



SECESSION AND WAR



The Confederate Bombardment of Fort Sumter, 1861

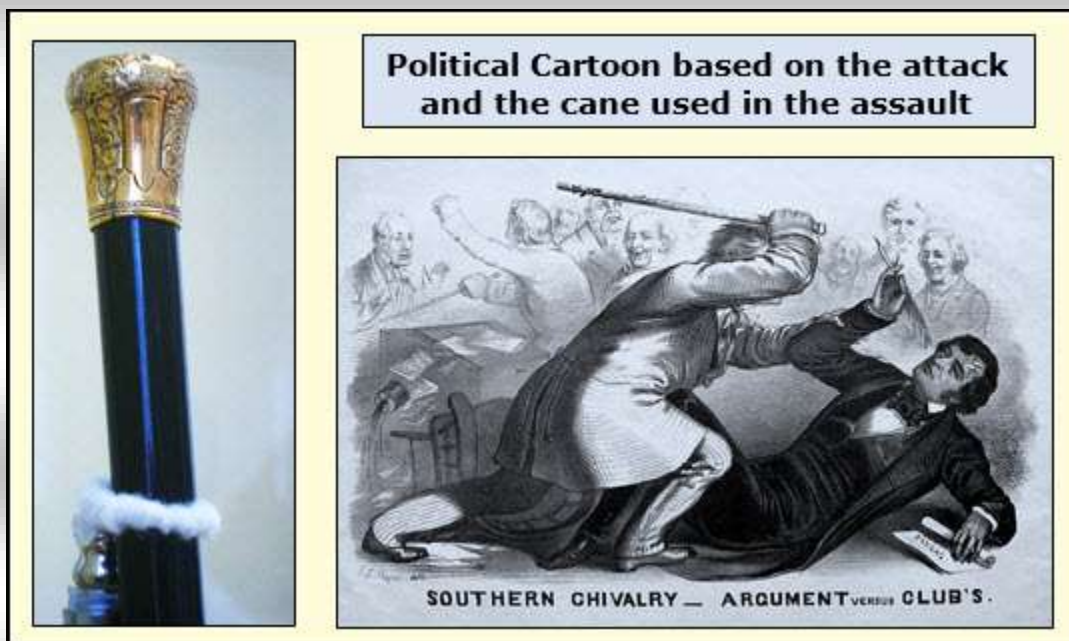
Unit Overview

As the country prepared for the presidential election of 1860, the relationship between the North and the South continued to deteriorate. For many southern whites, it marked a critical moment. Events at Harper's Ferry encouraged fears throughout the South of a slave rebellion led by northern abolitionists. When the Republican Party, which included a number of well-known antislavery activists, took a strong stand against the spread of slavery into the western territories, southerners saw it as a major threat to their way of life. When Lincoln won the White House, the South believed that it had no choice but to secede from the Union. Let's see how it all happened.

Violence in the Senate

By the mid-1850s, Congress found itself deeply divided on the question of slavery. A growing number of senators and representatives took extreme positions on the issue. Proslavery and antislavery radicals delivered fiery speeches on the floor of the House and Senate. Sometimes, they verbally denounced and insulted their colleagues for their views. These attacks were often very personal. In the summer of 1856, anger over these types of statements led to a violent episode in the U.S. Capitol.

Senator **Charles Sumner**, a well-known abolitionist from Massachusetts, spoke before the Senate and condemned the actions of the proslavery forces in Kansas. At the same time, he criticized several southern senators and repeatedly targeted Senator **Andrew Butler** of South Carolina throughout the address. Two days later, **Preston Brooks**, a member of the House of Representatives and Andrew's cousin, entered the Senate chamber. He approached Senator Sumner, who was working at his desk. Representative Butler drew his cane and struck the unsuspecting senator over the head. After repeated blows, Sumner, unconscious and bleeding, fell to the floor. He was hospitalized and did not return to the Senate for three years. Preston Brooks was tried in the District of Columbia where he was fined \$300.00 but served no time in jail.



