

2 The Drums of War

★ Section Focus

★ **Key Term** Confederate States of America

★ **Main Idea** Following the election of Abraham Lincoln as President, the states of the lower South seceded from the Union and formed their own government. The Civil War began when the South attacked Fort Sumter.

★ **Objectives** As you read, look for answers to these questions:

- ★ 1. What part did the issue of slavery play in the election of 1860?
- ★ 2. Why did Lincoln's election cause the southern states to secede?

As the election year of 1860 opened, the South was in an uproar. Thousands were joining military companies. Rumors of slave insurrections and abolitionist invaders abounded. Every Yankee was an enemy. Some northerners were tarred and feathered, and a few were lynched.

THE ELECTION OF 1860

The widening chasm between North and South ripped apart the Democratic Party. At the party convention in Charleston, southern Democrats insisted that the platform call for the protection of slavery in the territories. But Stephen Douglas, who controlled a majority of the delegates, refused to abandon the principle of popular sovereignty. The convention then moved to Baltimore. Northern Democrats chose Douglas as their candidate. Southern Democrats, meeting in a convention hall across town, nominated John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky.

With the Democrats divided, the Republicans knew that they had a good chance at winning the

presidency. There was great excitement at their makeshift wooden convention hall in Chicago. The galleries were filled with spectators instructed to shout as loudly as they could for their own candidates. The delegates adopted a platform that called for limiting the extension of slavery. On the third ballot they nominated Abraham Lincoln for President.

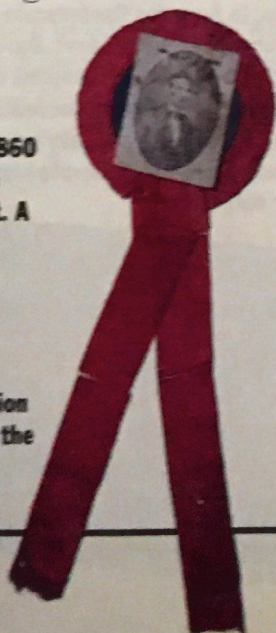
A fourth party, the Constitutional Union Party, nominated John Bell of Tennessee. Bell favored compromise and moderation as a way of saving the Union.

The election of 1860 was really two different races, one in the North and one in the South. In the North the main contenders were Lincoln and Douglas. In the South they were Breckinridge and Bell. Lincoln and Breckinridge were on the extremes, the one against any extension of slavery, the other for protecting slavery in the territories. Douglas and Bell were moderates who hoped to save the Union through compromise.

The election results made it clear that the nation was no longer in a mood to compromise. Lincoln won with 60 percent of the northern vote and a majority of the electoral vote. Breckinridge carried most of the South. Douglas and Bell did well only in the border states—the states between North and South.

Mass hysteria swept through the South upon the Republican victory. Lincoln's election, southerners were certain, meant their ruin. They foresaw slave insurrections and dreaded the effect of northern majority rule. The vote for Lincoln had been, one southerner said, "a deliberate, cold-blooded insult and outrage" to southern honor.

Lincoln supporters at the 1860 Republican convention wore ribbons like the one at right. A split between northern and southern Democrats helped Lincoln become President. Although 1.9 million people voted for Lincoln, his three opponents received 2.8 million votes. **POLITICS** Why might the election be described as an indirect vote on slavery?



SECESSION AND CONFEDERACY

Southern radicals saw no alternative but to secede from the Union. Lincoln had never claimed he would abolish slavery altogether; he had only said that it should not spread to the territories. But few in the South listened. They assumed that the new President planned to free the slaves.

South Carolina led the way, seceding from the Union on December 20, 1860. In its "Declaration of the Causes of Secession," the South Carolina legislature justified its action on the basis of states' rights. According to this argument, the states had voluntarily joined the Union and had therefore the right to leave the Union. With Lincoln's forthcoming inauguration, the declaration stated, "The slaveholding states will no longer have the power of self-government, or self-protection, and the federal government will have become their enemy. . . ."

