpose was to "conduct... a blanket investigation" (Chester 1959) and determine whether or not impeachment was necessary. This committee is formally known as the United States House Select Committee to Investigate Alleged Corruptions in Government. It was later nicknamed the Covode Committee after the committee's chairman John Covode, a Pennsylvanian congressman. The committee destroyed what was left of Buchanan's reputation and, "denounced him and his policy- they had taken away his own Pennsylvania- they had personally libeled him and held him up to scorn" (Hunt 1908). The tension between the north and south led to a wave of immediate disdain towards James Buchanan, despite the fact that the committee found no evidence to warrant an impeachment of the President. The imminent threat of Civil War led both sides to nurture a dislike towards pacifists like President Buchanan. Buchanan biographer Philip Klein added his own opinion of the present day evaluations of the man when he wrote

"Buchanan assumed Leadership... when an unprecedented wave of angry passion was sweeping over the nation. That he held the hostile sections in check during these revolutionary times was in itself a remarkable achievement. His weaknesses in the stormy years of his presidency were magnified by enraged partisans of the North and South. His many talents, which in a quieter era might have gained for him a place among the great presidents, were quickly overshadowed by the cataclysmic events of civil war and by the towering Abraham Lincoln," (Klein, 1962).

This quote perfectly captures the point I have attempted to make in this section. Buchanan's moral was constantly diminishing because of the unnecessary backlash he received after every minor decision he made while in office. His presidency was consistently being restricted by the

North vs. South rivalry and the broken government he inherited from President Pierce left Buchanan useless. The stressful state of affairs that Buchanan had to deal with was comparable only to the Great Depression in the case of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the founding of our nation in the case of George Washington, and the Cuban Missile Crisis in the case of John F. Kennedy.

The Man Before the Presidency:

In my attempt to refute James Buchanan's ranking, I will start at the beginning. The first category in the Siena Poll survey is labeled 'Background (Family, Education, Experience)'. Before James Buchanan was elected president in 1856, before he even began his political career in the House of Representatives in 1814, he was a lawyer, a freemason, and an avid federalist. He grew up on a farm in Pennsylvania with his six sisters and four brothers. The estate was large, not due to his family's farming abilities, but due to his father's success as a businessman. Buchanan later added wings to the estate with the wealth he obtained as a lawyer and a politician. This is important to note because it allowed Buchanan to experience the best of both worlds. He was a well-grounded boy growing up because of his experiences on the farm, but at the same time, he never lived in poverty or was left in need. Buchanan had a great deal of admiration for both of his parents because they were very hard workers. Buchanan's mother, after growing up on a farm herself, was a "tireless housewife... a woman whose enthusiastic toil... left her mind and imagination free and active, for somehow she found time to read, and what she read was worth reading," (Booth 1947). Buchanan describes his father as someone who "had received a good English education and had that kind of knowledge of mankind which prevented him from being ever deceived in his business," (Booth 1947). The positive effect that

Buchanan's parents had on him, caused him to pursue an education, and instilled an appreciation for knowledge in the future president.

After graduating high school, James Buchanan was able continue his education by attending Dickinson College in Pennsylvania, where he graduated with honors. Dickinson was an important experience for Buchanan because it shaped his political views, inspired him to study law, and established his desire to participate in politics. All of this education led to President Buchanan receiving a ranking of 23rd in the category titled "Background (Family, Education, Experience)" in the Siena rankings system. Even though this is Buchanan's highest score in any of the rankings from this specific system, I believe Buchanan could have scored higher. I will first break down the category into its three subcategories: Family, Education, and Experience.

I have already discussed the impact that Buchanan's parents had on his early life and political career. Buchanan grew up with an appreciation for how privileged he was and had an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. This was all thanks to his family. The only blemish on Buchanan's family was that he never started one of his own. James Buchanan was the only president to never get married. However, I do not believe this should affect his ranking, as it did not have an affect on his presidency. There were other great presidents who succeeded without a wife. Although Thomas Jefferson did get married, his wife passed away twenty years before he was elected president. President Andrew Jackson was also single while in office and both he and Thomas Jefferson were ranked in the top fifteen presidents in the Siena rankings.

