

**Fort Sumter
Visitor Education Center
Liberty Square
Charleston, SC**

**Exhibit Text
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What brought the Nation to civil war at Fort Sumter?

When the Civil War finally exploded in Charleston Harbor, it was the result of a half-century of growing sectionalism. Escalating crises over property rights, human rights, states rights and constitutional rights divided the country as it expanded westward. Underlying all the economic, social and political rhetoric was the volatile question of slavery. Because its economic life had long depended on enslaved labor, South Carolina was the first state to secede when this way of life was threatened. Confederate forces fired the first shot in South Carolina. The federal government responded with force. Decades of compromise were over. The very nature of the Union was at stake.

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Colonial Roots of the Conflict

Regional differences began early

Every freeman of Carolina shall have absolute power and authority over his negro slaves. Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina, 21 July 1669

Carolina looks more like a negro country than like a country settled by white people.
Samuel Dysli, Swiss newcomer, 1737

Charles Town, the principal one in this province, is a polite, agreeable place. The people live very Gentile and very much in the English taste. Eliza Lucas (Pinckney), 1740

This town makes a most beautiful appearance as you come up to it... in grandeur, splendour of buildings, decorations, equipages, numbers, commerce, shipping, indeed in almost every thing, it far surpasses all I ever saw... in America. Josiah Quincy, Jr., 1773
visitor from Boston

...in the spring a paradise, in the summer a hell, and in the autumn a hospital.
Johann David Shoepf, German natural historian, 1780s

Plantation agriculture and African slavery characterized the Lower South, more so than any other region in North America. Englishmen were late in colonizing Carolina, but they brought with them an economic system perfected on the sugar islands of the Caribbean. Initial trade was in furs and skins, naval stores and timber. Many early Carolina settlers arrived with slaves and the expectations of finding a staple crop for export. Rice, indigo and the slave trade transformed early Charlestown into the fourth largest city in colonial America. Ships sailed the Atlantic Ocean, connecting Charlestown to Europe, Africa and the West Indies.

Beginning with sugar cane in the Caribbean, tobacco in the Chesapeake, and rice along the South Atlantic coast, fortunes were made by ambitious European colonists. Plantations relied on international markets and became increasingly dependent on the labor of enslaved Africans.

Many planters owned several plantations and were often absent from their estates, leaving management to overseers and operations to trusted black drivers. In the Carolina and Georgia lowcountry, enslaved Africans constituted a large majority of the population. White fear of black rebellion meant the harshest slave laws in North America were passed to control slaves and to protect the slaveholders' economic investment. Nevertheless, the task system of labor allowed the slaves a small measure of free time and they were able to develop their own vibrant language and culture.

The high cost of initial investment in establishing a plantation meant that it was a pursuit of the rich. The majority of white settlers were small farmers, mechanics or merchants who aspired to planter status. The huge profits from rice cultivation created a small class of elite planters who dominated South Carolina's social, political and economic life. It was not unusual for more money to be invested in human beings (slaves) than in the land itself. In the 1770's nine of the ten richest men in the American colonies were South Carolinians.

Rice was the main export crop that defined the lowcountry landscape. Rice planting required a tremendous investment in swampland and slaves. With the expertise and labor of enslaved West Africans, South Carolina planters became the richest colonists in British North America. Following the American Revolution, planters perfected the tidal cultivation of rice, further increasing the extraordinary wealth of an elite few.

Rice cultivation in coastal South Carolina transformed inland swamps and lowland marshes bordering tidal estuaries into fields of Carolina Gold. Enslaved workers cleared cypress swamps and moved vast amounts of earth, building dykes and canals by hand. Enslaved Africans used skills brought from West Africa where rice had been grown for centuries. They planted, tended and harvested the crop using the task system of labor.

A bustling shipping center with connections to Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean, Charleston quickly outgrew early city walls. Built on a narrow peninsula between two

rivers, much of the city today stands on former marshlands and creeks that were filled in to accommodate growth.

Slavery in Carolina was central to a prosperity based on plantation agriculture and the mass production of such exports as rice. The experience of slavery varied greatly over time and place, from urban to rural, from large to small holdings, from field to domestic work, from unskilled laborer to skilled craftsman, between male and female, young and old, between individuals enslaved and those who claimed ownership.

By 1708 Africans made up the majority of South Carolina's population. A white minority feared slave rebellions and efforts to escape slavery. The Stono Rebellion near Charlestown in 1739 led to escalated fears, restrictive taxes on slave imports and a severe slave code. The successful 1791 slave rebellion on St. Domingue (Haiti) further heightened fears among mainland white slaveholders.

By the 1720's more than half of South Carolina's slaves lived on plantations with twenty or more slaves. By 1790 in some regions 75% lived in large communities of more than fifty people.

Henry Laurens (1724-1792) was a wealthy Lowcountry merchant, planter and slave trader. For many years Laurens acted as Charlestown agent for the owners of Bance (Bunce) Island, a slave trading post in the Sierra Leone River on the West African coast. A prominent figure in the American Revolution, he was one of many South Carolinians who contributed to the establishment of a government for the new nation. Laurens served as President of the Second Continental Congress. Captured at sea by the British, he was held prisoner in the Tower of London. Laurens's bail was posted by Richard Oswald, his British business partner in the Bunce Island slave trade. The highest ranking American in captivity, Laurens was later exchanged for Lord Cornwallis who had surrendered at Yorktown. Representing the Americans, Laurens and his British friend Oswald helped negotiate the treaty that ended the war. The transatlantic slave trade was thus interwoven in the international political, economic and social fabric of power. Deeply religious, Laurens eventually abandoned his role in the Atlantic slave trade, but not his role as slave owner.

Charleston dominated the political and commercial life of the province and was the cultural center of the Old South. Lowcountry planters and merchants formed a ruling class, emulating the aristocracy of England. A life of refined gentility mirrored the British ideal across the sea. Lowcountry planters looked to Charleston as the center for trade, law, and social functions. Planters built grand houses in the city where they spent the winter social season. Wealthy Carolinians sent their sons north to college and to England for education in law and business.

Objects:

The Charleston Rice Spoon developed from the English stuffing spoon and reflected the centrality of rice as a staple crop and a main course on dinner tables in the lowcountry. Poorer folk used wooden spoons.

During the nearly four hundred years of the **Atlantic slave trade**, an estimated twelve million Middle Passage survivors were brought into the Americas. Of this number only a small percentage (4% to 6%) were sold into slavery in North America. For over a hundred years Charleston was a main port of entry for these captured Africans. Blacks outnumbered whites in coastal South Carolina at rates higher than anywhere else in the Old South.

