THE SECESSION CRISIS

(OR “YOU MAY THINK YOU ARE FINISHED WITH YOUR PAST BUT YOUR PAST MAY NOT BE FINISHED WITH YOU”)
The election of Abraham Lincoln to the Presidency in November 1860 caused some of the slave holding states to threaten (again), act on or to consider (again) secession from the Union.

Immediately after November election South Carolina calls for a Secession Convention comprised of slaveholding state legislators in December 1860 that vote for secession December 20.

Florida, Georgia and Alabama legislatures authorize secession conferences in December 1860. These would be held in January and February 1861.
- South Carolina immediately begins taking federal forts and federal property
- SC federal government judges, postal workers and other employees resign
- The last federal fort in SC is Fort Sumter in April 1861.
  - SC’s attack on this fort and its surrender spurs Lincoln’s call for 75,000 volunteers and the secession of the middle south and the Civil War
How we got to this point

Political Events before 1860

The Whig Party dissolves and is replaced by the new Republican Party

Caused by loss in 1852 election and Southern Whigs and Northern Whigs not be able to reconcile expansion of slavery into the West

Republican Party a one issue no slavery in new states party

Republican Party made up of ex Whigs and Democrats
Territorial expansion threatened the vision and values of the Party members.

- Vision – a free labor prosperous America leading the world into a democratic republic culture, consistent with the Declaration of Independence and the wishes of the Founders.
- Economic prosperity was the “sinew of power” making America strong against internal rebellion and foreign threats.
- Slavery contradicted the message of freedom that America represented (you think!)
Bloody Kansas shows how the Kansas Nebraska Act of 1854 is unworkable

Democrat Stephen Douglas refuses to support James Buchanan and the LeCompton Constitution and loses support among Southern Democrats.

John Brown’s Harper’s Ferry of 1859 also has the south nervous.
Lincoln elected President as the nominee of the Republican Party
  o Received 39% of the popular vote.
    ▪ Most presidential losers receive more than this.
    ▪ This % significantly reduces any mandate Lincoln may have but not to him
    ▪ Marks end of Southern domination of Presidency
Lincoln gained the nomination at the Party’s June 1860 Chicago convention over William Steward, Salmon Chase and Edward Bates. Seward was an ex Whig, moderate Republican, ex-governor of New York and US Senator, the initial favorite to win the nomination.

- With his long public career, he had his enemies and a public record of being a moderate/radical on slavery.
- He prided himself on his inside Washington political skills and would be instrumental in Washington advancing Lincoln’s views and his own before the inauguration.
Chase was an ex Whig and ex Free Soil party member, ex-governor of Ohio and US Senator, who also was in the running at Chicago.

- With his long public career, he had his enemies and a public record of being a radical on slavery with a long public record.

Edward Bates was an ex-governor of Missouri and a conservative, more tolerant of some territorial expansion of slavery.

Lincoln was a moderate with regard to slavery.
The Republican Platform adopted 17 guiding principles in Chicago that were “restorative” yet “radical”

- #2. That the maintenance of the principles promulgated in the Declaration of Independence and embodied in the Federal Constitution, "That all men are created equal .......

This view and value encompassed a ‘natural rights’ and ‘moral rights’ view of slavery that were irreconcilable with the Slave Power view.
#3. *That to the Union of the States this nation owes its unprecedented increase in population, its surprising development of material resources, its rapid augmentation of wealth, its happiness at home and its honor abroad .... “*

This view and value encompassed a view held by Pubilus of the Federalist Papers, that a Union brought prosperity
#4. That the maintenance inviolate of the rights of the states, and especially the right of each state to order and control its own domestic institutions

This signaled a “hands off” attitude to where slavery currently existed.
It was not comforting to the Southern radicals, rhetorically or substantially.
#7. That the new dogma that the Constitution, of its own force, carries slavery into any or all of the territories of the United States, is a dangerous political heresy.

This is the anti Dred Scott position that so upset the South.
#8. *That the normal condition of all the territory of the United States is that of freedom*

The Party’s approach is backed by a natural law theory.
# 16. *That a railroad to the Pacific Ocean is imperatively demanded by the interests of the whole country*

The purpose of the Kansas Nebraska Act.

Absent – any reference to expansion of the country into Cuba, Mexico or Latin America.
Lincoln beat Stephen Douglas of Illinois representing the Northern Democratic Party, John Breckinridge of Kentucky representing the Southern Democratic Party, and John Bell of Tennessee, representing the Constitutional Union Party.

As obvious, the Democratic Party had split after it failed at its April 1860 Charleston Convention to nominate a candidate.

- Some Southern Democrats and radicals saw this would result in Lincoln’s election and engineered, and rejoiced in, it.
Subsequent Democratic Party nominating conventions were held at Baltimore (Douglas was nominated by Northern Democrats) and Richmond (Breckinridge nominated by Southern Democrats).

