

Chapter 257 - Momentum Behind Disunion Builds In The South

Time: November 6, 1860

Reactions To The Election Materialize Quickly

Abraham Lincoln spends most of the election day at the Governor's Room of the statehouse in Springfield.

Around 3pm he hears that the crowds have thinned out and goes out to cast his ballot after carefully removing his name from the top so as not to vote for himself.

He then heads over to the Illinois & Mississippi telegraph office to watch the returns come in along with messages from his supporters around the country. He stays until 1am when it is clear he has won not only nationally, but also in his own city of Springfield, long a Democratic stronghold. From there he is off home for a long night's sleep.

The local supporters are far less restrained than the new President-elect. The city streets remain filled with revelers until 4am when a cannon sounds and the Wide Awakes break out once more in song:

*We're the Lincoln boys!
We're the Lincoln boys!
Ain't you glad you joined the Republicans,
Joined the Republicans,
Ain't you glad you joined the Republicans*

As news of the Republican's victory circulates, responses reflect the deep divisions within the country.

Salmon Chase sees it as the culmination of his personal efforts to defeat the Democrats and the Slave Power.

The great object of my wishes & labors for nineteen years is accomplished in the overthrow of the Slave Power.

The poet and editor of the *New York Evening Post*, William Cullen Bryant forecasts the start of a new era.

At our feet, conquered, lies that great oligarchy which has so long held the South through submission and fear... A new era is now inaugurated, the old order of things has passed away, never, we hope, to return..

John Greenleaf Whittier reflects on the awesome burden that lies ahead.

Well God has laid the responsibility upon us! We must take it up and bear it.

From the South comes acrimony, none as strident as that from South Carolina. The *Charleston Mercury*, edited by the son of the fire-eater, R.B. Rhett, says the “revolution” has arrived.

The Southern States are now in the crisis of their fate, and...nothing is needed for our deliverance but that the ball of revolution be set in motion....The tea has been thrown overboard – the revolution of 1860 has been initiated.

This is seconded by Edmund Ruffin who has campaigned non-stop since John Brown’s raid on behalf of southern secession.

This...momentous...election will serve to show whether these southern states are to remain free, or to be politically enslaved – whether the institution of negro slavery on which the social and political existence of the south rests, is to be secured by our resistance, or...abolished in a short time, as the certain result of our present submission to northern domination.

South Carolina Senator James Chestnut joins in with a bellicose line that surprises many given his family’s staunch pro-Unionist history.

A line of enemies is closing us which must be broken...For myself, I would unfurl the Palmetto (flag)...determined to live or die as became our ancestors.

Time: November 9, 1860

South Carolina Begins Its March Toward Secession



James L. Petigru (1789-1863)

The first overt act of resistance to Lincoln’s election comes predictably in South Carolina, where three federal officials in Charleston -- Judge AG Magrath, District Attorney James Conner and Port Collector W.F. Colcock -- immediately resign from their posts, with the latter announcing:

I will not serve under the enemy of my country.

Governor William Gist follows with an order for 10,000 rifles from the U.S. Arsenal, routing it through a New York bank recommended by Secretary of War, John Floyd.

On November 9, the South Carolina legislature passes a bill calling for a state convention to consider secession – a move met with “hurrahs” from the public and parade ground displays by local militias.

Over the next two days, James Chestnut and James Henry Hammond resign their seats in the U.S. Senate.

About the only voice of moderation by this point belongs to 71 year old James L. Petigru, the ex-Attorney General of the state, who had opposed “nullification” and the possibility of secession back in the 1830’s. He says:

My own countrymen here in South Carolina are distempered to a degree that makes them to a calm and impartial observers real objects of pity. They believe anything that flatters their delusion or their vanity; and at the same time they are credulous to every whisper of suspicion about insurgence or incendiaries.

Time: November 9, 1860

Buchanan Turns To His Cabinet For Advice

South Carolina’s call for a convention alarms Buchanan and he holds an emergency meeting with his cabinet on November 9, 1860, to seek their advice.

James Buchanan’s Cabinet On November 9, 1860

Position	Name	Home State	In War
Secretary of State	Lewis Cass	Michigan	USA
Secretary of Treasury	Howell Cobb	Georgia	CSA
Secretary of War	John Floyd	Virginia	CSA
Attorney General	Jeremiah Black	Pennsylvania	USA
Secretary of Navy	Isaac Toucey	Connecticut	USA
Postmaster General	Joseph Holt	Kentucky	USA
Secretary of the Interior	Jacob Thompson	Mississippi	CSA

The most outspoken response comes from Attorney General Jeremiah Black, formerly a justice on the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. While soon telling the President that the Constitution does not authorize the use of force against a seceding State, Black urges the deployment of troops to secure the federal forts in Charleston, and in doing so, send a signal to South Carolina to reject secession.

Black’s view is supported by another Northerner, Secretary of State Lewis Cass, and by Postmaster Joseph Holt of Kentucky.

The other Southerners disagree. Their leader is Secretary of the Treasury, Howell Cobb of Georgia, who is personally close to Buchanan and one who has long worked to avoid disunion.

His message is that any attempt to alter the status quo with the Charleston forts will be taken by South Carolina as a federal provocation, and boost the odds of secession, not diminish them.

Cobb's views are seconded by John Floyd of Virginia and Jacob Thompson of Mississippi, and by the Connecticut man, Isaac Toucey, another Buchanan loyalist.

On the same day the President encounters this split in his cabinet, he also learns from Colonel J. L. Gardner, the 76 year old Mexican War hero in command of the Charleston forts, that an effort to transfer arms from the undermanned and vulnerable Ft. Moultrie to the security of Ft. Sumter has been turned back at the Charleston wharf.

With this news in his head, Buchanan turns his attention to crafting his fourth and final address to Congress on the State of the Union, scheduled for December 3, 1860. He already senses that events are spinning out of control, and intends to use the message to defend his time in office and to try to delay the growing crisis.