By the end of the legalized international slave trade in 1808, over 240,000 men, women and children from the West Coast of Africa had landed on Charleston's shores. To prevent the spread of disease, many of these people, like those arriving from Europe or New England, served a period of quarantine on board ship, on Sullivan's Island or on James Island. They were then sold to planters from outlying areas.

Ambiguities of the Constitution

Regional compromises ensured nation's birth

The closely related issues of **slavery and state sovereignty** were so volatile that they were not directly addressed in the Constitution. At the time of the Constitutional Convention in 1787, the economies of the southern states depended upon slave labor for their agricultural exports. Most delegates professed Enlightenment ideals and believed that the continued progress of man would eventually result in the end of slavery. But this was to be a gradual process. Any direct reference to slavery in the new document might cause a fatal rupture in the negotiations between regions and prevent a federal union.

Charles Pinckney, his second cousin Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, Pierce Butler, and John Rutledge represented South Carolina at the Constitutional Convention. At twenty-nine, Charles Pinckney was one of the youngest convention delegates. He introduced a comprehensive plan of the constitution, known as the "Pinckney Draft." Pinckney argued forcefully for a strong federal government and worked to protect the special interests of the southern states, particularly slavery. South Carolina delegates argued that any document that threatened the livelihood of slaveholders would not be ratified by their state legislature.

At the time of the Revolution, slavery existed in both the North and the South. New York, Pennsylvania and Connecticut had significant numbers of slaves. Both regions also had vast frontier areas of small farms and many citizens with no property in slaves. Neither section imagined African-Americans as fully enfranchised citizens. As the geography of the northern colonies did not lend itself to large-scale agriculture, states in the North began to slowly phase out slavery.

Small farms, shipping and manufacturing characterized the economic base in New England. In 1790 only 5.8% of the enslaved U.S. population lived north of Delaware.

Plantation agriculture in the South produced cash crops for world markets. In spite of large-scale agriculture, most enslaved people lived on smaller farms. By 1860, 46% of white South Carolina families owned slaves.

The nation quickly learned that the Bill of Rights and the system of checks and balances between the branches of government did not guarantee individual liberties if one political party gained control of all three branches of government. The **1798-1799 Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions** written by James Madison and Thomas Jefferson were manifestos of a state's right to judge the constitutionality of federal actions. The resolutions defined the Union as a compact among the states, giving limited powers to the central government. Arguments of a broken contract, or a failed "compact" that no longer protected a state's interests were the basis for secession movements. The Constitution itself did not address a state's right to leave the union.

The founders did not use the word slave or slavery in the Constitution, but approached the subject indirectly.

Article I, Section II - three-fifths clause

The slaveholding states wanted slaves counted for the purpose of representation in Congress, rather than for taxation. The nonslaveholding delegates objected to "property" being counted towards representation. With the compromise, a slave was counted as 3/5ths of a person. Indentured servants, who were bound to labor for a specific term of years, were counted as whole persons.

Article I, Section 9, importation of slaves

To appease slaveholding interests Congress allowed for the continued importation of slaves until 1808, when it could vote to outlaw the international slave trade. With slavery still legal in much of the Caribbean and the Americas, the profitable international slave trade continued and included illegal imports into the United States up until the time of the Civil War.

Article IV, section 2, return of fugitive slaves

This article guaranteed the return of any "Person held to Service or Labour in one State" who might flee to another state. Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, a South Carolina delegate to the Convention, noted: "We have a right to recover our slaves in whatever part of America they may take refuge, which is a right we had not before."

South Carolina delegates defended their interests:

“...while there remained one acre of swampland uncleared of South Carolina, I would raise my voice against restricting the importation of negroes....the nature of our climate and the flat, swampy situation of our country, obliges us to cultivate our lands with negroes, and that without them South Carolina would soon be a desert waste...” Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, South Carolina delegate, 1787

“In all ages one half of mankind have been slaves. If the Southern states were let alone [they would] probably of themselves stop importation.” Charles Pinckney, South Carolina delegate, 1787

“South Carolina and Georgia cannot do without slaves.”
Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, South Carolina delegate, 1787

The people of South Carolina and Georgia “would never be such fools as to give up so important an interest.” John Rutledge, South Carolina delegate, 1787

Books published by blacks during the late 1700’s included poetry, scientific discourse, and personal experiences of slavery. All of these works disproved popular notions of racial inferiority. The Revolutionary ideals of equality and justice were contradicted by the condition of African-Americans. In 1776 about 500,000 blacks lived in the colonies, making up one-fifth of the population. All but 25,000 were enslaved.

Phillis Wheatley. Born in Africa and brought to America as a young girl, Wheatley received wide recognition for her essays and poems and adoption of Western mores. In 1773 she was manumitted (freed) by her Boston owners and had her first book published in England.

Olaudah Equiano. Son of an Ibo tribal elder, kidnapped and sold into slavery, Equiano eventually escaped and wrote the story of his life. His autobiography was first published in 1789.

Benjamin Banneker. A well-known astronomer and surveyor, Banneker published his almanac in 1795.

“O, ye nominal Christians!... Is it not enough that we are torn from our country and friends, to toil for your luxury and lust of gain?... Why are parents to lose their children, brothers their sisters, or husbands their wives? Surely, this is a new refinement in cruelty...” Gustavus Vassa, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Oloudah Equiano*, or *Gustavus Vassa*, 1789

“...are we MEN?... America is more our country than it is the whites - we have enriched it with our blood and tears.” David Walker’s *Appeal*, 1829

“...in the new code of laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make, I desire you would remember the ladies, and be more generous to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power in the hands of husbands. Remember, all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention are not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound to obey the laws in which we have no voice of representation.” Abigail Adams wrote to her husband, John Adams, March 1776

Referring to slavery: *“We have the wolf by the ears, and we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go. Justice is in one scale, and self-preservation in the other.”* Thomas Jefferson, 1820

“The defense of human liberty against the aggressions of despotic power have been always the most efficient in States where domestic slavery was to prevail.” S.C. Senator John C. Calhoun, addressing Congress, 1836

“...it was a solemnly understood compact, that, on the southern states consenting to shut their ports against the importation of Africans, no power was to be delegated to congress, nor were they ever to be authorized to touch the question of slavery; that the property of the southern states in slaves was to be as sacredly preserved, and protected to them, as that of land, or any other kind of property...” Charles Pinckney, US Congressman from South Carolina, Missouri Compromise debates, 1820.

