

The Nation Divides

If YOU were there...

You work for the weekly newspaper in Harpers Ferry, Virginia. You strongly oppose slavery, but you think the question ought to be resolved by laws, not bloodshed. Now your paper has sent you to interview the famous abolitionist John Brown in prison. His raids in “Bleeding Kansas” killed several people. Now he is in jail for attacking a federal arsenal and taking weapons.

What questions would you ask John Brown?

BUILDING BACKGROUND Unpopular compromises and court decisions deepened the divisions between pro-slavery and antislavery advocates. The Lincoln-Douglas debates attracted more attention to the issue. As the disagreements grew, violence increased, though many Americans hoped to avoid it. But it was too late to keep the nation unified.

Raid on Harpers Ferry

In 1858 John Brown tried to start an uprising. He wanted to attack the federal arsenal in Virginia and seize weapons there. He planned to arm local slaves. Brown expected to kill or take hostage white southerners who stood in his way. He urged abolitionists to give him money so that he could support a small army. But after nearly two years, Brown’s army had only about 20 men.

On the night of October 16, 1859, **John Brown’s raid** began when he and his men took over the arsenal in Harpers Ferry, Virginia, in hopes of starting a slave rebellion. He sent several of his men into the countryside to get slaves to join him. However, enslaved African Americans did not come to Harpers Ferry, fearing punishment if they took part. Instead, local white southerners attacked Brown. Eight of his men and three local men were killed. Brown and some followers retreated to a firehouse.

Federal troops arrived in Harpers Ferry the following night. The next morning, Colonel Robert E. Lee ordered a squad of marines to storm the firehouse. In a matter of seconds, the marines killed two more of Brown’s men and captured the rest—including Brown.

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

1. John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry intensified the disagreement between free states and slave states.
2. The outcome of the election of 1860 divided the United States.
3. The dispute over slavery led the South to secede.

The Big Idea

The United States broke apart due to the growing conflict over slavery.

Key Terms and People

John Brown’s raid, p. 493
John C. Breckinridge, p. 495
Constitutional Union Party, p. 495
John Bell, p. 495
John J. Crittenden, p. 496
Confederate States of America, p. 497
Jefferson Davis, p. 497

TAKING NOTES

Create a chart like the one below. As you read, take notes on the significance of each of the people listed in the chart and his relationship to the events of the section.

Person	Significance
John Brown	
John C. Breckinridge	
John Bell	
Abraham Lincoln	
Jefferson Davis	
John J. Crittenden	

Primary Source

SPEECH

John Brown's Last Speech

At his trial, after being pronounced guilty, John Brown spoke in his own defense about his plan to free slaves.

