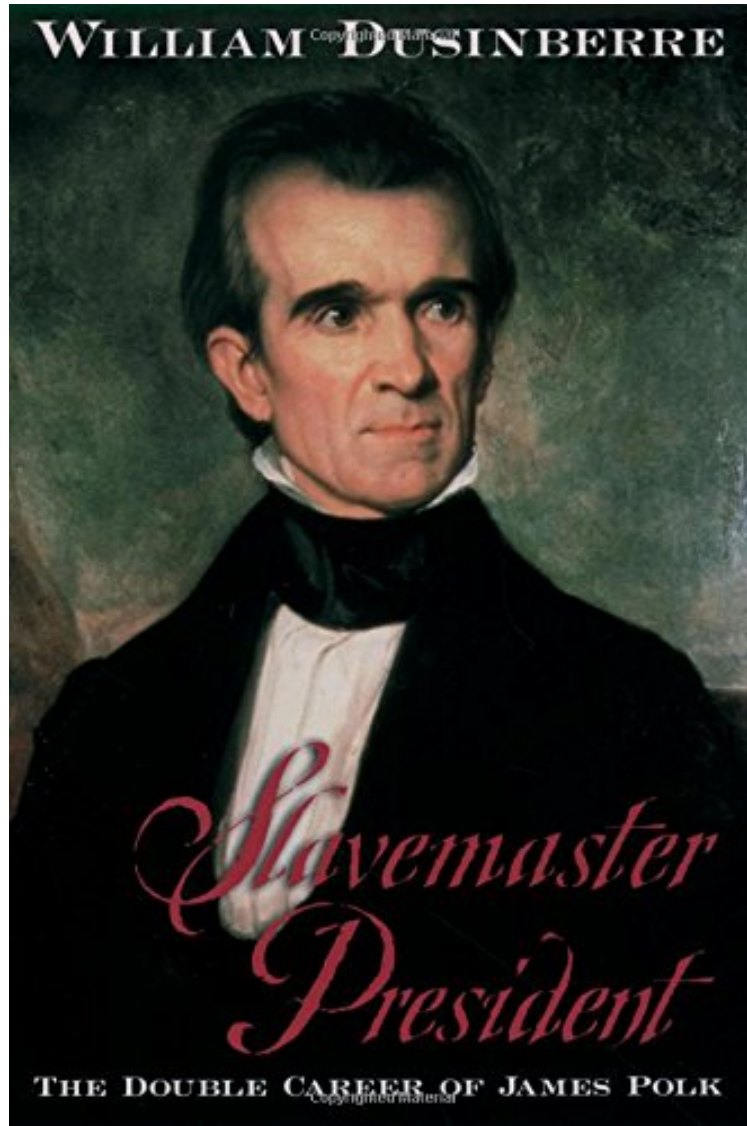


[Mobile book] Slavemaster President: The Double Career of James Polk

Slavemaster President: The Double Career of James Polk

William Dusinberre

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#2542915 in Books William Dusinberre 2003-03-27 Original language: English PDF # 1 6.20 x 1.10 x 9.301, 1.16 #File Name: 0195157354272 pages Slavemaster President The Double Career of James Polk | File size: 63.Mb

William Dusinberre : Slavemaster President: The Double Career of James Polk before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Slavemaster President: The Double Career of James Polk:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Customer Not far into this one yet - but good so far 6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Polk as a short-sighted failure By John B. Maggiore James Polk is usually