“...the moment this House undertakes to legislate upon this subject [slavery], it dissolves the Union....I will go home to preach...disunion, and civil war....A revolution must ensue, and this republic sink in blood.” James H. Hammond, Congressman from South Carolina, 1836

“...the only safety of the South from abolition universal is to be found in an early dissolution of the Union.” Georgia politician, Henry L. Benning, 1849.

“Democratic liberty exists solely because we have slaves...freedom is not possible without slavery.” Richmond Enquirer, 1856.

“I am not included within the pale of this glorious anniversary! Your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us...This Fourth July is yours, not mine.” Abolitionist and former slave, Frederick Douglass, July 4, 1852.

“Brethren, arise, arise!...Strike for your lives and liberties. Rather die freemen than live to be slaves...Let your motto be resistance; no oppressed people have secured their liberty without resistance.” Abolitionist Henry Highland Garnet, 1843.

“Any people anywhere, being inclined and having the power, have the right to rise up, and shake off the existing government, and form a new one that suits them better. This is a most valuable, - a most sacred right - a right, which we hope and believe, is to liberate the world.”

U.S. Congressman Abraham Lincoln, January 12, 1848 speech to Congress

“The right to change a government, or to utterly abolish it, and to establish a new government, is the inherent right of a free people; and when they are deprived of that right they are no longer free.”

New Orleans Daily Crescent, November 13, 1860

“I would save the Union. I would save it the shortest way under the Constitution. My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union.”

President Abraham Lincoln, letter to Horace Greeley, August 22, 1862

Antebellum United States 1820 - 1860

Conflicts escalated as the country expanded

After the War of 1812 the United States experienced an era of substantial growth and development. Eleven new states, from Maine to Oregon, joined the Union. The population grew from 9,000,000 to 23,000,000. Growing pains of immigration, industrialization and urbanization challenged the country. The explosive growth of railroads, the Mexican War, Indian Wars and religious conflicts influenced the era. As the nation grew so did the sense of being an American. At the same time, regional differences -- in economic systems and visions of the American future -- met and clashed over the expansion of slavery into new western territories.

Nullification Crisis

The Congressional debate over federal taxes on imported manufactured goods showed clearly the division between North and South. Designed to protect American-made products, such tariffs were viewed as harmful by southern agriculturalists who traded with Europe for manufactured goods and had little investment in industry.

Citing states rights doctrine, South Carolina voted to nullify the federal tariffs of 1828 and 1832. During the crisis Vice President John C. Calhoun broke with President Andrew Jackson and resigned his office. The President sent troops to Fort Moultrie and Castle Pinckney to enforce collection of the tariff. Calling for secession, the South Carolina legislature readied the state militia. The crisis was defused in 1833 by a compromise tariff, but the state had learned that cries of disunion could be an effective political weapon.

Missouri Compromise of 1820

The words disunion and civil war were part of the escalating rhetoric as Congress tried to maintain a balance between free and slave states. In 1820 Maine was admitted as a free state and Missouri as a slave state. Slavery was prohibited in the rest of the Louisiana Purchase north of Missouri's southern border.

Charles Pinckney, U.S. Congressman from South Carolina, warned that the economic interests of North and South were at odds and that slavery was the only question that could separate the Union. Pinckney saw trouble ahead. He stated that a consequence of the Missouri Compromise "may be the division of this union and a civil war."

Compromise of 1850

Southern fears of becoming an isolated agrarian and slaveholding minority within an industrializing and free labor nation resulted in the Compromise of 1850. New national legislation abandoned the Missouri Compromise and made the territories of Utah and New Mexico open to a local vote on slavery. California was admitted as a free state. Slavery was allowed to continue in the District of Columbia, but the slave trade in the nation's capital was abolished. A more effective fugitive slave law made it a federal crime to refuse aid in the capture of runaways.

Kentucky Senator Henry Clay supported the 1850 Compromise. Clay was instrumental in defusing the growing conflicts of increasing sectionalism.

Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854

This act allowed new western states to decide the issue of slavery on the basis of popular vote. The results were violent and disastrous as pro and antislavery factions crossed from other states to sway elections in Kansas. The best-known radical involved was John Brown. A five year guerilla war, Bleeding Kansas was a preview of the Civil War.

Northern Whigs, Free Soilers and Democrats who had fought the passage of the Act joined forces and formed the Republican party. Antislavery in its stance, the party came up with a broad enough program to attract supporters who were indifferent on the issue of slavery.

Even Congress was the scene of violence. In 1856 S.C. Congressman, Preston Brooks, used a cane to severely beat Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner for a blistering speech insulting to Brooks' family honor.

Abolitionist John Brown was involved in the Kansas bloodshed. A violent extremist, Brown became a martyr to the antislavery cause after his 1859 raid on Harpers Ferry.

The 1857 Dred Scott decision

Dred Scott was a slave who sued for his freedom in 1846 because he had lived in Illinois and Wisconsin Territory, both closed to slavery. The case rose to the U.S. Supreme Court which ruled that not only was Scott not free, but that he could not sue because blacks had no rights of citizenship at the federal level. The court ruled the Missouri Compromise unconstitutional because it infringed on southern rights to take property (slaves) anywhere in the nation. Chief Justice Taney wrote that blacks had no rights which white men were bound to respect.

Newspapers of the day either praised or condemned the Supreme Court's Dred Scott decision:

"...slavery is guaranteed by the Constitutional compact." Charleston, S.C. Mercury (Democratic), 17 March 1857

"Five of its nine silk gowns are worn by Slaveholders." Albany, New York Evening Journal (Republican), 19 March 1857

John C. Calhoun (1782-1850) is closely identified with the history of South Carolina. From a nationalist with presidential ambitions, he became the leader and intellectual architect of the Southern Rights faction of the Democratic party. Calhoun led the Palmetto State as it articulated a "positive good" argument for slavery. He developed a

doctrine of state sovereignty, designed to legally protect slavery, that became the rationale for secession.

Andrew Jackson, the hero of the War of 1812, served two terms as President (1828-1836) while the nation experienced tremendous growth. Jackson thought the Constitution had established “a single nation,” not a league of states. Jackson called nullification an “abominable doctrine” and South Carolinians “unprincipled men who would rather rule in hell than be subordinate in heaven.”

The State Rights and Union Ticket, 1832. The state of South Carolina was bitterly divided over the nature of the Union and the role of federal authority. In 1832 a fierce campaign was waged for control of the General Assembly, pitting a conservative Union ticket against the radical Nullifiers. The Nullifiers won by a sweeping majority, suggesting the level of alienation from the Union felt by South Carolina as early as 1832. **Handbills**, along with newspapers, public appearances and speeches, were among the methods available for voters to learn about the candidates.