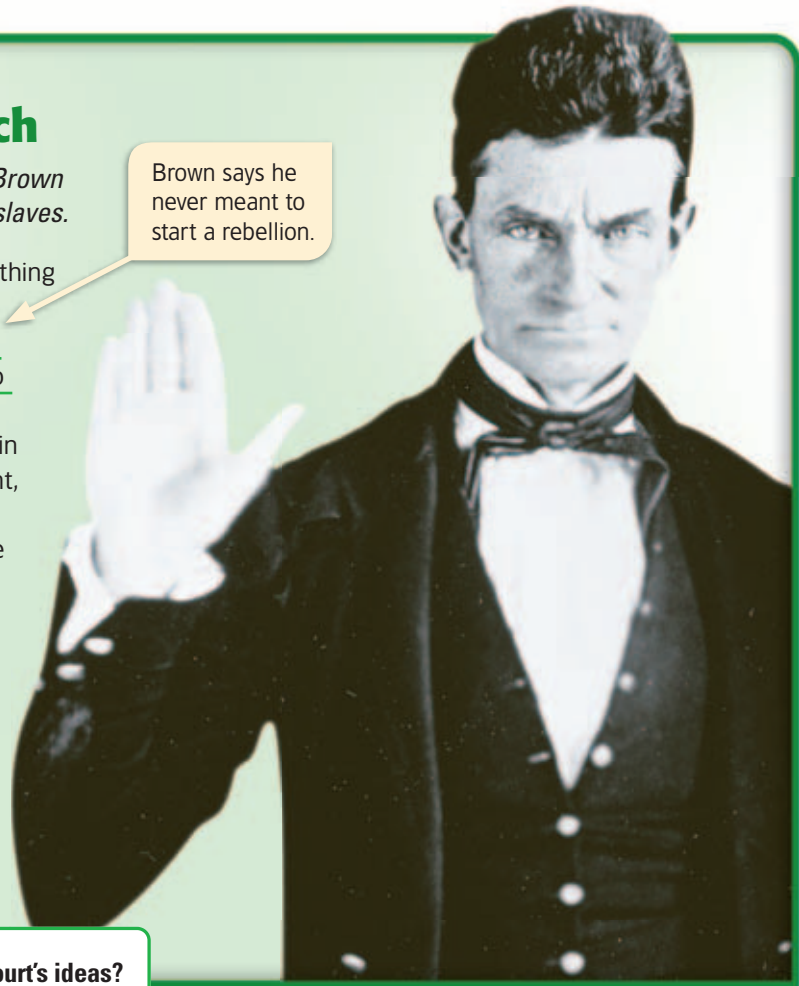
“I intended certainly to have made a clean thing of that matter [freeing slaves] . . . I never did intend murder or treason, or the destruction of property, or to excite or incite the slaves to rebellion, or to make insurrection [revolt] . . . Had I interfered in the manner which I admit . . . in behalf of the rich, the powerful, the intelligent, the so-called great . . . it would have been all right, and every man in this Court would have deemed it an act worthy of reward rather than punishment . . . I believe that to have interfered as I have done . . . in behalf of His despoised poor, is no wrong, but right.”

—John Brown,

quoted in *The Life, Trial and Execution of Captain John Brown*

By *His*, Brown means God's.

Brown says he never meant to start a rebellion.



ANALYSIS SKILL

ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

How does Brown contrast his ideas with the Court's ideas?

Brown was quickly convicted of treason, murder, and conspiracy. Some of his men received death sentences. John A. Copeland, a fugitive slave, defended his actions. “If I am dying for freedom, I could not die for a better cause.” Convinced that he also would be sentenced to death, Brown delivered a memorable speech.

“Now, if it is deemed [thought] necessary that I should forfeit [give up] my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle [mix] my blood . . . with the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments, I say, let it be done.”

—John Brown, quoted in *John Brown, 1800–1859* by Oswald Garrison Villard

As expected, the judge ordered Brown to be hanged. The sentence was carried out one month later on December 2, 1859.

Many northerners mourned John Brown's death, but some abolitionists criticized his extreme actions. Abraham Lincoln said Brown “agreed with us in thinking slavery wrong.” However, Lincoln continued, “That cannot excuse violence, bloodshed, and treason.”

Most southern whites—both slaveholders and non-slaveholders—felt threatened by the actions of John Brown. They worried that a “John Brown the Second” might attack. One South Carolina newspaper voiced these fears: “We are convinced the safety of the South lies only outside the present Union.” Another newspaper stated that “the sooner we get out of the Union, the better.”

READING CHECK Drawing Conclusions

Why did John Brown's raid lead some southerners to talk about leaving the Union?

Election of 1860

In this climate of distrust, Americans prepared for another presidential election in 1860. The northern and southern Democrats could not agree on a candidate. Northern Democrats chose Senator Stephen Douglas. Southern Democrats backed the current vice president, **John C. Breckinridge** of Kentucky, who supported slavery in the territories.

Meanwhile, a new political party emerged. The **Constitutional Union Party** recognized “no political principles other than the Constitution of the country, the Union of the states, and the enforcement of the laws.” Members of this new party met in Baltimore, Maryland, and selected **John Bell** of Tennessee as their candidate. Bell was a slaveholder, but he had opposed the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854.

Senator William Seward of New York was the Republicans’ leading candidate at the start of their convention. But it turned out that Lincoln appealed to more party members. A moderate who was against the spread of

slavery, Lincoln promised not to abolish slavery where it already existed.

