

Events Leading to Southern Secession

Abraham Lincoln and many Northerners believed that the nation was a union and could not be divided. Most Southerners believed that states had freely created and joined the union and could freely leave it. While the Civil War did not begin as a war to abolish slavery, issues surrounding slavery deeply divided the nation.

In 1857, there was an important national debate over slavery. Dred Scott was a slave from Missouri who had moved with his master to the free state of Illinois. Later, they moved back to Missouri, a slave state. Scott went to court to sue for his freedom. Scott claimed that having lived in a free state made him free. The case went before the Supreme Court. Abolitionists paid Scott's legal fees, and leading abolitionist lawyers argued his case. They wanted to test the legal boundaries of slavery. The Supreme Court ruled that Scott could not sue for his freedom because he was property, not a citizen. Chief Justice Roger Taney said that Scott had "no rights which any white man was bound to respect." The Supreme Court also ruled that Congress could not outlaw slavery in a territory only state legislatures could do that; therefore the Missouri Compromise was unconstitutional. Most Southerners were pleased with the decision. Northern anti-slavery groups were enraged; slavery was now legal in all territories.

John Brown caused a further division between the North and South in 1859. John Brown was an abolitionist who had led attacks on pro-slavery people in Kansas. In 1859, he was planning on leading an attack on slave owners in Virginia. In order to carry out his plan he was going to steal weapons from an arsenal in Harper's Ferry, Virginia. On October 16, 1859, John Brown put his plan into action. Brown and his men were stopped by federal and state troops. Brown was captured, found guilty, and was sentenced to death by hanging. The importance of John Brown's Raid on Harper's Ferry was that it showed that the struggle over slavery was growing, and compromise was becoming harder to find.

The final straw for the South was when Abraham Lincoln was elected President in 1860. Lincoln wanted to keep the Union together and to end the spread of slavery into the new states. Southerners worried that Lincoln would not only try to end slavery in the west but also in Southern states. They also were afraid that they would lose their voice in government. Because of these reasons, many Southerners believed that the South should secede, or break away from the Union.

In December 1860, two months after Lincoln's election, South Carolina became the first state to secede from the Union. By February of 1861 eleven states had left the Union and formed their own government. The Southern government was called the Confederate States of America or the Confederacy. They elected Jefferson Davis as their president.

By March of 1861, the Confederacy had taken control of most of the forts and military property of the United States in the South. One of the forts still under Union control was Fort Sumter, in Charleston, South Carolina. Jefferson Davis sent military forces to ask the fort to surrender to the Confederacy. The Union refused to surrender the fort, and on April 12, 1861 the Confederates began to fire upon the fort. With little food, water, and supplies the Union army was forced to surrender Fort Sumter to the Confederacy. The battle at Fort Sumter began the American Civil War. The next four years would mark the longest and bloodiest years in United States history.

States to Secede

Virginia
 North Carolina
 South Carolina
 Georgia
 Florida
 Tennessee
 Texas
 Louisiana
 Mississippi
 Alabama
 Arkansas

States to Remain in the Union

Border States (slave states in Union)

Maryland
 Delaware
 Kentucky
 Missouri

Free States

Maine	Michigan
New Hampshire	Indiana
Massachusetts	Illinois
Rhode Island	Wisconsin
Connecticut	Oregon
New Jersey	California
New York	Minnesota
Pennsylvania	Iowa
Ohio	Kansas
West Virginia (Western counties of Virginia refused to secede from the Union)	

Directions: Using the notes “Events Leading to Southern Secession,” answer the following questions. You are to write out the question, skip a space, and then answer it.

1. How did Abraham Lincoln and most Northerners view the Union?
2. How did most Southerners view the Union?
3. True or False: The Civil War started as a war to abolish slavery.
4. Who was Dred Scott?
5. What was the decision made by the Supreme Court in the Dred Scott case?
(you must discuss 2 issues)
6. How did John Brown cause further division between the North and the South?
7. Where did John Brown’s raid take place (city and state)?
8. What was the final straw for the South caused them to secede from the Union?
9. Why was the South worried about Lincoln being elected President?
(give 2 reasons)
10. What does it mean to secede?
11. What was the first state to secede from the Union?
12. What was the Confederate government called?
13. Who was elected President of the Southern government?
14. What battle began the Civil War?