The invention of the cotton gin in 1793 was followed by a rapid expansion of cotton farming and increased investment in enslaved labor. As slavery tightened its hold on the southern economy, so did the system itself tighten its grasp on those it enslaved. The view of slavery as a necessary evil was replaced with a pro-slavery argument that defended the institution as a “positive good”.

Northern businessmen invested profits from agriculture into factories, ships, railroads, government bonds and banks. The resulting mixed economy balanced agriculture, manufacturing and commerce. Southern cotton fed the growth of textile mills in New England. By 1835 New York’s ready-made clothing industry supplied cheap shirts and dungarees to western farmers and southern slaves.

By 1850 southerners had moved South and West - and cotton was king. The British textile industry created a vast demand for cotton, while Indian removal and the Mexican War opened up lands for expansion. By 1860 white per capita income in the South exceeded the national average and the twelve richest counties in the nation were in the South. Typical planters with more than twenty slaves had more capital invested in human chattel than in land or farm implements.

SC Senator James Henry Hammond declared in 1858, “You dare not make war upon cotton; no power on earth dares to make war upon it. Cotton is king.”

Slavery was profitable. Based on 1860 Census data, 26% of southern white families owned slaves. Percentages ranged from 49% in Mississippi to 3% in Delaware. Some free blacks also owned slaves.

Enslaved men and women worked side by side in the fields. The buying and selling of slaves disrupted family life. Blacks had a higher mortality rate than whites; one in three

children died before the age of ten. In the face of many obstacles, strong black communities of extended kin supported each other, employing survival strategies of patience and covert resistance.

Work songs and spirituals were part of daily life. Years after he escaped from slavery, **Frederick Douglass** wrote that “slaves sing when they are most unhappy. The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears.” The eloquence of fugitive slave and abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, inspired both black and white Americans to join the fight against slavery.

Running away was one method of resisting slavery that carried great risks. Strong family ties made running away a last recourse for the most desperate. Canada became a land of refuge as the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 and the Dred Scott decision of 1857 made it legal to kidnap runaways from free states and possible to kidnap free blacks.

Antislavery advocates ranged from militant radicals to moderate pacifists. Early white antislavery advocates called for gradual emancipation and some favored compensation for owners or the transportation of blacks to Africa. But antislavery free blacks argued for abolition with citizenship. The movement grew rapidly during the 1830’s. Publications such as William Lloyd Garrison’s *The Liberator* and other antislavery tracts were kept out of southern states, in violation of First Amendment rights.

At a time when most women supported the status quo, the **Grimke** sisters were two very unusual South Carolinians. Abolitionists Angelina and Sarah Grimke were the daughters of an aristocratic Charleston slaveholding family. Both women became Quakers, moved North and renounced their inheritance.

Antislavery action ranged from the publication of abolitionist literature, such as Harriet **Beecher Stowe**’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, to assisting in the escape of enslaved African Americans. After her own escape **Harriet Tubman** became known as “Moses” because of the many people that she led to freedom. Both whites and blacks aided runaways by providing directions and places of hiding along the legendary Underground Railroad, the name given to the many routes that blacks took to escape slavery.

Charleston led the fight against abolition. The Pro-Slavery Argument was published in Charleston in 1852. It contained essays by southern figures quoting Scriptures and the Classics, and citing natural philosophy works to prove that blacks were inherently inferior.

Louisa Susanna Cheves McCord, a South Carolina intellectual and essayist, expressed the scathing sentiments of a “Southern lady” in response to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. McCord wrote of Mrs. Stowe: “The authoress is so ignorant of Southern life and slave institutions, that she does not know how very far she leaves behind her the track of probability.” “Her black angels are as hard to find as her white devils, both being creations whose existence

belongs to the terra incognita of her own brain.” Southern Quarterly Review, De Bow’s, 1853.

“...it is the solemn duty of the Government to resist all attempts by one portion of the Union to use it as an instrument to attack the domestic institutions of another, or to weaken or destroy such institutions, instead of strengthening and upholding them, as it is duty bound to do.” John C. Calhoun, 1838

“...the assumed power to put an end to slavery, or take the first steps towards that object, being a higher power than the Constitution has given Congress, is a violation of its provisions, and a destruction of liberty itself. It was constitutional liberty which our fathers fought to establish and not union! They had union with the mother country when they rebelled...” Alabama Congressman David Hubbard, 1830’s

“I will say then that I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races that I am not nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people; and there is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality. There must be the position of superior and inferior, and I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race.” Abraham Lincoln, Lincoln-Douglas Debates, Charleston, September 18, 1858

Charleston in 1860

Poised on the brink

Although Charleston remained the social center of the South, it declined in commercial importance as the cotton kingdom moved west. The fourth largest American city in 1790, Charleston had fallen to 22nd by 1860. Most of the nation's population growth was in the northern states. With an area population of over 40,000 Charleston was the 6th largest city in the South, behind St. Louis, New Orleans, Baltimore, Washington, DC and Louisville. This figure included almost 14,000 enslaved and over 3,000 free African Americans. Rice, cotton, slave trading, shipping and retailing were the basis of the city's economy. Founded in 1670, Charleston rapidly grew into the primary seaport on the South Atlantic coast of the United States.

Rubbing shoulders on the small peninsula were elegant homes and rundown hovels. Urban slave quarters could be found down alleyways or in the rear of slaveowners' lots. Although some were cobbled, most streets were unpaved. Docks and wharves along East Bay Street bustled with shipping activity. Fronting the Cooper River stood the mansions of the leading import-export merchants. White laborers and seamen rented space in the crowded homes of worker families. The town also had a middle-class of merchants, lawyers, craftsmen and service workers who catered to the planter society.

Known as “**the Holy City**” because of its many churches, the city had an ethnic flavor missing in the rest of the state. The city was home to a large Jewish population, French, Irish and German merchants and mechanics, and a significant number of free blacks who lived precariously in a slave society.

In 1860 slave wealth made up over 60% of the total personal wealth of the white lowcountry population. Even more than in colonial times, money invested in human beings was greater than all other forms of property. By 1860 cotton production had finally surpassed rice in South Carolina. Transported down the rivers or by railroad, thousands of bales of **cotton** and barrels of **rice** arrived at Charleston's docks for loading onto ships bound for the northeast U.S. or Europe.

In April 1860 the Democratic Party held its convention in Charleston's Institute Hall. Radical secessionists undermined the meeting. Unable to agree on a slavery plank, the delegations of eight southern states walked out. Northern and southern factions each nominated their own candidates for President, virtually guaranteeing a Republican victory.