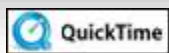
Representative Brooks resigned from the House of Representatives and gave the citizens of his home district in South Carolina an opportunity to elect someone else. Although not all southerners approved of his actions, voters in a special election agreed to return Preston Brooks to Congress. Newspapers across the country carried the details of the story, and most Americans formed definite opinions concerning the Sumner-Brooks affair. Brooks was a hero to many southerners, who viewed defense of one's family as honorable. Most northerners, even those who were not strong abolitionists, were outraged.



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Trouble at Harper's Ferry

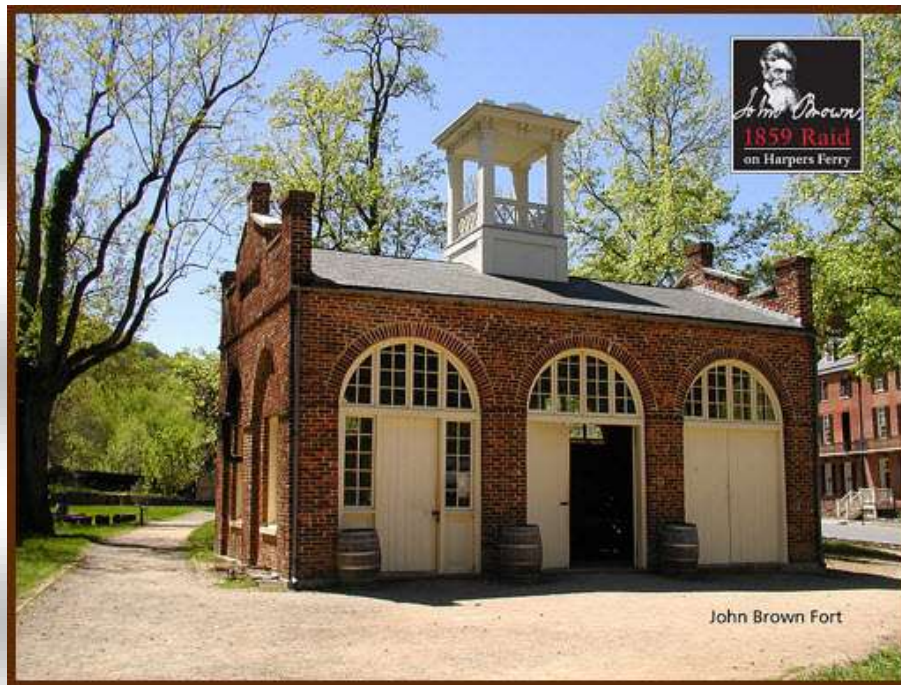
Bleeding Kansas and the Brooks-Sumner affair were not the only events that increased the tension between the North and the South during the late 1850s. Violence also erupted in **Harper's Ferry**, Virginia, located today in West Virginia. **John Brown**, responsible for the deaths of five proslavery supporters in Kansas, planned to start a widespread slave revolt with the goal of freeing African Americans in the South. A group of northern abolitionists gave Brown \$4,000 to finance the scheme. On October 16, 1859, John Brown with eighteen followers put his idea in motion by raiding a federal arsenal in Harper's Ferry. Because the structure housed a large supply of weapons and ammunition, the abolitionist leader hoped to arm the slaves and to pull off the rebellion. He and his followers took several hostages and barricaded themselves in the engine house next to the armory. Learn more about John Brown's Raid by watching the video listed below.



John Brown's Raid on Harper's Ferry

To Brown's disappointment, his forces were easily defeated. The Virginia militia, federal troops and local citizens stormed the engine house and captured the raiders. Brown was tried and convicted of murder and treason. He was executed by hanging for these crimes on December 2. In the North, some antislavery supporters, including several influential Republicans, condemned Brown's use of

violence. Others, however, called him a hero and a **martyr**, a term for someone who gave his life for an important cause. For southerners, the event seemed to be part of a major conspiracy not only to abolish slavery but to take away their rights and to ruin their economy. When they learned that the abolitionists had funded Brown's plans, southern anger reached a new level of intensity. Their fury was also directed against the Republican Party since many northern abolitionists were members. As the presidential election of 1860 approached, Americans wondered if it was possible to keep the Union together.