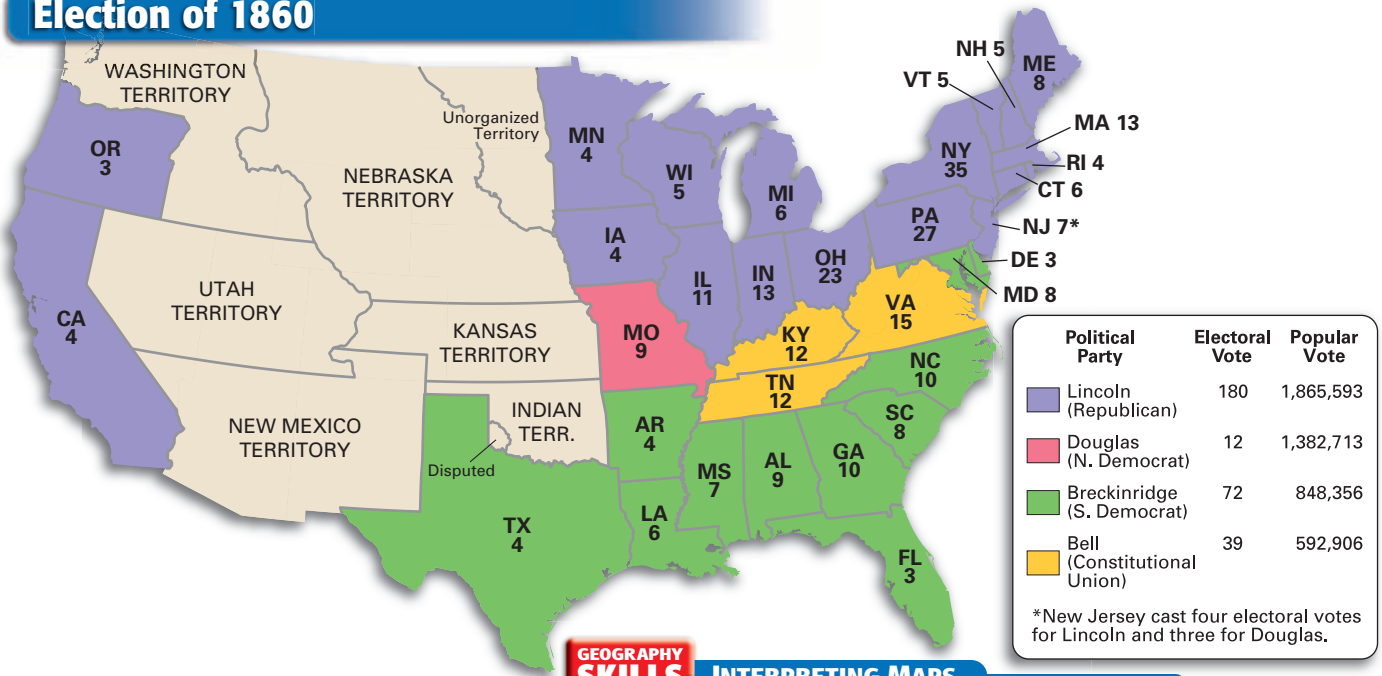
Douglas, Breckinridge, and Bell each knew he might not win the election. They hoped to win enough electoral votes to prevent Lincoln from winning in the electoral college. But with a unified Republican Party behind him, Lincoln won. Although he received the highest number of votes, he won only about 40 percent of the overall popular vote.

Lincoln won 180 of 183 electoral votes in free states. Douglas had the second-highest number of popular votes, but he won only one state. He earned just 12 electoral votes. Breckinridge and Bell split electoral votes in other slave states.

The election results angered southerners. Lincoln did not campaign in their region and did not carry any southern states, but he became the next president. The election signaled that the South was losing its national political power.

READING CHECK Analyzing Why was Lincoln viewed by many as a moderate candidate during his campaign for the presidency?

Election of 1860



GEOGRAPHY SKILLS

INTERPRETING MAPS

Region In which part of the country were most of the states that Lincoln won?