“Slavery is our King - Slavery is our Truth - Slavery is our Divine Right.” J.S. Preston addressing South Carolina's 1860 Democratic Convention in Charleston

In 1858 a slave ship, the ***Echo***, arrived in Charleston so that its American captain and crew could stand trial for illegally trading in captive Africans. The ship was headed to Cuba when captured in the Caribbean. The 300 survivors of the Middle Passage were

held at Fort Sumter. Eventually the federal government resettled the 271 surviving Africans in Monrovia, Liberia. The captain and crew were acquitted.

Charleston has long been known for its **architecture** and the human scale of the city. The popular Greek Revival style was used in rebuilding sections of town destroyed by a devastating 1838 fire.

Many of Charleston's **free blacks** were mulattoes of varying shades and highly conscious of color as an aspect of class. Only in New Orleans were gradations of color as important. Charleston was known for its "Brown Fellowship Society" where membership was based on free status, wealth and shade of color.

Free and enslaved African-Americans worked in a variety of occupations. Men loaded and unloaded ships, worked as carriage drivers, porters, coopers, carpenters, brick masons, boat captains, fishermen, cooks, blacksmiths and barbers. Women held positions such as vendor, cook, household servant, laundress or seamstress. It was not unusual for slaves to "hire-out" their services. The Holloway family was among the 900 free families of color in Charleston during the 1790's. An early 19th century portrait of Richard Holloway, a carpenter, was found in the family Bible.

The fear of slave rebellion was behind many of the city's repressive policies. The most vivid and frightening memory to white Charlestonians was Denmark **Vesey's** aborted plot in 1822. Vesey's plan was to liberate Charleston's enslaved population, leading a mass escape to Haiti. Rumors spread that he planned to kill all the whites and any blacks who did not support the rebellion. A literate man who had purchased his own freedom, Vesey looked to Haiti, the Old Testament and African culture for inspiration. Vesey and thirty-five conspirators were executed.

The militarization of daily life was a direct result of the fear of rebellion. The city had a patrol system that was strict and repressive. Between sunset and sunrise, the patrol could administer twenty lashes to any black person found without a pass. The South Carolina Military College (**the Citadel**) grew out of the state's response to slave unrest.

“In walking about Charleston, I was forcibly reminded of some of the older country towns in England...The appearance of the city is highly picturesque... It has none of the smug mercantile primness of the Northern cities, but a look of state...a little gone down in the world, yet remembering still its former dignity... Charleston has an air of eccentricity, too and peculiarity, which formerly were not deemed unbecoming ...” British actress Frances Ann Kemble, 1839

“But go to the bottom of this security and dependence and you come to police machinery ... I happened myself to see more direct expression of tyranny in a single day and night at Charleston, than at Naples (under Bomba) in a week.” Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveller’s Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States*, 1850.

“I wonder if it be a sin to think slavery a curse to any land... the Mulattoes one sees in every family exactly resemble the white children - & every lady tells you who is the father of all the Mulatto children in every body’s household, but those in her own, she seems to think drop from the clouds... ”

Mary Boykin Chesnut, March 18, 1861

“Ours is the property invaded; ours are the institutions which are at stake; ours is the peace that is to be destroyed; ours is the honor at stake ... all of which rests upon what your course may ultimately make a great heaving volcano of passion and crime... Bear with us, then, if we stand sternly upon what is yet that dormant volcano, and say we yield no position here until we are convinced we are wrong.” W.L. Yancey, a native South Carolinian, “fire-eating” secessionist from Alabama, Democratic Convention, April 1860

“There exists a great mistake...in supposing that the people of the United States are, or ever have been, one people. On the contrary, never did the sun shine on two peoples as thoroughly distinct as the people of the North and...South....Like all great nations of antiquity we are slaveholders and understand free governments. The North does not.”

Robert Barnwell Rhett, November 10, 1860

“The issue before the country is the extinction of slavery...The Southern States are now in the crisis of their fate; and, if we read aright the signs of the times, nothing is needed for our deliverance, but that the ball of revolution be set in motion.”

Charleston Mercury (November 3, 1860)

South Carolina Declares Independence

War draws near

“South Carolina is too small for a republic, but too large for an insane asylum.”

Federal Judge James L. Petigru of Charleston, December 1860

“The slaveholding South is now the controlling power of the world.... Would any sane nation make war on us? Without firing a gun, ...we could bring the whole world to our feet....No, you dare not make war on cotton....Cotton is king.”

James Henry Hammond, U.S. Senator from South Carolina addressing Congress, 1858

“This...momentous election...will serve to show whether these southern states are to remain free, or to be politically enslaved...” Agriculturalist Edmund Ruffin, Diary, 1860

“A geographical line has been drawn across the Union, and all the States north of that line have united in the election of a man to the high office of President of the United States, whose opinions and purposes are hostile to slavery.” Declaration of Causes of Secession, December 24, 1860

“ Slavery with us is no abstraction - but a great and vital fact. Without it our every comfort would be taken from us...all lost and our people ruined for ever. Nothing short of separation from the Union can save us.”

A.P. Hayne to President Buchanan, December 22, 1860

On December 20, 1860, in response to the election of Abraham Lincoln as President of the United States, a South Carolina Social Convention of 169 delegates passed and signed an **Ordinance of Secession**, taking the state out of the Union. A broadside printed by the Charleston Mercury newspaper proclaimed South Carolina's secession from the Union.

The secession convention first gathered in Columbia, the state capitol, but an outbreak of yellow fever caused the meeting to be moved to Charleston. The delegates met in the South Carolina Institute Hall on Meeting Street to sign the Ordinance of Secession. The building became known as "Secession Hall." The building was destroyed in the December 10, 1861 fire. A *Harper's Weekly* illustration shows a secessionist rally at the Mills House.

Not everyone in South Carolina favored secession. **James L. Petigru** was the state's leading Unionist and from one of Charleston's most distinguished families. Upon learning of the signing of the Ordinance of Secession, Petigru said, "they have this day set a blazing torch to the temple of constitutional liberty and, please God, we shall have no more peace forever."

South Carolinian **Robert Barnwell Rhett** was an adamant secessionist. A delegate to the Secession Convention, Rhett served as one of the seven members of the committee appointed to write the ordinance.

Newspapers were the only form of mass communication at the time of the Civil War. Editorial and political cartoons began to appear on a regular basis in the nation's leading newspapers - *Harper's Weekly* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated*. A group of four political cartoons from the February 9, 1861 issue of *Harpers Weekly* illustrates the agricultural differences between the North and South with a caricature of a slave.