the least familiar president to appear on historians' top 10 lists. But for William Dusinger, Polk firmly holds a spot near the very bottom. For Dusinger, Polk and his ideological brethren set the country on a course that unnecessarily led to the Civil War, the violent fall of the South, and the self-destruction of his own class. Polk annexed Texas and was the instigator of the Mexican American War, which led to acquisition of most of the southwest for the United States. Polk also took the Oregon territory, which encompassed much of what is now the northwestern United States. Dusinger suggests that there was a certain inevitability to some of this, but the way it all played out, and the final border results were far from certain. Polk's overly aggressive expansionism was, to Dusinger the worst possible way for the country to stretch from sea to shining sea because it infused militarism and obstinacy into the debate about the future of slavery. Dusinger convincingly argues that Polk's, and the Southern ruling classes' mores about slavery as a tool of social order, southern honor, and states rights were all subservient to the economic benefits reaped by slave owners such as Polk. This economic incentive was so great, that it blinded Polk to what Dusinger believes to be the inevitable fall of slavery. A more forward-looking advocate of the Southern ruling class could have promoted a plan for a soft landing and perhaps sought alliances with moderates, rather than painting everyone who had any problems with slavery as extreme "abolitionists." Polk's military adventurism, intolerance for even discussion of issues related to slavery, and insistence that slave owners' so-called rights should be expanded (or the South would lose its dominance in the Senate) was coupled by his implicit threat of secession in the event of almost any sort of compromise. Dusinger argues that before Polk and his war, different gradations of opinion existed in the south, but afterward existed only unthought. The Civil War followed. *SLAVEMASTER PRESIDENT* is not really a biography as much as it is a study of how slave ownership may have affected the ideology of pre-Civil War southern Democrats such as and including Polk, and how that ideology in turn contributed to the conditions that led to the Civil War. It is a compelling argument. Dusinger also achieves a heart-rending description of slave life on the Polk plantation. The book achieves what it set out to do. Still, I would have liked the book to be a bit more biographical. Dusinger explains up front that his book "does not discuss Polk's role as a congressman in President Andrew Jackson's war against the Bank of the United States. Nor does it portray President Polk's part in securing the Tariff of 1846, nor his diplomacy with Britain, which led to the establishment of the northwestern boundary dividing the United States from Canada. These stories," explains Dusinger, "have been told elsewhere." Maybe they have, but there is remarkably little popular literature on this influential, if wrongheaded president. I am satisfied with Dusinger's book such that it is, but it also left me wanting to read more about Polk. 14 of 14 people found the following review helpful. Not a page turner, but certainly a worthwhile read. By Paul Tognetti For American history buffs in general, and Civil War enthusiasts in particular, William Dusinger has produced a volume worthy of your attention. Dusinger argues with great vigor that James Polk helped to plant the seeds of civil war while he was President during the late 1840's. While pursuing the Presidency, Polk presented himself as a moderate on the issue of slavery. All the while, he was quietly engaged in the buying and selling of slaves for his Mississippi plantation. Dusinger argues that throughout his four years in office, Polk advocated policies designed to perpetuate slavery for the foreseeable future. He cites in particular the annexation of Texas as a major issue. The book also chronicles the appalling working and living conditions many slaves were forced to live under and the total disregard that most slavemasters (Polk included) for the slaves family lives. In most instances, if it was a profitable transaction, slaves were sold off to the highest bidder and families were torn apart. Polk always portrayed himself as the benevolent master but the facts seem to dispute his claims. "Slavemaster President: The Double Career of James Polk" can be slow moving and at times I wondered if I would have the endurance to finish it. But I am glad I did. This book gives us an entirely new perspective on the events of that period and as such is a welcome addition.

James Polk was President of the United States from 1845 to 1849, a time when slavery began to dominate American politics. Polk's presidency coincided with the eruption of the territorial slavery issue, which within a few years would lead to the catastrophe of the Civil War. Polk himself owned substantial cotton plantations-- in Tennessee and later in Mississippi-- and some 50 slaves. Unlike many antebellum planters who portrayed their involvement with slavery as a historical burden bestowed onto them by their ancestors, Polk entered the slave business of his own volition, for reasons principally of financial self-interest. Drawing on previously unexplored records, *Slavemaster President* recreates the world of Polk's plantation and the personal histories of his slaves, in what is arguably the most careful and vivid account to date of how slavery functioned on a single cotton plantation. Life at the Polk estate was brutal and often short. Fewer than one in two slave children lived to the age of fifteen, a child mortality rate even higher than that on the average plantation. A steady stream of slaves temporarily fled the plantation throughout Polk's tenure as absentee slavemaster. Yet Polk was in some respects an enlightened owner, instituting an unusual incentive plan for his slaves and granting extensive privileges to his most favored slave. Startlingly, Dusinger shows how Polk sought to hide from public knowledge the fact that, while he was president, he was secretly buying as many slaves as his plantation revenues permitted. Shortly before his sudden death from cholera, the president quietly drafted a new will, in which he expressed the hope that his slaves might be freed--but only after he and his wife were both dead. The very next day, he authorized the purchase, in strictest secrecy, of six more very young slaves. By contrast with Senator John

C. Calhoun, President Polk has been seen as a moderate Southern Democratic leader. But DusiBerre suggests that the president's political stance toward slavery-- influenced as it was by his deep personal involvement in the plantation system-- may actually have helped precipitate the Civil War that Polk sought to avoid.

"A good look at the very hard, often harsh, conditions on a new plantation in a frontier area."--CHOICE" This is a striking and important book. James K. Polk tried to keep his activities as a slaveowner and absentee planter separate from his public life as a politician and, eventually, president. William DusiBerre brings the two sides of Polk's career together again. He has done more than anyone else to examine the lives of Polk's slaves, and reveals often-disturbing evidence about the harshness of their conditions. He also shows how Polk's perspectives as a planter shaped his administration's expansionist policies. This will be essential reading for all interested in the debate on slavery and the origins of the Civil War."--Christopher Clark, University of Warwick" Slavemaster President is a powerful combination of careful research, clear prose, and controlled passion. At the core of the book is a meticulous reconstruction of James Knox Polk's cotton plantation. But DusiBerre is after much bigger analytical fish than a single case study would suggest: he uses Polk as a launching pad for a full-scale reinterpretation of the antebellum South. In so doing, he reintegrates the social and political history of southern slave society, bringing us closer than ever to understanding precisely how the politics of slavery led ultimately to Civil War."--James Oakes, The Graduate Center, City University of New York" No other study that I can think of juxtaposes so revealingly the personal experiences of the enslaved with those of their enslaver, or the career of a slaveholder with the leadership of a president. By bringing to life the world of the enslaved people for whom James K. Polk was responsible even as Polk himself became responsible for slavery's westward expansion, DusiBerre presents a truly original synthesis of biography and social history that challenges us to reexamine the politics of the sectional conflict."--James Brewer Stewart, Macalester College

About the Author William DusiBerre is author of the award-winning *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps*.