Source: Historical Statistics of the United States

The South Secedes

Lincoln insisted that he would not change slavery in the South. However, he said that slavery could not expand and thus would eventually die out completely. That idea angered many southerners.

Southerners' Reactions

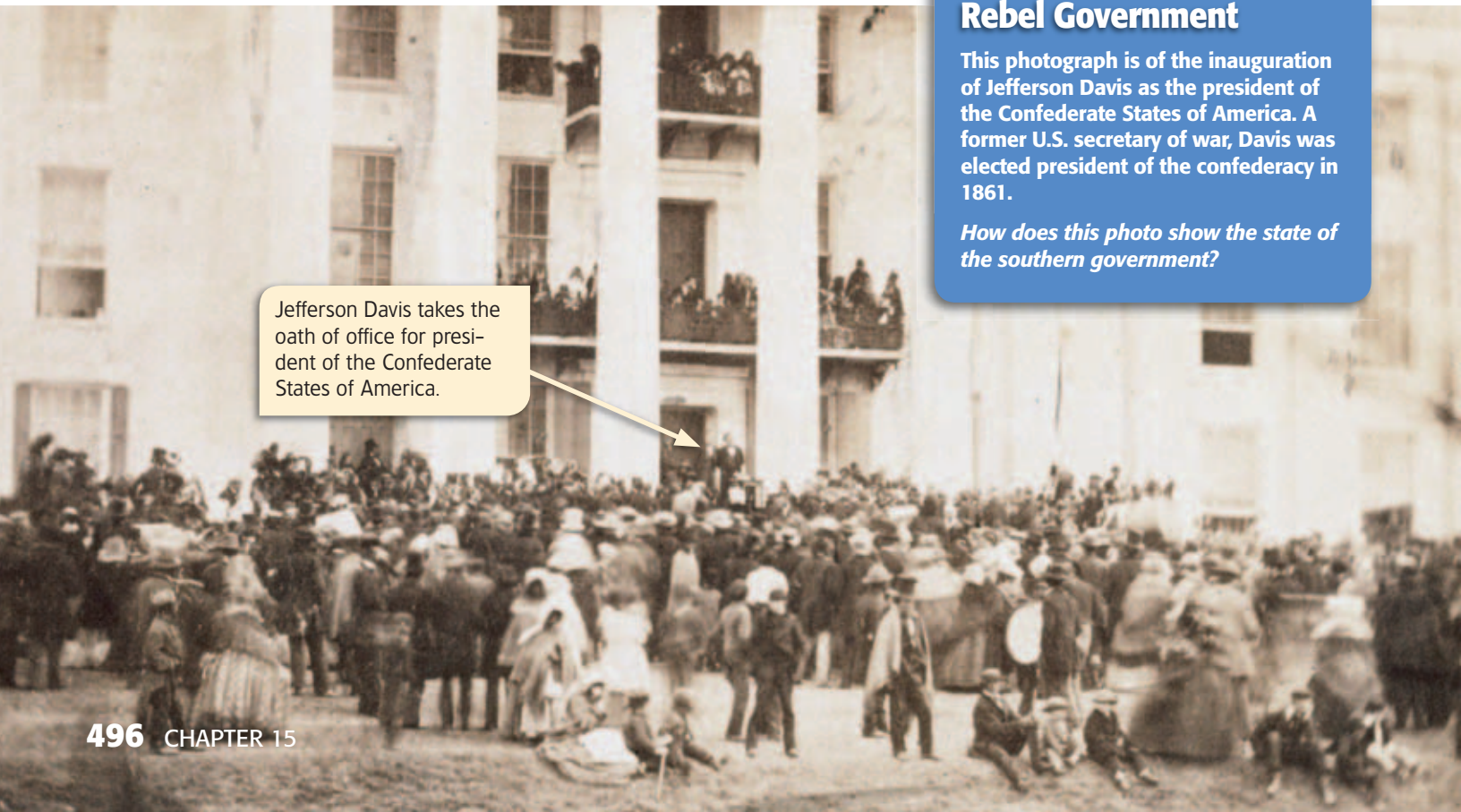
People in the South believed their economy and way of life would be destroyed without slave labor. They reacted immediately. Within a week of Lincoln's election, South Carolina's legislature called for a special convention. The delegates considered secession. Southern secessionists believed that they had a right to leave the Union. They pointed out that each of the original states had voluntarily joined the Union by holding a special convention that had ratified the Constitution. Surely, they reasoned, states could leave the Union by the same process.