Christopher G. Memminger, a moderate who opposed nullification and secession until late in the 1850's, was a successful lawyer and active in educational reforms in Charleston. Finally convinced that secession was the only hope for the South, Memminger began promoting the movement. He wrote the *Declaration of the Immediate Causes of Secession* which was adopted four days after secession on December 24, 1860.

A geographical line has been drawn across the Union, and all the States north of that line have united in the election of a man to the high office of President of the United States, whose opinions and purposes are hostile to slavery. He is to be entrusted with the administration of the common Government, because he has declared that that "Government cannot endure permanently half slave, half free," and that the public mind must rest in the belief that slavery is in the course of ultimate extinction. South Carolina's Declaration of the Immediate Causes of Secession

When South Carolina seceded many of its citizens viewed this as the start of a second American Revolution. As an "independent republic" a banner was needed. In response a flag was adopted on January 28, 1861. A palmetto was added to the flag that flew during the June 28, 1776 Battle of Sullivan's Island.

The Election of 1860

The failure of the National Democratic Party convention held in Charleston to decide on a slavery plank caused the party to split into two factions and diluted its strength. The Republican platform opposed the extension of slavery into the territories. Following the Republican victory, South Carolina held true to its threat to secede from the Union.

U.S. Senator **Stephen A. Douglas** of Illinois won the presidential nomination from the northern faction of the Democratic Party. Douglas was the leading advocate of allowing new states to vote on the issue of slavery.

Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party stood for the non-expansion of slavery into new territories. Lincoln was despised by slaveholders for his anti-slavery stance: "*A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free.*"

Vice-President in Buchanan's administration, **John C. Breckinridge** accepted the presidential nomination from the southern faction of the Democratic Party. This faction of the party called for the unrestricted expansion of slavery into the territories.

Statesman **John Bell** was the presidential candidate for the Constitutional Union Party. This new party believed in a strict interpretation of the Constitution and was opposed to secession. Bell carried three states in 1860 and played a role in giving the election to the Republicans.

In a political cartoon, the artist used a foot race to illustrate the presidential election of 1860. Exaggerating Lincoln's height of 6'4" the cartoonist depicts him towering over the other three candidates and sprinting ahead to victory.

“Oh my God! This morning heard that Lincoln was elected...Lord we know not what is to be the result of this but I do pray, if there is to be a crisis, that we all lay down our lives sooner than free our slaves in our midst...” Eliza Goodwyn Hopkins Brevard diary, November 9, 1860 entry.

By February 4, 1861 the **Deep South** states of Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas had followed South Carolina's lead and left the Union. Representatives met in Montgomery, Alabama to form a **new national government**. What little contact a citizen had with any form of government was generally on the local or state level. For the most part, as each state seceded, local and state government remained unchanged. On the national level the mail continued between North and South, along with telegraphic messages, and passengers and cargo still traveled between the regions by railroad and ship.

In response to Major Robert Anderson's move from Fort Moultrie to Fort Sumter and the possibility of a relief expedition coming from the sea, southern military forces began **strengthening the existing fortifications** of Charleston Harbor and building new ones. Slave gangs from lowcountry plantations provided much of the labor for these construction projects. In 1863, one such laborer was **Jacob Stroyer** of Richland County. In his autobiography, Stroyer described his first-hand experience of slavery during the Civil War. *“Our work was to repair forts, build batteries, mount guns, and arrange them. ...the boys my age, namely, thirteen, and some older, waited on officers and carried water for the men at work, and in general acted as messengers...although we knew that our work in the Confederate service was against our liberty, yet we were delighted to be in military service.”*

Forming an Army

Like many states, South Carolina had a state wide militia organization. When the state seceded, **Governor Francis Pickens** called the South Carolina Militia into service to defend against invasion. Answering the call, men of all ages rushed to join existing units or rapidly formed new ones.

Thousands of new recruits had to be trained, uniformed, armed and equipped. Each seceding state faced the same problems. Like many states, South Carolina had a state wide militia organization. When the state seceded, Governor Francis Pickens called the South Carolina Militia into service to defend against invasion. Answering the call, men of all ages rushed to join existing units or rapidly formed new ones.

One of the first military organizations called into service was the **Citadel**, a state four year military college established in 1842. An immediate source of military knowledge, the Citadel's corps of cadets helped drill new militia units. The cadets were assigned to man an artillery battery on Morris Island. On January 9, 1861 they opened fire on the *Star of the West*, a ship sent to re-supply Fort Sumter.

Excitement and thoughts of adventure swept across North and South as the nation continued headlong toward civil war. The largest single age group rushing to join local military units were 18 year olds, followed by 21 and 19 year olds. How many children joined is unknown, but records do reveal boys as young as 9 and 11 years old serving in the army. Many photographs capture the faces of **boy soldiers** such as Georgia private Edwin Jennison. Another photograph shows young Private Andrew Chandler with his enslaved body-servant Silas Chandler, both armed for battle.

Many Southerners living outside the South expressed their support of secession in various ways. At Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut on January 20, 1861, "the **secession flag**" was found flying over Alumni Hall on campus. The flag was reportedly placed there by southern students.

Forming the Confederacy

The formation of the Confederate States of America meant a national government had to be established. As states seceded, most of their senators and representatives resigned from the US Congress. They brought the knowledge and expertise needed to form and run a legislative body. Many southerners who were career federal government employees resigned and offered their services to the Confederacy. This was also true with many military officers who resigned their commissions and returned to their native states.

By March 1, 1861, an organized Confederate government took over the operations against Fort Sumter from South Carolina.

Conservative **Jefferson Davis** of Mississippi was elected provisional president of the Confederacy in February 1861.

"Its foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery...is his natural and normal condition." **Alexander Stephens**, Vice-President of the Confederacy, referring to the Confederate government, March 1861.

“Representative liberty will remain in the States after they are separated. Liberty was not crushed by the separation of the colonies from the mother country, then the most constitutional monarchy and the freest Government known. Still less will be destroyed by the separation of these States to prevent the destruction of the spirit of the Constitution by the maladministration of it.”

U.S. Congressman **Jefferson Davis**, speech to U.S. Senate, January 10, 1861

South Carolina U.S. Senator James Chesnut, Jr. was one of the first congressmen to resign his office following secession. Chesnut and his wife, **Mary Boykin Chesnut**, were from two of the leading families of South Carolina. Mary Chesnut's wartime diary provides one the best sources of information on the era.