During the next eight weeks Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas voted to secede from the Union. It was a revolution fed by passion and emotion. "You might as well attempt

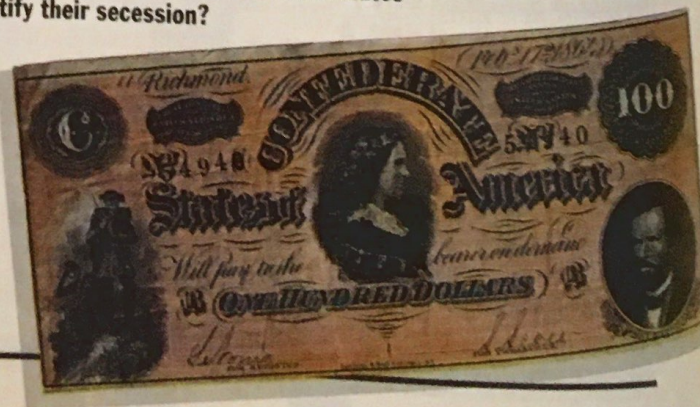
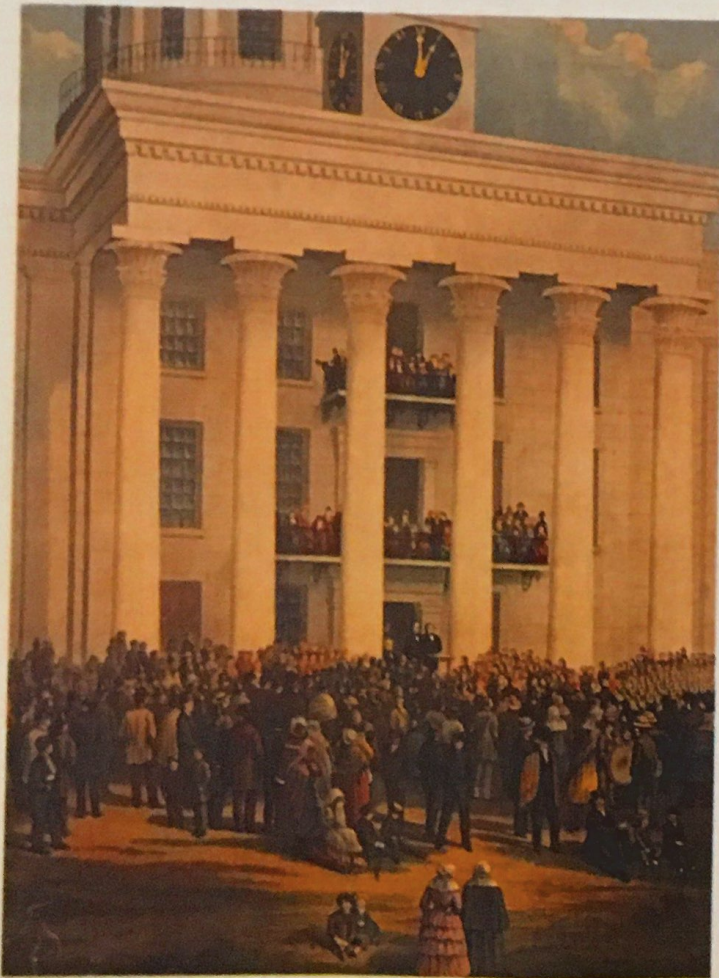
to control a tornado as to attempt to stop them," a southerner observed. The seceding states established a new nation, the **Confederate States of America**, in February 1862. For president they chose Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, and for vice president, Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia. Secession, Jefferson Davis pointed out, was necessary to "renew such sacrifices as our fathers made to the holy cause of constitutional liberty."

But how could the Confederacy talk about liberty and hold 3.5 million black people in bondage? The Confederate constitution answered the question bluntly. "Our new government is founded . . . upon the great truth that the Negro is not equal to the white man," Stephens wrote. Liberty, in other words, was for white people only.

Jefferson Davis also spoke bluntly about the South's economic dependence on slaves. The South could not afford to give up property worth many millions of dollars. Nor could southern agriculture be expected to continue without slaves. Davis argued that slavery was "absolutely necessary to the wants of civilized man."

Yet only about one-fourth of the white families of the Confederacy owned slaves. What about the other three-fourths? Why should they be willing to fight the battles of the slaveholders? For many, the answer was simple: to protect hearth and homeland. As one Confederate soldier later told his Yankee captor, "I'm fighting because you're down here."

Representatives from the seceding states convened in Montgomery, Alabama, to form the Confederate States of America. They elected Jefferson Davis president. Davis's inauguration took place on the steps of Montgomery's capitol building in 1862. Because it lacked hard currency, the new Confederate government issued paper money, such as the treasury note below. **NATIONAL IDENTITY** How did the Confederate states justify their secession?



THE STATES CHOOSE SIDES



MAP SKILLS

When the Civil War began, most southern states quickly joined the Confederacy. Which border states remained in the Union? How many states were there on each side? **CRITICAL THINKING** What special difficulties might border states have faced?

THE NORTHERN RESPONSE

The idea that states had the right to defy the national government was hardly new. It had been asserted in the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions of 1798–1799 as well as by South Carolina during the nullification controversy of 1828–1832. Now, however, most northerners rejected the principle.

