

Timeline of the Civil War, January–June 1861 ^[1]

January 1861

The South Secedes

When Abraham Lincoln, a known opponent of slavery, was elected president, the South Carolina legislature perceived a threat. Calling a state convention, the delegates voted to remove the state of South Carolina from the union known as the United States of America. The [secession](#) ^[2] of South Carolina was followed by the secession of six more states -- Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas -- and the threat of secession by four more -- Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina. These eleven states eventually formed the Confederate States of America.

February 1861

The South Creates a Government

At a convention in Montgomery, Alabama, the seven seceding states created the Confederate Constitution, a document similar to the United States Constitution, but with greater stress on the autonomy of each state. Jefferson Davis was named [provisional](#) ^[3] president of the Confederacy until elections could be held.

The South Seizes Federal Forts

When President Buchanan -- Lincoln's predecessor -- refused to surrender southern federal forts to the seceding states, southern state troops seized them. At Fort Sumter, South Carolina troops [repulsed](#) ^[4] a supply ship trying to reach federal forces based in the fort. The ship was forced to return to New York, its supplies undelivered.

March 1861

Lincoln's Inauguration

At Lincoln's inauguration on March 4, the new president said he had no plans to end slavery in those states where it already existed, but he also said he would not accept secession. He hoped to resolve the national crisis without warfare.

April 1861

Attack on Fort Sumter

When President Lincoln planned to send supplies to Fort Sumter, he alerted the state in advance, in an attempt to avoid hostilities. South Carolina, however, feared a trick; the commander of the fort, Robert Anderson, was asked to surrender immediately. Anderson offered to surrender, but only after he had exhausted his supplies. His offer was rejected, and on April 12, the Civil War began with shots fired on the fort. Fort Sumter eventually was surrendered to South Carolina.

Four More States Join the Confederacy

The attack on Fort Sumter prompted four more states to join the Confederacy. With Virginia's secession, Richmond was named the Confederate capitol.

June 1861

West Virginia Is Born

Residents of the western counties of Virginia did not wish to secede along with the rest of the state. This section of Virginia was admitted into the Union as the state of West Virginia on June 20, 1863.

Four Slave States Stay in the Union

Despite their acceptance of slavery, Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, and Missouri did not join the Confederacy. Although divided in their loyalties, a combination of political maneuvering and Union military pressure kept these states from seceding.

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