Buchanan may not have attended an Ivy League school, but his education was still impressive. There are four presidents who did not even attend a college who were ranked higher

than Buchanan in this category (Washington, McKinley, Van Buren, Cleveland). This also makes Buchanan's ranking in the category 'Intelligence' from the Siena Poll extremely confusing. President Buchanan was ranked 40th out of 43 presidents in this category even though he attended a respected college and law school. He was much more educated than the average man during his time, which made him a more than qualified candidate for the presidency. His educational background was strong as was his familial background.

Why then is Buchanan ranked only 23 out of the 43 presidents in the 'Background' category? The only explanation is that the judges interpreted the final term "experience" to mean everything that the president had been through before he came into office, rather than interpreting it to mean solely experience in politics. Buchanan was in politics for 42 years before he was elected president. Not many presidents can match that level of experience. However, some of the judges must have included military experience in this 'background' category. If this is the case, then it could explain why presidents such as Washington, Jackson, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, F. Roosevelt, T. Roosevelt, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Polk, L. Johnson, G.H. Bush, McKinley, Garfield, and Nixon scored higher than President Buchanan. On the other hand, military experience is not directly related to the success of a president.

Experience in politics is much more valuable than experience in the military when it comes to evaluating presidents. First of all, being a good military leader does not directly translate to being a good political leader (if you want an example merely take a look at Ulysses S. Grant's presidency). There have been examples of presidents with decorated military pasts who have excelled as presidents, but their success as presidents cannot be attributed to their military experience. George Washington is a great example of a president who was elected

largely due to his military prowess and reputation. However, once he was elected, it was not his military strategies that aided him with running the fledgling country. He was a capable leader, a patient and wise decision maker, and very representative of his constituents. There used to be a general consensus amongst voters that good soldiers made good presidents. Therefore, presidential candidates used to publicize the fact that they had military experience in hopes that it would help get them elected. In recent year, however, the American public seems to have had a change of heart. In fact, since the 1992 election, “the candidate with the less distinguishable military resume has triumphed,” (Nagl 2012). This is because it is becoming a generally accepted principle that military experience does not affect presidential ability.

Military experience is not completely useless; in fact, I would argue that military experience is an admirable quality in a president. On the other hand, I would not consider it more important than political experience. President Buchanan was a member of the House of Representatives, he was the Minister to Russia, he was the Secretary of State under Polk, and he helped negotiate many American treaties including the Oregon Treaty of 1846. This experience should be more valued than a few purple hearts, or winning a strategic military battle. I personally would prefer that my president knows how to negotiate with other world leaders than know how to gain the physical high ground in a military conflict. Therefore, I believe President Buchan’s ranking in the “Background (Family, Education, Experience)” category should be much higher than a middle of the pack score of 23.

Although Buchanan came from a well-respected family and had all the political experience someone could have asked for, I will be adjusting his score in the ‘Background’ category based solely on his education. This is because his education is the only one of the

subcategories that can be measured quantitatively. Experience could also be measured quantitatively if it was based solely on political experience, but because it includes all previous experience (including military) it would be too difficult to assign quantitative scores. Therefore, President Buchanan's adjusted score in the category titled 'Background' would be 19th (he would surpass the four presidents ahead of him who did not attend a college). Keep in mind that Buchanan could move up higher if we assumed the term experience to solely mean experience in government considering Buchanan had 42 years of political experience.

Finally, I will also be readjusting President Buchanan's 'Intelligence' ranking. He is currently given a score 40th in this category. Buchanan attended both an accredited college and law school. Using this information as a standard for judging intelligence, Buchanan's score would jump from 40th to 32nd if we ranked him ahead of all the presidents who did not graduate from college. If we took that a step further and ranked Buchanan ahead of the presidents who did not attend a graduate school, then his ranking would go up even further to 12th. Below is a table displaying all of the presidents who did not graduate from an undergraduate institution, those who did not graduate from a graduate institution (law school, business school, medical school, etc.), and those who do have the same amount of education as President Buchanan. It clearly shows that Buchanan was much more educated than many of the other US Presidents. Please note that although other presidents did attend graduate universities, many of them either withdrew or simply did not receive a diploma from their respective institutions.