President Buchanan, although he sympathized with the southern cause, spoke for the majority. The Constitution of the United States, Buchanan said, was the supreme law of the land. If secession were permitted, the Union would become “a rope of sand.” He warned that the 33 states could break up “into as many petty, jarring, and hostile republics.” Abraham Lincoln, soon to take office, agreed with Buchanan. “The Union is older than any of the states,” said Lincoln, “and, in fact, it created them as states.”

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—Abraham Lincoln, 1861

Secession also raised the issue of democracy and majority rule. From the South’s point of view, majority rule was a threat to liberty. The unrestricted right of the majority to dictate to the minority was nothing less than tyranny, southerners said.

The North saw it differently. James Russell Lowell, a poet and essayist, complained that after being “defeated overwhelmingly before the people,” southerners were now questioning “the right of the majority to govern.” He added, “Their quarrel is not with the Republican Party, but with the theory of democracy.”

THE FAILURE OF COMPROMISE

As war threatened, Congress made one last attempt to reach a compromise. Senator John J. Crittenden of Kentucky proposed to restore the Missouri Compromise line of 36°30’ as the division between free and slave states and territories. Lincoln, however, would have none of it. From Springfield he wrote a friend, “The tug has to come, and better now than later.” The Republicans refused to allow the extension of slavery, and the South would have no less. The compromise failed.

“Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection.”

—Abraham Lincoln, 1861

As Lincoln’s inauguration approached, the nation waited. What would he do? In his First Inaugural Address, Lincoln made public his position. He told the audience that he had no intention of interfering with slavery in the states where it already existed. But he also asserted that “the Union of these states is perpetual.” No state, he said, could lawfully withdraw from the Union.

Lincoln announced that he would use the power of the federal government “to hold, occupy, and possess the property, and places belonging to the government, and to collect the duties and imposts.” Yet Lincoln did not want to provoke war. “There will be no invasion,” Lincoln said, “no using of force against, or among the people anywhere.” Lincoln urged calmness. “We are not enemies, but friends,” he concluded. “Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection.”

CRISIS AT FORT SUMTER

Once in office, Lincoln faced a crucial decision: what to do about Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor and Fort Pickens in the harbor of Pensacola, Florida. Each needed supplies. In January 1861, President Buchanan had sent a ship carrying supplies and reinforcements to Fort Sumter, but it turned back when fired upon by South Carolina batteries. Now time was running out for Major Robert Anderson and his garrison at Fort Sumter. If Lincoln withdrew the garrison, he would be recognizing the Confederacy. If he supplied the garrison, he risked war. On April 6, 1861, Lincoln announced that he was sending relief expeditions to both Fort Sumter and Fort Pickens.

Lincoln’s announcement meant he intended to fight if necessary. Confederate leaders decided to attack Fort Sumter before the supply ship arrived. At 4:30 A.M. on April 12, 1861, the shore guns opened fire on the island fort. For 33 hours the Confederates fired shells into the fort, until its

walls were partly demolished and the officers’ quarters were on fire. Anderson had kept his 128 men well under cover, firing only the lowest tier of guns at the Confederates. But the gunners were choking from the smoke, and the fire threatened to reach the fort’s supplies of gunpowder. Anderson then lowered the Stars and Stripes and surrendered to the Confederates. No one had been killed, but the Civil War had begun.

COULD WAR HAVE BEEN AVOIDED?

Historians have long debated the causes of the Civil War. Was slavery the cause of the war? Or economic differences? Or constitutional differences? Or even bungling leadership?

For decades the South and North had been different, and for decades they had compromised their differences. Compromise, however, no longer seemed possible after 1860 because of the intense disagreement over slavery and the deep distrust of one section toward the other.

Could the war have been avoided, or was it inevitable? Some historians claim that it could have been avoided with more skillful leadership. The historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., however, concluded that it was inevitable. “The unhappy fact is that man occasionally works himself into a log-jam; and that the log-jam must be burst by violence,” Schlesinger has written. “Nothing exists in history to assure us that the great moral dilemmas can be resolved without pain.”

SECTION REVIEW

- 1. KEY TERM** Confederate States of America
- 2. PEOPLE AND PLACES** John C. Breckinridge, John Bell, Jefferson Davis, John J. Crittenden, Fort Sumter
- 3. COMPREHENSION** What did the election of 1860 reveal about the political sentiments of North and South?
- 4. COMPREHENSION** Why did the election of Lincoln alarm the South?
- 5. CRITICAL THINKING** Compare the South’s reasons for leaving the Union with the American colonies’ reasons for breaking with Britain.