



# **1858: Abraham Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, Ulysses S. Grant and the War They Failed to See**

*Bruce Chadwick*

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"Highly recommended—a gripping narrative of the critical year of 1858 and the nation's slide toward disunion and war. Chadwick is especially adept at retelling the intense emotions of this critical time, particularly especially in recounting abolitionist opposition to the Fugitive Slave Act and Jefferson Davis's passionate defense of this institution. For readers seeking to understand how individuals are agents of historical change will find Chadwick's account of the failed leadership of President James Buchanan, especially compelling."

-G. Kurt Piehler, author of "Remembering War the American Way" and Associate Professor of History, The University of Tennessee

1858 explores the events and personalities of the year that would send the America's North and South on a collision course culminating in the slaughter of 630,000 of the nation's young men, a greater number than died in any other American conflict. The record of that year is told in seven separate stories, each participant, though unaware, is linked to the oncoming tragedy by the central, though ineffective, figure of that time, the man in the White House, President James Buchanan.

The seven figures who suddenly leap onto history's stage and shape the great moments to come are: Jefferson Davis, who lived a life out of a Romantic novel, and who almost died from herpes simplex of the eye; the disgruntled Col. Robert E. Lee, who had to decide whether he would stay in the military or return to Virginia to run his family's plantation; William Tecumseh Sherman, one of the great Union generals, who had been reduced to running a roadside food stand in Kansas; the uprising of eight abolitionists in Oberlin, Ohio, who freed a slave apprehended by slave catchers, and set off a fiery debate across America; a dramatic speech by New York Senator William Seward in Rochester, which foreshadowed the civil war and which seemed to solidify his hold on the 1860 Republican Presidential nomination; John Brown's raid on a plantation in Missouri, where he freed several slaves, and marched them eleven hundred miles to Canada, to be followed a year later by his catastrophic attack on Harper's Ferry; and finally, Illinois Senator Steven Douglas' seven historic debates with little-known Abraham Lincoln in the Illinois Senate race, that would help bring the ambitious and determined Lincoln to the Presidency of the United States.

As these stories unfold, the reader learns how the country reluctantly stumbled towards that moment in April 1861 when the Southern army opened fire on Fort Sumter.

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