

Trump, Buchanan, Jackson and the Civil War

Slavery couldn't be finessed or negotiated to resolution as President Trump imagines.



A statue by Clark Mills, in Lafayette Park, Washington, DC, of President Andrew Jackson riding his horse. PHOTO: ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

May 10, 2017 5:08 p.m. ET

Had James Buchanan applied Andrew Jackson's more confrontational approach to the secession crisis, it is likely that Civil War would have come sooner rather than await the accession of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency. James S. Robbins ("[James Buchanan Was No Andrew Jackson](#)," op-ed, May 3) seems to have forgotten that for the South Lincoln's election appeared to empower an abolitionist, whereas Old Hickory at least had been a good-old boy, a southern slave owner himself, which gave him a certain cache in dealing with nullification. Six states

followed South Carolina's lead in seceding, not because of Buchanan's lassitude, but because of their fear of Lincoln.

Although Lincoln had proclaimed initially that the Civil War was to be fought to preserve the Union, its true underlying cause was the issue of slavery, which couldn't be finessed or negotiated to resolution as President Trump imagines. In this sense, Buchanan was right that there was nothing he could do short of war to prevent secession, something not in the prerogative of a lame duck. And so Mr. Trump does not actually have a point, as Mr. Robbins asserts.

Albion M. Urdank

UCLA

Los Angeles