Table 2: Highest Level of Education Achieved by Each President

<u>Presidents who did NOT Graduate College</u>	<u>Presidents who Graduated College and did NOT receive a Graduate Degree</u>	<u>Presidents who have both a College Degree and a Graduate Degree</u>
G. Washington	L. Johnson J. Adams	G. Ford
A. Jackson	C. Arthur R. Reagan	B. Clinton
M. Van Buren	J. Kennedy J. Tyler	<i>J. Buchanan</i>
W. H. Harrison	W. Wilson T. Jefferson	F. Pierce
Z. Taylor	J. Carter J. Madison	R. Hayes
M. Fillmore	D. Eisenhower J. Monroe	B. Obama
A. Lincoln	G. H. W. Bush C. Coolidge	G. W. Bush
A. Johnson	J. Garfield B. Harrison	W. Wilson
G. Cleveland	U. Grant H. Hoover	R. Nixon
W. McKinley	J. Polk. W. Harding	W. Taft
H. Truman	J. Q. Adams	F. Roosevelt
		T. Roosevelt

Source: <http://www.presidentsusa.net/collegelisting.html>

I acknowledge that education arguably does not directly relate to intelligence, however, there is something to be said about a president who has a large amount of schooling. Until presidents are required to take IQ tests, there is no better way to measure and rank the intelligence of the presidents.

Buchanan's Character:

President Buchanan certainly deserved a higher score in the 'Integrity' category. Integrity is a category that was judged qualitatively by the judges in both of the ranking systems that I have examined (in the C-SPAN rankings I am assuming 'Moral Authority' to be the equivalent of 'Integrity'). The only explanation for Buchanan's low scores in areas involving integrity is that the judges were upset by the findings of the Covode Committee. The Covode Committee, as

explained in the background section on President Buchanan, was a committee that was established by congress to investigate corruption and bribery within the Buchanan administration in order to determine whether or not President Buchanan should be impeached. The committee eventually established that there was no reason to impeach Buchanan, but the majority report did expose a great deal of corruption and abuse of power within Buchanan's administration (Klein 1962). This harmed Buchanan's reputation and probably affected the judges' scores in the Siena and C-SPAN polls.

It is important to note here that President Buchanan was not impeached, and that he himself was not found guilty of corruption or bribery. Buchanan's administration may have included some corrupt politicians, but Buchanan himself was innocent. The Covode Committee reported that President Buchanan could not be impeached, that he was not guilty of corruption, bribery, or other impeachable actions, and that the corruption that was unveiled in the committee's "report was lacking in evidence" (Klein 1962). The committee itself was a partisan attempt to slander President Buchanan's character. It is commonly agreed that at the time Buchanan's administration was the most corrupt administration since the adoption of the US Constitution. At the same time, since 1860 there have been many presidents and a handful of them have more questionable integrity than President Buchanan.

President Buchanan was ranked 40th out of 43 presidents by the Siena Poll in the category titled 'Integrity' and was ranked dead last by the C-SPAN poll in the category titled 'Moral Authority'. These do not seem like accurate rankings considering I can name many presidents who arguably had less integrity than James Buchanan. President Clinton, regardless of how great he was at handling our nation's budget and economy, had little to no integrity. He will always be

associated with his scandalous relationship with his intern Monica Lewinsky (not to mention other accusations of unfaithfulness to his wife during his time as the governor of Arkansas). President Nixon is the only president to actually resign the presidency due to his involvement with the Watergate Scandal. President Harding experienced a similar degree of federal corruption with the Teapot Dome Scandal. This corruption was so widespread that it actually carried over into the presidencies of Calvin Coolidge and Herbert Hoover. I am not arguing that President Buchanan deserves to be at the top of the list in terms of integrity, but he definitely deserves to be higher ranked than these previously mentioned presidents. At least Buchanan was not directly involved with the dishonesty in his administration.