The split arose over the affirmation/redaction of the Kansas Nebraska Act of 1854 and whether Dred Scott rights would be diluted.
1860 Northern Democratic Party Platform

- Supported the policies laid out at the 1856 Democratic convention in Cincinnati.
  - This platform promoted limited government and adherence to the 1850 Compromise and Nebraska-Kansas Act.
  - The Party’s 1856 election message was that disunion would come if Fremont were elected.
- Obey Dred Scott decision.
- Democratic party will insure the construction of a railroad to the Pacific coast as soon as possible.
- Supported the acquisition of Cuba, as long as the terms are agreeably to the United States and Spain.
- Attempts to defeat the execution of the Fugitive Slave Law, are hostile, undermine the Constitution, and revolutionary in their effect.
1860 Southern Democratic Platform

- All citizens have an equal right to settle with their property in a Territory.
- Duty of the Federal Government, in all its departments, to protect, when necessary, the rights of persons and property in the Territories, and wherever else its Constitutional authority extends.
o Territories ought to be admitted into the Federal Union, whether its Constitution prohibits or recognizes the institution of Slavery.
- In favor of the acquisition of the island of Cuba

- Personal liberty laws are subversive of the Constitution, and revolutionary in their effect
For construction of a Pacific Railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean, at the earliest practicable moment.
Lincoln wins the election with 39% of popular vote
Many but apparently not a majority of Northern voters agreed that slavery should not expand.
These voters also generally agreed that the federal government could not end slavery where it already existed but that it could prohibit slavery in new territories and states (as Lincoln professed).
In 1860, the North had a population of approximately twenty-three million people to the South's twelve million.
Southerners divided their support between Breckinridge and Bell, while Northerners generally rejected these two candidates.

Douglas provided the only real opposition to Lincoln in the North, but most Northern voters preferred Lincoln's views.

With such a wide difference in population totals, the North controlled the Electoral College and gave Lincoln the victory in the election.
November to December of 1861

- Most Northerners see the secession threat as a bluff though some political leaders see it as a real threat
- Lincoln generally observes a public silence with regard to the impending crisis, referring questions regarding his plans to be answered by his record of writings and speeches
  - Lincoln holds firm to the Republican Platform feeling it necessary to hold together the Republican Party and the advantages this will give him and the nation
Lincoln will follow a consistent strategy between his November election and April 1861 of “masterful inactivity” to allow Unionists in the south to take power and reject secession and for the upper South to reject secession.

- Lincoln will overestimate the strength of Unionists in the south (as will Seward and many conciliars).
This permits James Buchanan to act without comment by Lincoln

- Buchanan is a “doughface” and in his December State of the Union message to Congress states that secession is not permitted under the Constitution but that he has no Constitutional power to stop it.
- He proposed a restoration of the Missouri compromise to calm the South.
- Buchanan has definite sympathies for the South’s states right arguments (as do many Northerners)
- However, Buchanan is non-committal to southern representatives regarding the Union’s reactions to potential southern actions.
- Buchanan is inactive also with regard to the protection of federal property in the south (e.g., Ft. Sumter) not wanting to antagonize the secessionists, much like Lincoln will be.
Lincoln’s Writings and the problem of the South with him

- The Republican Platform
- The House Divided Speech of 1858
  - “A house divided against itself cannot stand. It must be either all on or all the other.”
- The power through patronage that Lincoln and the Republican Party would possess and how it will build an anti-Slavery coalition in the south (Republicans admitted this as a goal)
Lincoln’s silence before inauguration

- Lincoln won on November 6, 1860 but was not inaugurated until March 4, 1861
- He was silent regarding the political crisis referring people to his pre-election writings for his beliefs on the crisis but privately telling his Republican allies to stand firm – no expansion but the current status of slavery would go unchanged
The House and Senate each form their own committees to work out a compromise but fail to do so
- The Crittenden Compromise of the Senate
- The Corwin Adams Compromise and other compromise proposals of the House
- The compromises addressed territorial expansion, fugitive slaves, and slavery in Federal controlled areas
The Crittenden Compromise

Amendments to the United States Constitution

- Slavery would be prohibited in any territory of the United States "now held, or hereafter acquired," north of latitude 36 degrees, 30 minutes line. In territories south of this line, slavery of the African race was "hereby recognized" and could not be interfered with by Congress.

- States would be admitted to the Union from any territory with or without slavery as their constitutions provided (the Kansas Nebraska popular vote solution)

- Congress was forbidden to abolish slavery in places under its jurisdiction within a slave state such as a military post.
Congress could not abolish slavery in the District of Columbia so long as it existed in Virginia and Maryland.