In 1860-61 there was no standard U.S. paper currency. At that time the only paper money was issued by state chartered banks. While the banks in the seceded states still issued their own currency, in March 1861 the Confederate government authorized a national paper money to be issued.

Fort Sumter

Countdown to Conflict

The saber is drawn - the nation goes to war

“The Southern States now stand exactly in the same position toward the Northern States that our ancestors in the colonies did toward Great Britain.” Robert Barnwell Rhett, The Address of South Carolina to the Slaveholding States of the United States, December 1860

“In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without yourselves being the aggressors.”

Abraham Lincoln, Inaugural Address, March 4, 1861

“The firing upon that fort will inaugurate a civil war greater than any the world has yet seen.” Robert Toombs, Confederate secretary of state, 1861.

“There stands Fort Sumter, and thereby hangs peace or war.”

Mary Boykin Chesnut, March 31, 1861

“All this morning I felt restless and anxious, listening to every sound with a beating heart, fearing to hear the announcement of the beginning of civil war. What fearful meaning is concentrated in those two little words.” Charlestonian Emma Holmes, April 9, 1861

In November 1860, **Major Robert Anderson** assumed command of U.S. fortifications in Charleston Harbor with headquarters at Fort Moultrie. The other installations were Castle Pinckney, Fort Johnson, and Fort Sumter and the federal Arsenal. These defenses reflected the overall condition of the nation's military in 1860 - underfunded, undermanned, and unprepared for war. From December 1860 until April 1861 North and South continued on the road to armed conflict.

Castle Pinckney. The second fort located on Shutes Folly Island in the mouth of the Cooper River, Castle Pinckney was built in 1810 to provide for inner harbor defense. By 1860 it was in need of major repair and its garrison consisted of a widowed sergeant and his teenage daughter.

Fort Johnson. The British built the first fort on James Island to defend Charleston in 1708. Over the years three forts on the site were destroyed by storms. Early in 1861 South Carolina troops began rebuilding fortifications here. The first shot of the Civil War was fired from one of Fort Johnson's mortar batteries at 4:30 AM on April 12, 1861.

Fort Moultrie. The site of the Battle of Sullivan's Island, the first fort was built in 1776 and constructed of palmetto logs and sand. Replaced by a second fort in 1798, it was destroyed in a hurricane. A third Fort Moultrie was completed in 1809. With fifty cannon mounted, it served as the major fortification to defend Charleston Harbor until the beginning of the Civil War.

Fort Sumter. Located in the mouth of Charleston Harbor, work began on Fort Sumter in 1829. Its mission was to work in conjunction with Fort Moultrie, one mile away across the main shipping channel, providing concentrated crossfire against any enemy naval force attempting to enter the harbor. Fort Sumter sits on a man-made island. The brick fort was about ninety percent complete in 1860. Fort Sumter was an imposing sight and the most defensible fortification in Charleston Harbor.

With a command of about 85 officers and men, which included the regimental band, Major Anderson had only one-third of the soldiers needed to defend Fort Moultrie. The fort was in disrepair and in no condition to defend itself if attacked from Sullivan's Island. Aware of all these problems, the major moved his command from Fort Moultrie to Fort Sumter on the night of December 26, 1860. Upon their arrival at Fort Sumter, Anderson and his command quickly began preparing Fort Sumter against an attack. For over three months, until April 12, 1861, the federals worked to strengthen the fort's defenses.

On the morning of December 27, 1860, the people of Charleston and South Carolina learned that Major Anderson had moved his command from Fort Moultrie to Fort Sumter. In response, Governor Francis Pickens ordered South Carolina troops to occupy Fort

Moultrie and Castle Pinckney. The occupation of Fort Sumter by Major Anderson in December 1860 became a symbol to both North and South. To the North it was a symbol

of U.S. authority over federal property in the first state to secede from the Union. For the South it was a threat to the Confederacy's independence and security to have a "foreign power" manning a fort that controlled the use of one of its most important ports.

President James Buchanan served four months as a "lame duck" president until Lincoln's inauguration on March 4, 1861. Buchanan nothing to prevent South Carolina's secession and that of the other six states that followed. President Buchanan and his divided cabinet were ineffective in uniting the country. Only two of the seven cabinet members were considered forceful leaders with strong Union feelings. Several members of the cabinet openly supported secession. It was not an administration equipped to deal with the crisis facing the nation.

Robert Anderson was a native of Kentucky, son of a Revolutionary War officer, West Point graduate, veteran of three wars, and career Army officer. Sympathetic to the South and not opposed to slavery, Anderson was also completely loyal to the Union. He did not want war and would do what he could to avoid having it started by his command.

The November 1860 election of **Abraham Lincoln** to the office of president marked the beginning of the chain of events that led to the secession of South Carolina. This was soon followed by the secession of six more Deep South states.

The first national flag of the Confederacy was the "**Stars and Bars.**" Its seven stars represent the first Deep South states to secede from the Union.

With South Carolina's secession on December 20, 1860, the state became an "independent republic". Governor **Francis Pickens** had the responsibility of directing all civilian and military operations in the state.

A West Point graduate, Mexican War hero, former Secretary of War, and U.S. Senator when Mississippi seceded, **Jefferson Davis** followed his state out of the Union and resigned from the Congress. One of the more conservative Southern leaders, when the Confederate government was organized in February 1861, Davis was selected as its provisional president.

West Point graduate and Mexican War veteran, **P.G.T. Beauregard** had been appointed Superintendent at West Point when his native state of Louisiana seceded. Beauregard resigned and was soon commissioned a general in the Confederate Army and given command of southern forces in Charleston Harbor. When Beauregard was a cadet at West Point, his artillery instructor was Robert Anderson.

On the night of January 5, 1861, under orders from President Buchanan, the *Star of West* left New York Harbor loaded with food and troops for Fort Sumter. A dispatch informing Major Anderson that help was on the way was sent but never arrived. South Carolinians, informed of the mission, were ready when the ship arrived at the entrance to Charleston Harbor on January 9th. As it steamed up the channel paralleling

Morris Island toward Fort Sumter, an artillery battery on the island opened fire. The battery was manned by 40 Citadel officers and cadets. Soon the guns from Fort Moultrie opened fire and the *Star of the West* turned around and steamed back to New York.

Major Anderson and his officers were photographed at Fort Sumter. As part of the negotiations for a peaceful settlement and evacuation of Sumter, the Confederacy allowed Anderson to regularly communicate with the government in Washington.

Harper's Weekly and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated* kept a nation of anxious readers informed of events in Charleston. Depicted here is the February 8, 1861 evacuation of the federal soldiers' wives and families.