If Buchanan's scores were adjusted in these categories based on the aforementioned information, then Buchanan would raise one spot in the 'Integrity' category from the Siena Poll and five spots in the 'Moral Authority' category from the C-SPAN Poll. These changes are being made quantitatively based on the number of times Buchanan was tried for impeachment. Both Clinton and A. Johnson were tried for impeachment while the Covode Committee found no need to try President Buchanan. Nixon and Harding also would have been impeached if it were not for Nixon's resignation and Harding's untimely death (assumed to be brought on by the stress of his corrupt dealings). As a result, this category that was originally judged qualitatively does have quantitative measurements.

Let's Do The Math:

Buchanan was only in office from 1857-1861, and being a one-term president greatly affected Buchanan's ranking. For starters, it directly affected his ranking in the categories "Executive Appointments" and "Court Appointments". He ranked 39th and 42nd in these

categories respectively. Because he was not in office as long as many of the other presidents, he was not able to match them in these categories quantitatively. President Franklin D. Roosevelt scored very highly in both of these categories considering he spent the most time in office. However, if these appointments are measured quantitatively, then Buchanan should have beat out presidents who served shorter terms than him. William Henry Harrison is known for his tragically short term due to his death after only 32 days in office. How can a man who was president for barely a month have made more executive and court appointments than a man who served as president for four years? The simple answer is he did not. Buchanan made many more appointments than Harrison. Buchanan also had more appointments than Presidents Garfield and Taylor for the same reason. Therefore, I am going to assume that the historians who scored the presidents in these two categories were basing their judgments on the quality of the appointments rather than the quantity of them (otherwise it would just a matter of historians not doing their research).

If the category 'Court Appointments' was measured quantitatively and was assumed to only include Supreme Court appointments, then Buchanan would rank close to the middle of the pack. He certainly would not be second to last. There are other smaller court appointments that presidents are required to make, but they are not viewed as important to the administration or the government as the Supreme Court appointments.

Table 3: Number of Supreme Court Appointments

<u>0 Appointments to the Supreme Court</u>	<u>1 Appointment to the Supreme Court</u>	<u>2-4 Appointments to the Supreme Court</u>		<u>5+ Appointments to the Supreme Court</u>
W. H. Harrison	J. Monroe	G. Washington	W. Wilson	A. Jackson
Z. Taylor	J.Q. Adams	J. Adams	W. Harding	A. Lincoln
A. Johnson	J. Tyler	T. Jefferson	H. Hoover	W. Taft
J. Carter	M. Fillmore	J. Madison	H. Truman	F. Roosevelt
	F. Pierce	M. Van Buren	J. Kennedy	D. Eisenhower
	<i>J. Buchanan</i>	J. Polk	L. Johnson	
	J. Garfield	U. Grant	R. Nixon	
	W. McKinley	R. Hayes	R. Reagan	
	C. Coolidge	C. Arthur	G.H.W.	
	G. Ford	B. Harrison	Bush	
		G. Cleveland	W. Clinton	
		T. Roosevelt	G. W. Bush	
			B. Obama	

Source: <http://www.loc.gov/law/find/court-confirmed.php>

The quality of each president's appointments is nearly impossible to judge. This is because an appointment may seem like the right person for the job, but in actuality the person appointed is inadequate at their post. This would not be the president's fault. Also, although appointments technically fall under the executive powers in the Constitution, the president rarely picks the appointments by himself. The appointments are typically recommended by the president's political party in order to help with the president's political agenda. Also, how are these historians judging quality? Is the quality of an appointment determined by how well the appointed does his/her job? Is it reliant on how strategic the appointment is?

I believe that these two categories should be measured solely on a quantitative basis. This is because a president cannot control the actions of someone he has appointed (unless he fires them) and it would be too difficult to judge each presidential appointment individually in terms of quality. Buchanan may have received some negative scores because a few of his appointments were accused of bribery in the Covode Committee's final report. On the other hand, if we are qualitatively judging the appointments based on how strategic each appointment is, then President Buchanan made a great deal of strong strategic appointments. These two criteria are too open-ended to be ranked qualitatively, and therefore should be judged solely quantitatively. The results of the categories 'Executive Appointments' and 'Court Appointments' are inconclusive and do not properly reflect upon whether or not each president was effective or high quality.