Congress could not prohibit or interfere with the interstate slave trade.

Congress would provide full compensation to owners of rescued fugitive slaves.

No future amendment of the Constitution could change these amendments or authorize or empower Congress to interfere with slavery within any slave state.
Lincoln’s position and strategy

- Position
  - As president his constitutional duty was to protect the Union
  - Hold together the one issue Republican party without compromising the Republican Platform
  - Secession as not permitted under the Constitution
  - Secession as anti-democratic
  - Secession of some could lead to secession of others
  - A slave holding southern country would pose a threat to the remaining Union as it expanded south and grew more powerful
  - New slave states would pose a threat to the Union’s way of life
**Strategy**

- There were strong Union people in the Confederate States who would reconstruct the States.
- Do not do anything to antagonize these Unionists.
- Hence delay.
- The South secessionists are aware of this approach but do not want to fire the 1st shot and can work delay to their benefit by building a government and reinforcing.
- The Congressional representatives from the southern states abandoned the field after their states seceded.
Fort Sumter

Ft. Sumter - actions take the place of words
  1. Charleston federal facilities in November 1861
     - Ft. Sumter – an incomplete federal fort in Charleston harbor designed to protect shipping in this important port
     - Ft. Moultrie – on the northern shore of the harbor, designed for sea attacks, not attack from the west
On December 26, 1860, six days after South Carolina seceded from the Union, U.S. Army Major Robert Anderson abandoned the indefensible Fort Moultrie, spiking its large guns, burning its gun carriages, and taking its smaller cannon with him to be trained on the city.

- He secretly relocated 127 men, 13 of them musicians) of the 1st U.S. Artillery to Fort Sumter on his own initiative, without orders from his superiors.
Anderson thought that providing a stronger defense would delay an attack by South Carolina militia.
The SC representatives who had met with representatives of the Buchanan administration before SC succeeded on December 20, 1860 saw this move as a violation of Buchanan’s implicit agreement to maintain the status quo.
Buchanan sent the *Star of the West* (civilian steamship) to Ft Sumter to transport troops and supplies and the Charleston harbor gunnery fired on it driving it off on January 9, 1861.

- Northern opinion was outraged but this cooled off when Buchanan took no action.
- The Southern radicals disregarded this outrage
• In a letter delivered January 31, 1861, South Carolina Governor Pickens demanded President Buchanan surrender Fort Sumter because "I regard that possession is not consistent with the dignity or safety of the State of South Carolina."

• Jefferson Davis is elected President of the Confederate States of America in February 1861 and takes over authority regarding the Ft Sumter situation.

• Over the next few months repeated calls for evacuation of Fort Sumter from the government of South Carolina and then from Confederate Brigadier General P. G. T. Beauregard were ignored.
Lincoln takes office on March 4, 1861 and is notified that Ft Sumter would run out of food by April 15, 1861,
- Lincoln has multiple Cabinet meetings to discuss his alternatives, stalling at times to allow the pro Unionists to reverse the Secession acts in their states.
- Lincoln is also dealing with threats to Ft Pickens off Pensacola, Florida and wishes to make sure this fort is secure when he makes any decision on Ft Sumter
- Lincoln’s Ft Sumter choices are abandon or retain
• In early April Lincoln orders a fleet of ships, under the command of Gustavus V. Fox, to attempt entry into Charleston Harbor and supply Fort Sumter.
  o By April 6, 1861, the first ships began to set sail for their rendezvous off the Charleston Bar. The first to arrive was Harriet Lane, the evening of April 11, 1861. No ship will make it past the threat of the cannon outside the fort.
On Thursday, April 11, 1861, Beauregard sent three aides to demand the surrender of the fort.

- Anderson declined, and the aides returned to report to Beauregard.

- After Beauregard had consulted the Confederate Secretary of War, Leroy Walker, he sent the aides back to the fort and authorized one aide, James Chesnut, to decide whether the fort should be taken by force.

- The aides waited four hours while Anderson considered his alternatives and played for time.
At about 3:00 a.m., when Anderson finally announced his conditions, Colonel Chesnut, after conferring with the other aides, decided that they were "manifestly futile and not within the scope of the instructions verbally given to us".

The aides then left the fort and proceeded to the nearby Fort Johnson. There, Chesnut ordered the fort to open fire on Fort Sumter.
On Friday, April 12, 1861, at 4:30 a.m., Confederate batteries opened fire on the fort, firing for 34 straight hours.

On Saturday, April 13, the fort was surrendered and evacuated.

Accounts, such as in the famous diary of Mary Chesnut, describe Charleston residents along what is now known as The Battery, sitting on balconies and drinking salutes to the start of the hostilities.

Lincoln requests a total of 75,000 volunteers from the remaining States on April 17, prompting the secession of Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas.
And the War Came