

## Civil War: Background and Prelude (Continued)

Among the ordinances of secession passed by the individual states, those of three—Texas, Alabama, and Virginia—specifically mentioned the plight of the "slaveholding states" at the hands of Northern abolitionists. The rest make no mention of the slavery issue and are often brief announcements of the dissolution of ties by the legislatures. However, at least four states—South Carolina, Mississippi, Georgia, and Texas<sup>1</sup>—also passed lengthy and detailed explanations of their causes for secession, all of which laid the blame squarely on the movement to abolish slavery and that movement's influence over the politics of the Northern states.

The Southern states believed slaveholding was a constitutional right because of the Fugitive Slave Clause of the Constitution. These states agreed to form a new federal government, the Confederate States of America, on February 4, 1861. They took control of federal forts and other properties within their boundaries with little resistance from outgoing President [James Buchanan](#), whose term ended on March 4, 1861. Buchanan said that the Dred Scott decision was proof that the South had no reason for secession, and that the Union "was intended to be perpetual", but that "The power by force of arms to compel a State to remain in the Union" was not among the "enumerated powers granted to Congress". One-quarter of the U.S. Army—the entire garrison in Texas—was surrendered in February 1861 to state forces by its commanding general, [David E. Twiggs](#), who then joined the Confederacy.

As Southerners resigned their seats in the Senate and the House, Republicans were able to pass projects that had been blocked by Southern senators before the war. These included the [Morrill Tariff](#), land grant colleges (the [Morrill Act](#)), a [Homestead Act](#), a transcontinental railroad (the [Pacific Railroad Acts](#)), the [National Bank Act](#), the authorization of United States Notes by the [Legal Tender Act of 1862](#), and the [ending of slavery in the District of Columbia](#). The [Revenue Act of 1861](#) introduced the [income tax](#) to help finance the war.

On December 18, 1860, the Crittenden Compromise was proposed to re-establish the Missouri Compromise line by constitutionally banning slavery in territories to the north of the line while guaranteeing it to the south. The adoption of this compromise likely would have prevented the secession of every Southern state apart from South Carolina, but Lincoln and the Republicans rejected it. It was then proposed to hold a national referendum on the compromise. The Republicans again rejected the idea, although a majority of both Northerners and Southerners would likely have voted in favor of it. A pre-war February [Peace Conference of 1861](#) met in Washington, proposing a solution similar to that of the Crittenden compromise, it was rejected by Congress. The Republicans proposed an alternative compromise to not interfere with slavery where it existed, but the South regarded it as insufficient. Nonetheless, the remaining eight slave states rejected pleas to join the Confederacy following a two-to-one no-vote in Virginia's First Secessionist Convention on April 4, 1861.

On March 4, 1861, Abraham Lincoln was sworn in as president. In his [inaugural address](#), he argued that the Constitution was a *more perfect union* than the earlier [Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union](#), that it was a binding contract, and called any secession "legally void". He had no intent to invade Southern states, nor did he intend to end slavery where it existed but said that he would use force to maintain possession of Federal property. The government would make

no move to recover post offices, and if resisted, mail delivery would end at state lines. Where popular conditions did not allow peaceful enforcement of Federal law, U.S. marshals and judges would be withdrawn. No mention was made of bullion lost from U.S. mints in Louisiana, Georgia, and North Carolina. He stated that it would be U.S. policy to only collect import duties at its ports; there could be no serious injury to the South to justify the armed revolution during his administration. His speech closed with a plea for restoration of the bonds of union, famously calling on "the mystic chords of memory" binding the two regions.

The South sent delegations to Washington and offered to pay for the federal properties and enter into a peace treaty with the United States. Lincoln rejected any negotiations with Confederate agents because he claimed the Confederacy was not a legitimate government, and that making any treaty with it would be tantamount to recognition of it as a sovereign government. Secretary of State [William Seward](#), who at the time saw himself as the real governor or "prime minister" behind the throne of the inexperienced Lincoln, engaged in unauthorized and indirect negotiations that failed. President Lincoln was determined to hold all remaining Union-occupied forts in the Confederacy: [Fort Monroe](#) in Virginia, [Fort Pickens](#), [Fort Jefferson](#) and [Fort Taylor](#) in Florida, and [Fort Sumter](#) – located at the cockpit of secession in Charleston, South Carolina.

The Civil War began when the Confederacy attacked Fort Sumter pm April 12, 1861.