On February 18, 1861, Jefferson Davis was sworn in as the provisional president of the Confederate States of America. Afterward he wrote his wife, "I saw troubles and thorns innumerable. We are without machinery, without means, and threatened by a powerful opposition..."

On March 4, 1861 **Abraham Lincoln** became the 16th President of a no longer United States. In his conciliatory address, Lincoln reiterated that he had no intention of interfering with slavery where it existed. He added that it was the right of each state to control the "domestic institutions" within its borders. But he did not recognize the right of secession. He proclaimed that "the Union is unbroken," and that any act of violence against the United States was "insurrectionary or revolutionary."

The Upper South states were very reluctant to secede. Kentucky Senator John J. Crittenden proposed extending the old Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific Ocean. But both sides rejected this last effort at compromise. After the firing on Fort Sumter, Lincoln called for 75,000 troops to put down the rebellion. In response, four Upper South states seceded.

On April 8, 1861, President Lincoln informed Governor Pickens that provisions were being sent to Fort Sumter by water. Two days later, General Beauregard was directed to demand the fort's evacuation and if refused to use whatever means necessary to force the federals out. Three of Beauregard's aides delivered the final ultimatum to Major Anderson. They were James Chesnut, A.R. Chisholm, and Stephen D. Lee

Captain **George S. James** was in command of the 10-inch mortar that fired the signal shot from Fort Johnson that began the bombardment of Fort Sumter.

Virginian and fire-eating secessionist, **Edmund Ruffin** helped man the iron-clad battery at Cummings Point on Morris Island. Ruffin is often credited with firing the first shot to actually strike Fort Sumter.

Mary Chesnut was aware of the tense negotiations because her husband was one of

Beauregard's staff taking messages back and forth to Fort Sumter. In the early hours of April 12, 1861, Mary Chesnut wrote, "*I do not pretend to go to sleep. How can I? If Anderson does not accept terms at four o'clock the orders are he shall be fired upon.*" Hearing cannon fire, Mrs. Chesnut joined others on the house roof. "*Prayers from the women and imprecations from the men; and then a shell would light up the scene.*" Later, "*after all that noise, and our tears and prayers, nobody has been hurt. Sound and fury signifying nothing! A delusion and a snare!*"

Miss Emma Holmes wrote in her diary on April 12, "*All last night the troops were under arms, and, at half past four this morning, the heavy booming of cannons woke the city from its slumbers... Every body seems relieved that what has been so long dreaded has come at last...*"

"The plot thickens, the air is red-hot with rumors."

Mary Boykin Chesnut, April 6, 1861

The **final ultimatum** to evacuate was issued at 12:45 AM on April 12 and refused by Anderson at 3:15 AM. Expecting the naval relief expedition at any moment, the southern officers provided Anderson written notice that their batteries would open fire in about one hour. The officers all shook hands and the Confederates returned to Fort Johnson.

Beauregard's emissaries arrived at Fort Johnson around 4:00 AM. They informed Captain George S. James that his battery had been selected to fire the signal shot to begin the general bombardment of Fort Sumter. At **4:30 AM, April 12, 1861** a 10-inch mortar roared into action. Its shell arched high in the predawn darkness and exploded directed over Fort Sumter. In response cannon from Cummings Point on Morris Island, Sullivan's Island, and Mount Pleasant opened fire - America was at war with itself - **a civil war had begun.**

Major Anderson's Garrison Flag

When Major Robert Anderson transferred his small Federal garrison from Fort Moultrie to Fort Sumter on the night of December 26, 1860, he took with him the two flags of his command - this 20 x 36 foot garrison flag, which he carried himself, and the smaller storm flag used in bad weather. At noon on December 27, following a prayer of thanksgiving for their safe arrival, the garrison flag was raised above Sumter.

In a moment of powerful symbolism, just as the nation was being torn asunder, so was her flag. On April 11, 1861 the garrison flag marking Anderson's occupation was torn by strong winds. It was replaced by the 10 x 20 foot storm flag, which flew during the subsequent two-day bombardment.

After the fort's surrender on April 14, Anderson took both flags with him to New York City. There, following their display in a massive patriotic demonstration in Union Square, they were boxed up and placed in storage. The flags remained with the Anderson family until 1905, when they were presented to the War Department. In 1954 the flags were transferred to the National Park Service. The storm flag is on display in the museum at Fort Sumter. Following extensive conservation treatment, the fragile garrison flag lies in a specially constructed case in the Visitor Education Center at Liberty Square. Hanging above the case is a full-scale replica of the garrison flag.

Fort Sumter Today

Walls that tell a story of destruction

Structurally, Fort Sumter is no longer the looming presence that it was in 1860. The fort's walls no longer stand fifty five feet above sea level, but range from nine to twenty-five feet high. A stabilized ruin, the fort is a powerful symbol of the Civil War in terms of meaning and sense of place. Its very walls tell the story of destruction.

The task of clearing the rubble and ruin of war from the interior of Fort Sumter began in the 1870's. A lack of funds halted the rebuilding effort and the fort served mainly as a lighthouse station for the next twenty years. In 1899 it was modernized by the addition of a concrete Endicott Battery in the middle of the parade ground. The fort was used through World War II and was finally decommissioned in 1947. The War Department turned the Sumter over to the National Park Service and it became a national monument in 1948.

Today Battery Huger dominates the central portion of the fort and houses a museum. The top of the battery provides an expansive view of the harbor. Visitors can look across the

ship channel to Fort Moultrie on Sullivan's Island and understand the strategic nature of the site. To the south, visitors can see Morris Island where the 54th Massachusetts made their famous charge on Battery Wagner and from where Union guns mounted the Siege of Charleston and battered Fort Sumter into rubble.

A cutaway version of Fort Sumter shows what it would have looked like on the eve of the Civil War. The fort was built to hold three tiers of guns with two casemated levels and one open parapet level. When Federal troops occupied the fort in December, 1860 the place was still a construction site "filled with building materials, guns, carriages, shot, shell, derricks, timbers, blocks and tackle, and coils of rope in great confusion." The soldiers began the work of mounting guns and bricking up embrasures against a threatened Confederate attack.

Two years after the signal shot that started the Civil War, Fort Sumter became the focus of a gallant defense in which determined Confederate soldiers kept federal land and naval forces at bay for 587 days. In the summer of 1863 when federal forces gained control of Morris Island, the bombardment of Charleston and Fort Sumter began in earnest. The Siege of Charleston continued until February 17, 1865, the longest siege in U.S. military history.

Visit Fort Sumter for the rest of the story...

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