Since all of my revisions of these rankings are based on quantitative data, I will re-adjust Buchanan's rankings in the categories 'Executive Appointments' and 'Court Appointments' based on numbers. In the 'Executive Appointments' category Buchanan's score would raise from 39th to at least 27th. I state that 27th is the minimum score I would give because the number of positions that required executive appointments has increased drastically from Washington to Obama. Therefore, the numbers may be skewed simply due to the increase in positions that needed to be filled. The Supreme Court on the other hand has always been composed of nine justices. This makes the 'Court Appointments' score easier to evaluate. Buchanan's 'Court Appointments' score would increase from 42nd to at least a tie for 29th with the ten other presidents who only made one appointment to the Supreme Court.

Recalculating:

Now that I have thoroughly analyzed the categories involved in each ranking system, I will attempt to re-rank the presidents. I will not make any changes to the scores that Buchanan has received in the categories that I have argued as either redundant or irrelevant. I have stated my protest against the inclusion of these categories, but for the sake of time, I will not remove these criteria from the calculations. This is because if I removed certain scores from President Buchanan's ranking, then I would need to do the same for every president. Therefore, I will only be changing the scores of certain categories in which President Buchanan should have scored higher. These categories include 'Background', 'Intelligence', 'Executive Appointments', 'Court Appointments', and 'Integrity'. President Buchanan should have scored higher in each of these categories based on my quantitative analysis.

Table 4: President Buchanan's Scorecard Changes

<i>Based on the Siena Poll Categories</i>	<u>Background</u>	<u>Executive Appointments</u>	<u>Court Appointments</u>	<u>Integrity</u>	<u>Intelligence</u>
President Buchanan's Original Scores	23	39	42	40	40
President Buchanan's Revised Scores	19	27	29	39	12

Source: Siena College Research Institute. "*Siena's 5th Presidential Expert Poll 1982-2010*" (2010)

In order to calculate the difference these changes made in Buchanan's score via the Siena Poll ranking system, I needed to calculate the average scores of each president on the list. If you were to calculate Buchanan's average score by adding up each of Buchanan's category rankings, it would give him a score of 40.35, which is naturally the second lowest mean score of all the

presidents on the list (the exact ranking given to him by the Siena Poll). When you replace the surveys score in each of the five categories listed in Table 4 with the scores that I have calculated, President Buchanan's mean score becomes 37.45. This score would put him sandwiched between Presidents Bush and Pierce at a comfortable position ranked 40th.

Although only five scores out of twenty are changing, President Buchanan's score changes significantly. After measuring just a quarter of the categories quantitatively, President Buchanan's overall position jumps up two spots. If one were to continue to measure the remaining fifteen categories from the Siena Poll quantitatively I am sure James Buchanan's ranking would continue to rise. It may not rise at the same steady rate of two spots per five category changes; in fact, it may decrease with the changes made to other categories. However, I only calculated the categories that I believed to be most easily measured.

The other categories can be measured quantitatively, but there is too much disagreement over which quantitative measurement would be used to judge them. For example, the categories from the Siena Poll labeled 'Domestic Accomplishments' and 'Foreign Policy Accomplishments' could probably be measured quantitatively by simply adding up the accomplishments. However, this would raise a great deal of controversy over what counts as an accomplishment. How important would an accomplishment have to be in order for it to be counted? President Buchanan managed to keep the United States out of any foreign conflict during his presidency. There is a great deal of discrepancy over whether or not that counts as an accomplishment or not. Also, this is an accomplishment that could count as both a domestic accomplishment and a foreign policy accomplishment. This would lead to overlapping which would skew the rankings.

Other categories have no hope of being measured quantitatively. These categories include ‘Imagination’ and ‘Luck’. It is impossible to tell when a president has solved a problem using their imagination or when a crisis was solved due to a simple stroke of luck. I am specifically against the inclusion of a category such as ‘Luck’ in ranking system for presidents. First of all, as already mentioned, it is impossible to measure. Secondly, a president should not be viewed as a lesser president because he was unlucky. If anything, a president with bad luck should be ranked a little less harshly. President Buchanan was horrendously unlucky. I am in agreement with his qualitatively calculated 40th out of 43. This is not a knock on his abilities or his administration. Buchanan was unlucky because there was a great deal of concerns going on around him that were out of his control. Luck should either be omitted from the rankings entirely, or it should be an inverted category meaning that the president who is considered the unluckiest should receive a score of 1 and the luckiest president should receive a score of 43. But at no point should a president be penalized for being ill-fated.