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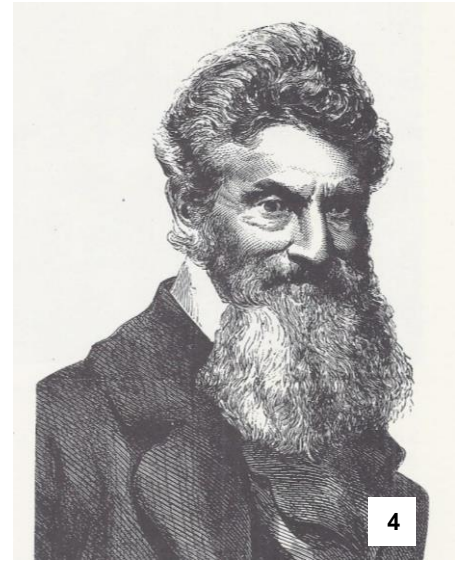
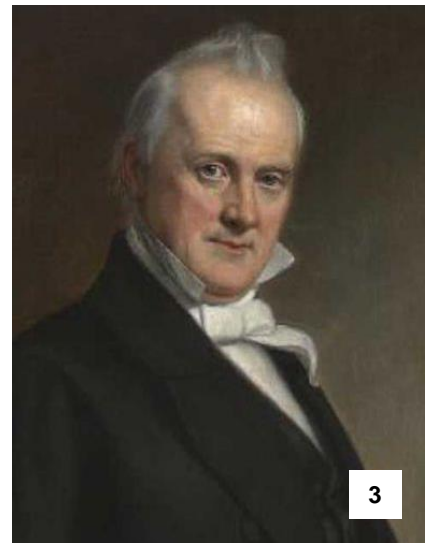
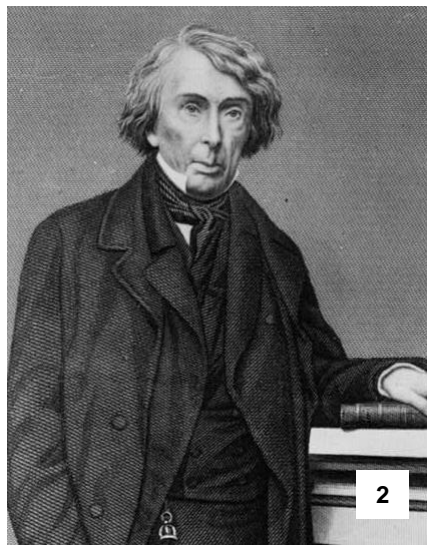
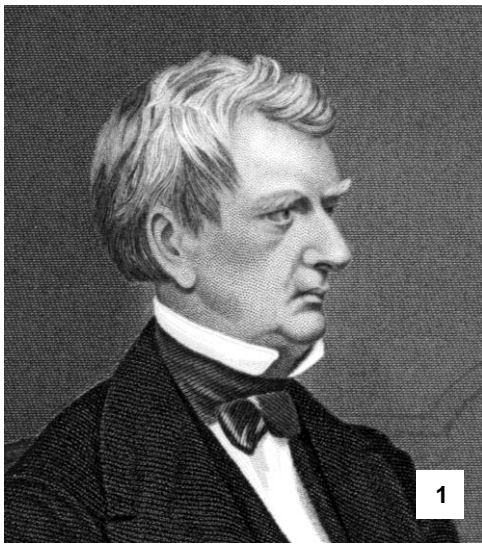
### **Note for students, teachers and researchers:**

Sources for the text:

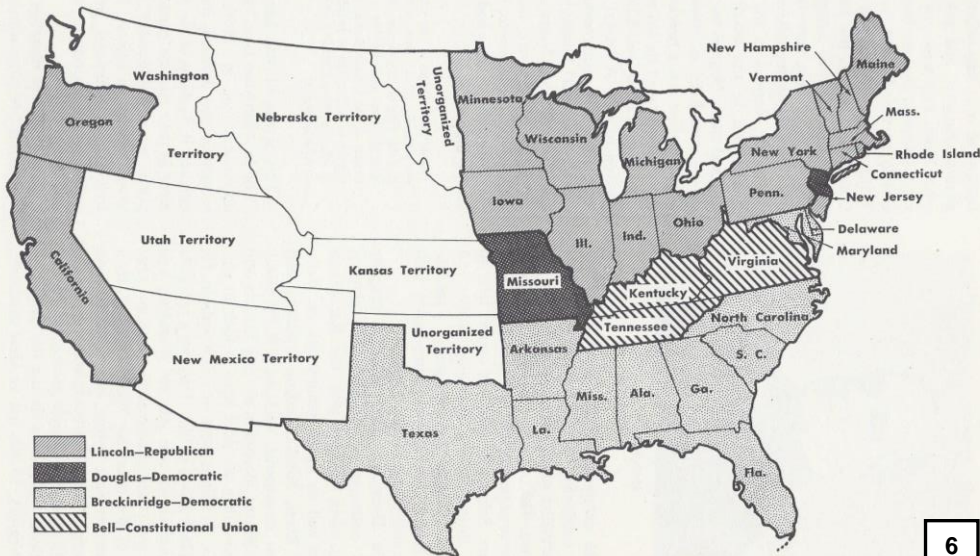
Negro Americans in the Civil War: From Slavery to Citizenship, pages 11-15, Charles H. Wesley and Patricia W. Romero, International Library of Negro Life and History, Publishers Company, Inc., Washington, DC, 1968 (Currently out-of-print), and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American\\_Civil\\_War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Civil_War). The reader is encouraged to view the original text for supplied footnotes as needed. All links were added by the Americans All editorial staff.

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### PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 1860



1. William Seward;
2. Roger B. Taney;
3. James Buchanan;
4. John Brown;
5. Bombardment of Fort Sumter by the batteries of the Confederate States, April 12, 1861;
6. Map of the Presidential Election of 1860.