Critics of secession thought this argument was ridiculous. President Buchanan

said the Union was not "a mere voluntary association of States, to be dissolved at pleasure by any one of the contracting parties." President-elect Abraham Lincoln agreed, saying, "No State, upon its own mere motion, can lawfully get out of the Union." Lincoln added, "They can only do so against [the] law, and by revolution."

While the South Carolina representatives were meeting in Charleston to discuss secession, Congress examined a plan to save the Union. Senator **John J. Crittenden** of Kentucky proposed a series of constitutional amendments that he believed would satisfy the South by protecting slavery. Crittenden hoped the country could avoid secession and a civil war.

Lincoln disagreed with Crittenden's plan. He believed there could be no compromise about the extension of slavery. Lincoln wrote, "The tug has to come and better now than later." A Senate committee voted on Crittenden's plan, and every Republican rejected it, as Lincoln had requested.



Jefferson Davis takes the oath of office for president of the Confederate States of America.

Rebel Government

This photograph is of the inauguration of Jefferson Davis as the president of the Confederate States of America. A former U.S. secretary of war, Davis was elected president of the confederacy in 1861.

How does this photo show the state of the southern government?

The Confederate States of America

South Carolina elected to dissolve “the union now subsisting [existing] between South Carolina and other States” on December 20, 1860. Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas also seceded to form the **Confederate States of America**, also called the **Confederacy**. Its new constitution guaranteed citizens the right to own slaves.

Delegates from seceded states elected **Jefferson Davis** of Mississippi as president of the Confederacy. Davis had hoped to be the commanding general of Mississippi’s troops. He responded to the news of his election with reluctance.

When the southern states seceded, the question of who owned federal property in the South arose. For instance, the forts in the harbor of Charleston, South Carolina, were federal property. However, Confederate president Davis and the Confederacy were ready to prevent the federal army from controlling the property.

Lincoln Takes Office

President Lincoln was inaugurated on March 4, 1861. In writing his inaugural address, Lincoln looked to many of the nation’s founding documents. Referring to the idea that governments receive “their just powers from the consent of the governed,” a line from the Declaration of Independence, Lincoln stated, “This country, with its institutions, belongs to the people who inhabit it. Whenever they grow weary of the existing Government, they can exercise their *constitutional* right of amending it or their *revolutionary* right to dismember [take apart] or overthrow it. I can not be ignorant of the fact that many worthy and patriotic citizens are desirous [wanting] of having the National Constitution amended . . .”

While he believed that U.S. citizens had the power to change their government through majority consent, he opposed the idea that southern states could leave the

Union because they were unhappy with the government’s position on slavery.

He announced in his inaugural address that he would keep all government property in the seceding states. However, he also tried to convince southerners that his government would not provoke a war. He hoped that, given time, southern states would return to the Union.

READING CHECK **Drawing Conclusions** Why did some southern states secede from the Union?

SUMMARY AND PREVIEW The secession of the southern states hinted at the violence to come. In the next chapter you will read about the Civil War.

Section 4 Assessment

Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and People

- a. Recall** Why did John Brown want to seize the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry?

b. Explain Why did some abolitionists disagree with Brown’s actions?
- a. Identify** List the candidates in the presidential election of 1860, and what party each supported.

b. Predict How might Abraham Lincoln’s victory in the election of 1860 lead to future problems?
- a. Identify** What states made up the **Confederate States of America**?

b. Explain Why did Lincoln disagree with **John J. Crittenden’s** plan to keep the Union together?

c. Elaborate Do you believe that the southern states had the right to secede? Why or why not?