Considering many of the judging criteria listed in the two ranking systems I have researched can be judged quantitatively, why did the expert judges (who have as much access to all of this information as I do) rank President Buchanan so poorly? In order to understand how the judges made their decisions, I looked for patterns and trends in the rankings.

The Lincoln Effect:

President Buchanan did not even attempt to run for office in the election of 1860. He recognized that he was doing a thankless job, and the stress was more than he could bear. He slipped away from the position peacefully and threw his support behind the incumbent Vice President John C. Breckinridge. After Abraham Lincoln won the election, James Buchanan

wrote to Lincoln, “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,” (Booth 1947). Buchanan did not enjoy his time in office, nor did he enjoy the constant loathing from his constituents up until his death seven years after leaving office. Buchanan did what he thought was best for the nation at the time he was in office and managed to keep the union together for most of his presidency. Seven states did technically secede while Buchanan was still in office, but they did so during his lame duck period and it was in response to Lincoln’s election.

Abraham Lincoln, on the other hand, was the immediate cause of the secession of the first seven southern states, and then let the four more southern states secede within the first three months of his presidency. He was unable to prevent a civil war and although he was able to reunite the nation, at the time of his assassination, the United States was in shambles. Despite all of this, President Lincoln is rated the best president overall according to the C-SPAN rankings and third best president overall according to the Siena Poll. His ranking is understandable and I would not dare try to refute it; it is just interesting to see how poorly historians view President Buchanan in comparison to President Lincoln. Issuing the Emancipation Proclamation and delivering the Gettysburg Address on route to freeing the slaves and winning the United States’ only Civil War all looks great on a resume. The question becomes did Lincoln’s success magnify Buchanan’s shortcomings? Did preceding possibly the greatest president in our nation’s history affect Buchanan’s ranking?

In order to test this, I looked at the rankings of other presidents who preceded some of the United States’ greatest presidents. The top five presidents varies depending on which ranking system you examine, but both the C-SPAN and the Siena rankings include George Washington,

Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt, and Thomas Jefferson in their top seven. Therefore, I have chosen to look at the predecessors of Lincoln, FDR, T.

Roosevelt, and Jefferson in order to determine whether or not preceding a great president affects the ranking of the preceding president.

Table 5: The Effects of Succeeding a Good President

<u>President</u>	<u>Siena Ranking</u>	<u>C-SPAN Ranking</u>
<i>James Buchanan</i> (Lincoln's Predecessor)	42	42
Herbert Hoover (F. Roosevelt's Predecessor)	36	34
William McKinley (T. Roosevelt's Predecessor)	21	16
John Adams (Jefferson's Predecessor)	17	17

Source: Siena College Research Institute. "*Siena's 5th Presidential Expert Poll 1982-2010*" (2010)

When you come directly before a great president, the general public is bound to make comparisons between the two leaders. Being the first president, George Washington did not have a predecessor. Lincoln's predecessor, as we have already discussed, was James Buchanan (and he was ranked very poorly). Roosevelt's predecessor was Herbert Hoover. Hoover is ranked 34th in the C-SPAN rankings and 36th in the Siena rankings. Neither of the two scores are particularly high. In fact, both of these rankings put Hoover in the bottom 20% of presidents. Still, that is not nearly as bad as President Buchanan's rankings. Theodore Roosevelt's predecessor was President McKinley. In the C-SPAN poll McKinley ranked 16th and in the Siena poll he ranked 21st. His rankings put him in the top 50% of both ranking systems. That means McKinley is right in the middle of the pack. Preceding a great president did not significantly hinder his score. Thomas Jefferson's predecessor was John Adams. Adams scored a ranking of 17 in both the C-

SPAN and Siena ranking systems. His scores are even higher than McKinley's and puts him in the top 40% of presidents.