The Engine House at Harper's Ferry National Park



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The Election of 1860

In the months before the presidential election of 1860, political parties held conventions and chose their candidates. Because of disagreements over slavery and the future of the Union, this was not an easy process. Eventually, the four candidates, listed in the graphic below, emerged.

Presidential Candidates in the Election of 1860		
Candidate	Political Party	Position on Slavery
Abraham Lincoln	Republican	Permitted in the South but not in the territories
John Bell	Constitutional Union	Took no position on the issue
John Breckinridge	Southern Democrats	Regarded slaves as property
Stephen Douglas	Northern Democrats	Based on popular sovereignty

On Election Day, **Abraham Lincoln** won a clear majority in the Electoral College and the presidency. When it came to the popular vote, however, only 40% of the ballots cast were for the Republican contender. Although he won every state in the North, Lincoln received little support from the Border States and none from the South. In fact, several southern states refused to put his name on the ballot. Learn more about the election of 1860 in the video listed below. Even though Republicans promised to leave slavery where it already existed, southerners had no faith in their pledge. On December 20, South Carolina called a special convention, and its members approved the **secession** of the state from the Union.



The Election of 1860



Go to Questions 7 and 8.

A Last-Minute Compromise?

In spite of bitter sectional disagreements, some Americans still hoped to preserve the Union. As South Carolina met to debate the secession question, congressional leaders in Washington D.C. worked frantically to hammer out a workable compromise. On December 18, Kentucky Senator **John Crittenden** suggested the addition of a group of amendments to the U.S. Constitution. Crittenden's plan

protected slavery by extending the old Missouri Compromise line across the continent. This was totally unacceptable to Republicans because they had just won the presidential election by promising to keep slavery out of all western territories. Leaders in the South had no interest in discussing any form of compromise and continued their plans for secession.



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The Formation of the Confederacy

Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas and Mississippi followed South Carolina's example and seceded from the Union in January of 1861.

Representatives from these states and South Carolina assembled in Montgomery, Alabama to form a new nation called the **Confederate States of America**. They named **Jefferson Davis**, a former senator from Mississippi, as their president and wrote a constitution. This document emphasized states' rights and legalized slavery. The delegates also justified their right to leave the Union. They stressed that all states had become part of the United States voluntarily and should be permitted to leave voluntarily. The convention claimed that the U.S. Constitution was a contract and that Congress had violated that agreement by denying citizens their property or, in other words, the right to own slaves in all lands controlled by the federal government.



Jefferson Davis, 1861
Inaugural Address

As a necessity, not a choice, we have resorted to the remedy of separation, and henceforth, our energies must be directed to the conduct of our own affairs, and the continuation of the Confederacy which we have formed. If a just perception of mutual interest shall permit us peaceably to pursue our separate political career, my most earnest desire will have been fulfilled. But if this be denied to us we will be forced to appeal to arms.

Americans had mixed reactions to the departure of the southern states. **President Buchanan**, who remained in office until Abraham Lincoln's inauguration on March 4, sent a message to Congress when the news of South Carolina's secession reached Washington D.C. He said that the southern states had no right to secede but added that he had no power to stop them. In the South, many citizens celebrated with parades and parties, but some worried about the consequences. In the North, a few determined abolitionists declared that they preferred to see the southern states leave the Union than to compromise again on slavery. For the most part, however, northerners believed that the Union had to be preserved even if it required the use of military force.

People in all areas of the country anxiously awaited to hear what the new president would say in his inaugural address. Would Abraham Lincoln take a hard line in respect to the southern states or offer gentler tone? In fact, his speech included both concepts. Lincoln made it clear that the United States would not accept secession, would hold onto its properties in the South and would continue to enforce its laws. At the same time, he pleaded with the southern states to reconsider their decision. Read an excerpt from Lincoln's speech quoted in the graphic below.

