

## DR. ROBERT E. DUNKER ANNUAL LECTURE

This series is named in honor of Dr. Robert E. Dunker, president emeritus of Western Iowa Tech Community College and founder of The Institute for Lifelong Learning.

### Two Spectacular Failures

Every president has faced obstacles and opportunities in his presidency. Seeing how he tackled or avoided those problems or how well he managed to move people forward defines that era in American history.

Each semester, the Dr. Robert E. Dunker Lecture series uses history to illuminate a president's methods of leadership. But this term we will examine two spectacular failures of leadership to see what caused their failures. Did the fault lie with the president or the times?

Join historian Russ Gifford for a look at the presidency that saw America split apart, and a later presidency that failed to draw the country together. These are the bookends of the years of the American Civil War. They offer vital messages on leadership and the consequences of failure of leadership.



### Part 1: James Buchanan: Tragic Circumstances or Failed Leader?

To some, James Buchanan's story offers hallmarks of a Greek tragedy: a tireless public servant overwhelmed by the tide of events beyond his control. Others see Buchanan as an inept president whose strategies caved to Southern demands. His willingness to meet those demands fueled additional ultimatums, leading eventually to secession. No matter which of these scenarios you agree with, historians perpetually rank James Buchanan at the bottom of the list of past presidents. Is that fair?

Buchanan's résumé entering the presidency gleamed. His experiences included time in the House of Representatives and later the Senate. He served as an ambassador and as Secretary of State, where he negotiated difficult international treaties, always in pursuit of peace. He entered the presidency at a dangerous time that would require the skills of a diplomat. Yet, he could not persuade his own countrymen to choose a path that did not lead to the breakup of the Union. In this lecture, we will examine how Buchanan practiced leadership to overcome the problems of a country divided on an issue that had perplexed the founding fathers.

Clearly, Buchanan was a deep thinker. As we will see, he devised complex strategies he believed would put the issue of disagreements about slavery away forever! What was his vision? Was he unable to communicate that vision or was his analysis of the situation wrong?

Leadership matters. Buchanan's story encompasses the last years before the eruption of the bloody conflict that forever changed America. His presidency stands as a marker to demonstrate what happens when politics – the process of finding common ground between various factions – fails. Bad leadership has consequences. Join **Russ Gifford** and journey back to the last moments before the impending crisis to evaluate the leadership and the results of James Buchanan.

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 24; 6 TO 8 P.M.**

**Location:** Cargill Auditorium, Entrance 14, Lot 4

**Fee:** No charge / **Max:** 200

Lifelong Learning membership not required

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### Part 2: Andrew Johnson: Impossible Situation or Failed Leader?

Does history change? Why revisit old stories of times past? Andrew Johnson's story is a president unfairly impeached by an overreaching House, saved from removal by one single vote shy of the two-thirds in the Senate trial. History books written after the turn of the 20th century took the line that this single vote saved, not only Johnson, but preserved the balance of power between the three arms of government provided in the Constitution.

One single vote saved Johnson, meaning almost a majority of the Senate clearly felt Johnson deserved removal from office for his actions. In hindsight we can see the law Johnson defied was unconstitutional. The Supreme Court agreed but not until 60 years had passed. The long wait shows the tensions of the times.

Our experience of history says the country pulls together following an act of terrorism, such as the one that propelled Johnson into the presidency. So what aspects of Johnson's leadership were lacking that he failed so miserably?

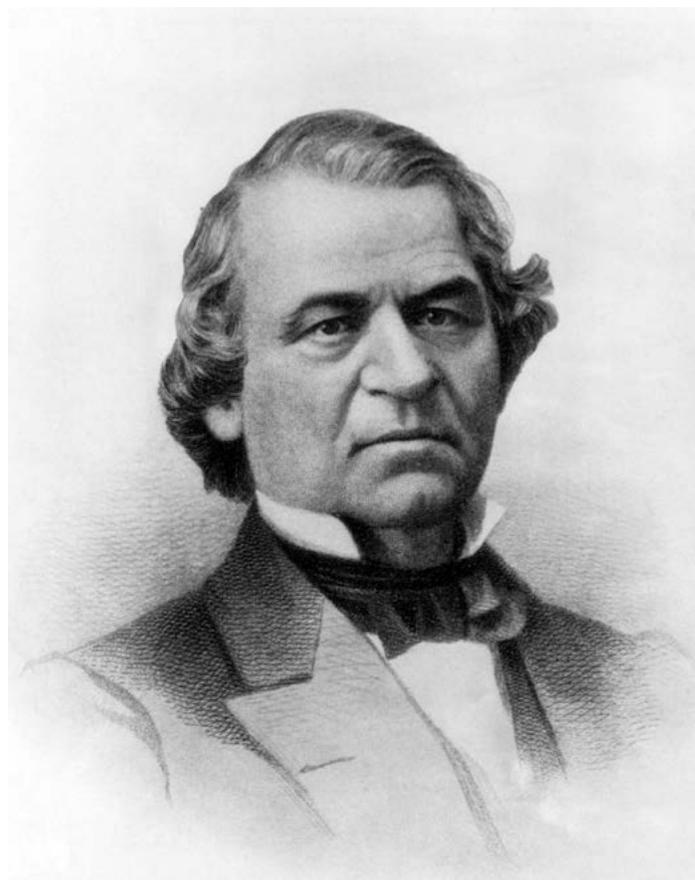
The concept that congress was overstepping uses Abraham Lincoln's own words to back Johnson's actions. Lincoln argued that we must "let them up easy" when speaking of bringing the Southern rebels back into the union of states. But unlike Lincoln, Johnson's reasoning for lenient treatment stems from his own life-long support of slavery. Johnson opposed secession, but he openly avowed his intention to prevent the equalization of freed slaves with whites.

Following Lincoln's assassination, the effort to reunite the country fell to Johnson. At least, he thought so. Johnson's vision of reconstruction eased the return of the states to the union. His policies also allowed openly racist politicians and former confederate leaders to serve in these new state governments, which enacted black codes to prevent former slaves from participating in state government and society. Congress vehemently disagreed. They created the 14th Amendment to guarantee former slaves the rights of citizens to counter the black codes. However, all but one of the Southern state governments created under Johnson's reconstruction act rejected the amendment.

Congress created their own version of reconstruction with stricter rules, military occupation, and strong laws against black codes. Johnson promptly vetoed it. Johnson then did something unheard of at that time. He left to campaign directly to the people, urging supporters to elect sympathetic congressmen in the upcoming off year elections of 1866! Johnson's efforts to find support failed. The

new congress overrode his veto. Johnson continued to use his power to obstruct congress by forbidding his cabinet officers from enforcing the new congressional law. After a series of actions on both sides, Johnson's second removal of Secretary of War Edwin Stanton triggered a successful impeachment in the House, setting up the climactic battle in the Senate.

While he failed, his delay of the efforts of reconstruction with meaningful rights for freed slaves had consequences for the decades following the Civil War and on to this day. Does a president have a right to order government departments not to enforce a law? Join historian **Russ Gifford** and examine Johnson's story and the larger issues still in play today.



**FRIDAY, APRIL 26, NOON TO 2 P.M.**

**Location:** Cargill Auditorium, Entrance 14, Lot 4

**Fee:** No charge / **Max:** 200

Lifelong Learning membership not required