If we look at other predecessors of top ten presidents, we are provided with more evidence that preceding a great president does not directly lower the score of that president. For example, Truman scored in the top nine of both lists and his predecessor was FDR (who as I've already mentioned is a top five president according to both rankings). Other examples of presidents who were not impeded by the fact that their successor was a top ten president include Presidents Jefferson and Madison. Therefore, it can be concluded that your successor does not affect your ranking as a rule. However, an exception should be made for James Buchanan. Being Abraham Lincoln's predecessor is a special case where Buchanan's ranking was affected. Because Lincoln did such a phenomenal job while in office and receives such esteem from the historians and political scientists who ranked the presidents, he made everyone else around him look insignificant. Lincoln ruined the curve. "Lincoln's successor Andrew Johnson is usually cast as Buchanan's biggest rival for worst president" (NCC 2013) which leads me to believe that there must be some relationship between a president's proximity to Lincoln and his ranking. Consequently, I now look to examine how the three presidents both before and after Lincoln were evaluated.

Lincoln's three predecessors were President Fillmore, President Pierce, and President Buchanan. His three successors were President Johnson, President Grant, and President Hayes.

Table 6: Presidents Preceding and Succeeding Abraham Lincoln

<u>President</u>	<u>Siena Ranking</u>	<u>C-SPAN Ranking</u>
Millard Fillmore	38	37
Franklin Pierce	40	40
<i>James Buchanan</i>	42	42
Andrew Johnson	43	41
Ulysses S. Grant	26	23
Rutherford B. Hayes	31	33

Source: Siena College Research Institute. “*Siena’s 5th Presidential Expert Poll 1982-2010*” (2010)

Based on the table above, it is clear that none of the presidents who were close to Lincoln in the presidential timeline received particularly high scores in the ranking systems. In fact, there seems to be a trend where the presidents who preceded Lincoln have rankings that steadily decrease leading up to Lincoln himself. The presidents who succeed Lincoln show a slow increase in their rankings with the exception of President Grant. This trend continues for a little bit if you look beyond the immediate three presidents before and after Lincoln. I have decided to call this the “Lincoln Effect”. Assuming these rankings are not flawed, this pattern would suggest that, with the exception of Abraham Lincoln, the United States suffered a 30-year period of inadequate presidents. I find it hard to believe that the United States simply could not elect a capable president for thirty straight years. Instead, I believe that the presidents during this time period were harshly judged because of how difficult it was to run the country during the pre and post Civil War eras and because of how well President Lincoln did with his handling of the Civil War. If only Buchanan’s score was affected by President Lincoln’s proximity, then I would

believe it to be a fluke. Even with Johnson's poor ranking this theory could be blamed on mere coincidence. But there is a clear pattern in the scores received by the presidents preceding and succeeding Lincoln.

Conclusion:

When I first started my research I hypothesized that the changes made in five of the categories from the Siena Poll would boost President Buchanan's overall score to the point that he would not be one of the worst five presidents of all time. The changes I made based on quantitative analysis ended up boosting Buchanan two spots in the Siena Poll rankings making him the 40th best president of all time. This leaves him at exactly the fourth worst president. Although my hypothesis was did not prove to be true, there is evidence that further reevaluations of James Buchanan in the remaining fifteen categories could propel him into the middle of the rankings and out of the bottom five.

James Buchanan was a well-educated president who never lost a political election. He was as prepared as any person possibly could have been for the presidency with his years of experience and the support of his political party. He is poorly ranked because of the flawed systems that have evaluated his presidency. A ranking system based on opinion or qualitative analysis will always be defective. Buchanan is notoriously associated with the secession movement, an ineffective pre-Civil War government, and his inability to prevent conflict between the North and South. It is true that Buchanan was the president during the pre-Civil War era and that a lot of unfortunate events transpired during his term. However, bad things do happen to good people. The problems that Buchanan was blamed for were out of his control. He alone could not prevent the Civil War or the secession of the southern states. In fact, most of the

tension that led up to the Civil War was caused by events that occurred before Buchanan took office. There are some problems that cannot be fixed. Buchanan did the best that he could with what he had. He was an intelligent and capable man faced with impossible circumstances. The current ranking systems do not seem to portray this message. When the evaluations are based on quantitative data the results tend to be friendlier towards President Buchanan. Although he floundered in his circumstances, he could have flourished in a different time. Finally, it is important to separate the individual from the content when making judgments.

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