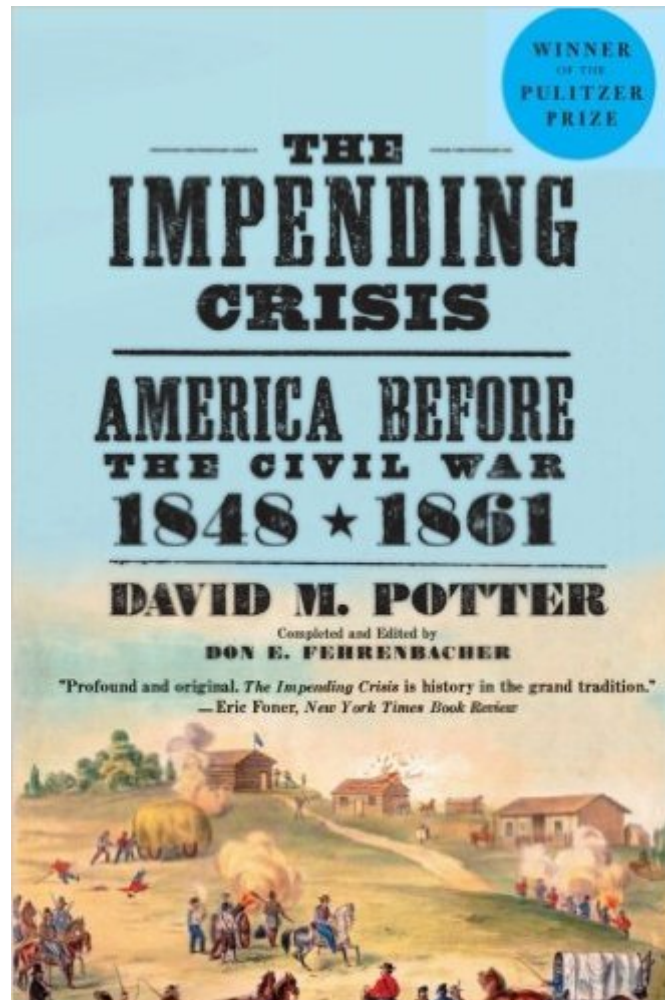


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The Impending Crisis, 1848–1861



Synopsis

David M. Potter's Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Impending Crisis* is the definitive history of antebellum America. Potter's sweeping epic masterfully charts the chaotic forces that climaxed with the outbreak of the Civil War: westward expansion, the divisive issue of slavery, the Dred Scott decision, John Brown's uprising, the ascension of Abraham Lincoln, and the drama of Southern secession. Now available in a new edition, *The Impending Crisis* remains one of the most celebrated works of American historical writing.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Abraham Lincoln's 1860 election as President of the United States was the catalyst that set off the American Civil War, but this book traces the political processes that led to that result during the just over a decade between the end of the Mexican War in 1848 and the start of the Civil War with the firing on Fort Sumner in 1861. Today it is easy to look back and regard the entire process as inevitable. What David Potter does in this classic, first published in 1976, is present the politics behind each step that pushed the sections of the country apart over the slavery issue. One apparent mystery has been what drove the astute politician Stephen Douglas to force through legislation tearing up the Compromise of 1820, which had extended a line from Missouri westward, north of which slavery would not be permitted. It was a colossal blunder that opened what had been a more or less settled issue, fanning the flames of sectionalism needlessly. His Kansas-Nebraska Act opened those territories, north of the line, to a concept of popular sovereignty, in which those

supposedly living in the territories would be allowed to vote on the issue. This may have sounded democratic, but it led to a wave of Abolitionist settlers from New England, and pro-slavery visitors from neighboring Missouri, resulting in "Bleeding Kansas", with attacks and massacres from both sides, and very little democracy. Potter shows that Douglas started from a powerful need to organize the territories so a Pacific railroad could be built, preferably from Chicago in his home state of Illinois. That simple point of departure led him into a series of moves that only deepened the sectional divide.

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