

## Chapter 281 - The South Regards The Speech As A Declaration Of War

Time: March 1861

### Southern Hostility Continues To Grow

Despite Lincoln's closing plea – “we must not be enemies” – Southern reactions to his inaugural speech are uniformly negative.

The *Alexandria Sentinel* says “the inaugural address is a declaration of war;” the *Athens Herald* claims “Mr. Lincoln's inaugural, analyzed, fully means nothing but force, war, and bloodshed;” the *Atlanta Confederacy* adds “the future is ominous...we are dealing first with men who hate us bitterly.”

While a Northern observer, Senator Stephen Douglas, finds ambiguity in the address – “I hardly know what he means...every point...is susceptible of a double construction” – the *Charleston News* hears “smooth and oily words... deeply impregnated with the intolerance of a partisan.”

There is little disagreement that the new President has properly identified the crux of the sectional conflict in a single sentence:

*One section of our country believes slavery is right and ought to be extended, while the other believes it is wrong and ought not to be extended. This is the only substantial dispute.*



Two Flags Instead Of One

But the rest of the speech, according to the critics, simply boils down to legalistic mumbo-jumbo contrived to prove that “majority rule” means the North can impose its will on the South, no matter how ruinous the effects are on its economic future.

This is the same argument that has played out in America since the 1787 Constitutional Convention – the North’s failure to recognize the extent to which the South’s wealth depends upon the extension of slavery. In Philadelphia, this message is delivered by South Carolinians like Charles C. Pinckney, Edward Rutledge and Rawlins Lowndes:

*Without negroes this state is one of the most contemptible in the Union. Negroes are our wealth, our only natural resource. Yet behold how our kind friends in the North are determined soon to tie up our hands and drain us of what we have.*

It is repeated in 1832 by John C. Calhoun, George McDuffie and Robert B. Rhett when the South tries in vain to “nullify” the Tariff of Abominations, “imposed” on them by the principle of “majority rules,” in order to protect Northern manufactures.

It comes around again in 1846 with the Wilmot Proviso and Salmon Chase’s Free Soil Party, intent on banning slavery in the western land won in the Mexican War in part by the sacrifices of Southern soldiers.

Then a decade later in “Bloody Kansas,” the opening battle in what, by March 1861, looks like the end of the Union and the start of a civil war.

From the beginning the sectional fight has centered on the long-term survival of the South’s one dimensional economy, hinging as it does on sales of its raw cotton and bred slaves

As James Henry Hammond declares in his landmark 1858 speech to the senate, “Cotton is King” across the South. The facts bear this out. Between 1850 and 1860, cotton production almost doubles – the result of new plantations opening on lands along the Mississippi Valley.

#### U.S. Cotton Production

	1850	1855	1860
Lbs. (millions)	933.5	1,173.7	1,712.0
Growth Index	100	126	183

But of even greater import to the future of Southern wealth is the increased demand for and value of field hands being created by these western plantations.

### Value Of Southern Slaves

Year	# Slaves (000)	Ave. Price/ Slave	Total Value (000)
1850	3,204	\$377	\$1,207,908
1855	3,559	600	2,135,400
1860	3,954	778	3,076,212

In 1860 the market value of those enslaved in the South reaches \$3 Billion, more than the combined worth of all the manufacturing and railroad assets in the nation.

If Lincoln and the Republicans have their way with “majority rules” and ban the expansion of slavery in the west, it will sound the death knell for growth of the entire Southern economy.

The planter and political leaders in the South recognize this fact, but does the new President? If so, why does he, along with Henry Seward, insist on calling the crisis “artificial” and “nothing that really hurts anybody” – views he has just expressed on his whistle stop journey to Washington?

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### Lincoln And Seward Still Underestimate The Threat

The fact is that neither Lincoln nor Seward fully comprehend in March 1861 the economic impact their slavery ban will have on the South.

They both tend to regard the early secession movement as a temporary anomaly, sparked by yet another small band of “ultras” in South Carolina who fomented the “nullification” movement.

As such, they are both convinced early-on that this too shall pass, that if they exhibit restraint and patience toward the secessionists, the anger will subside, calmer heads will prevail, and the Union will be restored.

They perceive the dispute in moral terms – the right vs. wrong of human bondage.

For the South, however, the paramount issue is what it has always been -- the impact of the ban on its prospects for future wealth.

Stop the continued expansion of plantations requiring slaves and you stop the growth engine for the entire South. This threat is not just emotional in nature and it is not passing.

The Republicans as a whole believe the South is “bluffing” once again to have its way in the political arena.

But they are wrong.

This time the threat is truly existential, and, as in Kansas, the South means to fight it out.

While Lincoln will recognize this reality ahead of Seward, he enters the White House still clinging to the hope that the “better angels” will somehow prevail in time.