One section of our country believes that slavery is right and ought to be extended, while the other believes it is wrong and ought not to be extended. This is the only substantial dispute...Physically speaking, we cannot separate. We cannot remove our respective sections from each other nor build an impassable wall between them. A husband and wife may be divorced and go out of the presence and beyond the reach of each other; but the different parts of our country cannot do this... We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every loving heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

Abraham Lincoln

Inaugural Address, 1861



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Fort Sumter

The South soon challenged President Lincoln's pledge to maintain control of federal property below the Mason-Dixson Line. Although Confederate forces seized several forts in the South, Lincoln did not want to start a war over their capture. On March 5, 1861, the day following his inauguration, the new president received a message from **Major Robert Anderson**, commander of **Fort Sumter**, a U.S. military installation located on an island off the coast of **Charleston, South Carolina**. The dispatch informed the President that the Confederates had demanded the surrender of the fort and warned that Union soldiers within the complex were low on supplies. This put Abraham Lincoln in a difficult position. If he agreed to the surrender of the fort, it would appear that he was accepting the South's right to secede. A defense of the fort, however, would likely start a war.



Fort Sumter before the Confederate Bombardment: 1860

On April 6, President Lincoln contacted **Francis Pickens**, South Carolina's governor, to let him know that unarmed Union ships carrying necessary supplies would soon be arriving at Fort Sumter. He stressed that the vessels would not unload additional soldiers or weapons unless the Confederates fired. Governor Pickens advised President Jefferson Davis and his Cabinet of the situation. They ordered **General P.G.T. Beauregard**, commander of South Carolina's Confederate troops, to attack Fort Sumter before the Union ships, already delayed by high seas, arrived. Although they held out for over thirty-three hours, Major Anderson had little choice but to surrender. On April 14, the American flag over Fort Sumter was replaced with a Confederate one. President Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers to defend the Union. At the same time, Tennessee, Arkansas, North Carolina and Virginia joined the Confederacy. The Border States, including Kentucky, Missouri, Maryland and Delaware, continued to allow slavery but remained in the Union. Nonetheless, their populations were divided over which side to support. The Civil War was underway.



Go to Questions 17 through 19.

North vs South

The North and the South had significant advantages and disadvantages when the war began. The North had a larger population from which to draw soldiers and a better banking system to finance the war effort. The U.S. Navy remained loyal to the Union and gave the North the option of blockading southern ports. The North had factories that could produce uniforms, shoes, blankets and tents. Northern industries included 95% of the country's ironworks that were essential for making cannons and railroad track. Northerners could transport troops, supplies and food along its 22,000 miles of railroad lines with greater efficiency than the South, whose railroad network consisted of 9,000 miles. The North also benefitted by having a strong, national government. The southern dedication to the principle of states' rights resulted in a central government with very little authority. At times, this made it difficult to conduct the war effectively.

The South, however, had its strengths. For the North to win the war, it had to invade the Confederacy, defeat its army and conquer a hostile population. Southerners, who were united in their cause, were fighting on their own land. They knew and understood the terrain and the climate much better than their northern counterparts. When the war started, the South's military leadership was superior to the North's. Military training was a tradition for the sons of southern planters. Some chose one of the South's seven military academies; others went north to attend the United States Military Academy at West Point, located in New York's Hudson River Valley. Although they were officers in the United States Army, **Robert E. Lee, Joseph Johnston, J.E.B. Stuart** and other **West Point** graduates from the South chose to fight for the Confederacy. Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederate States of America, was also a graduate of West Point and was regarded as a Mexican War hero. Southerners were quick to point out that Abraham Lincoln, on the other hand, had served just two months in the Illinois militia and had seen very little action.



Aerial View of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point:

Southerners expected to have the support of Great Britain and other European nations that purchased their cotton. They believed that this would give them the edge that they needed to win the war. To emphasize the importance of their product, they cut off the sale of cotton on the world market in an attempt to shut down textile factories abroad. Cotton growers reasoned that unemployed workers would push their governments to support the Confederacy. In spite of their advantages and disadvantages, both sides were confident of a quick victory in 1861. The North and the South were equally unprepared for length and the devastation of the war.



Go to Questions 20 through 25

What Happened Next?

When the American Civil War began, both sides were confident of a quick victory. By 1862, however, Americans realized that the conflict would be long and deadly. Before moving on to the next unit, review the names and terms found in Unit 33; then, answer Questions 26 through 35.



Go to Questions 26 through 35.