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LINCOLN AND

THE BORDER STATES
Introduction

In 1861 Abraham Lincoln was thrown into a crisis of epic proportion. He correctly concluded that the suppression of the southern insurrection depended on securing and maintaining the loyalty of the border slave states of Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri. In all the border states, though only marginally so in Delaware, Lincoln had to deal with divisions over secession and loyalties and contentious issues relating to constitutional and states’ rights, military interference in civil affairs, control of state militias, and factionalism among Unionists. Nothing, however, exceeded the difficulties Lincoln faced in the border states over his antislavery policies and the enlistment of blacks in the army. Although far from perfect in his conduct of border state affairs, Lincoln proved equal to the task of retaining the loyalty and cooperation of these states in the war, and ultimately, in the cases of Maryland and Missouri, to the task of securing emancipation.

The history of Lincoln and the border states offers insights into the president’s leadership and the unique and daunting problems he faced in the Civil War. It also provides a window into federal-state relations, military-civil affairs, the ongoing struggle for the Union in the border states, and the relationship of Lincoln with Unionists, army commanders, and others in those states. An intriguing aspect of the study is the Unionist leadership’s views of the Civil War president and his management of affairs in their
states. Although Lincoln realized he needed the support of border state leaders in the suppression of the rebellion, he at times found them to be more of an obstacle to success than a loyal opposition in achieving his objectives in the war, especially emancipation.

Historians, in giving their reasons for the border states’ adherence to the Union, have often cited their close proximity to the North, their diverse populations, their fears of becoming battlegrounds in the war, and the location in these states of three important industrial and commercial centers (Saint Louis, Missouri; Louisville, Kentucky; and Baltimore, Maryland) that rejected southern sectionalism. In addition, historians have pointed out the border region’s relatively weak identification with slavery (only 14 percent of border state families owned slaves) and its traditional loyalty to the Union and to sectional compromise.

These were all logical reasons for the border states to remain in the Union. On the other hand, there were also countervailing tendencies that, particularly at the beginning of the war, could have propelled the border states into the rebellion. These included traditional white ties to southern kin and culture, a profound hostility to the antislavery “Black Republican” Party, and the belief that Lincoln and his government posed a threat to constitutional rights. Although slavery was not as extensive in their states as in the Confederate South, border state whites, consisting of one-third of the southern white population, strongly defended the institution as important economically and as essential to social stability and racial control. Even tiny Delaware, with only 1,798 slaves according to the 1860 U.S. census, rejected Lincoln’s antislavery efforts during the war, mainly because of emancipation’s foreboding social and racial implications for the state.

Lincoln’s western Whig background enabled him to understand the political, constitutional, and racial realities in the border states. He realized the necessity of accommodating the sensitivities of whites in these states regarding federal-state relations, slavery, and constitutional rights, as long as there was no threat of secession and military operations were not hindered. When border state governors at the beginning of the war refused to honor his call for militiamen to suppress “combinations” in the lower South “too powerful to be suppressed by the ordinary course of judicial proceedings,” Lincoln declined to challenge their decision. Instead, he permitted the gov-
ernors to raise militia forces to maintain order at home, and, in the case of Missouri, he allowed Claiborne F. Jackson, the secession-leaning governor, to organize state troops to protect the “sovereignty” of the state. Lincoln, however, later insisted that the militias should serve the Union cause and should be under the command of overall federal commanders. Many of the border state militiamen, particularly those in Kentucky and Missouri, ultimately went south and, along with other border state volunteers, joined the Confederate army. These troops, however, never made up a majority of the soldiers from their states who fought in the war.

Lincoln even acquiesced in Kentucky’s declaration of armed neutrality during the early months of the war. Governor Jackson and the Missouri legislature briefly attempted an armed neutrality policy that, however, favored the Confederacy. A Union military force under General Nathaniel Lyon drove Jackson and his militia, under General Sterling Price, into southern Missouri, where they merged with the Confederate army. Maryland also toyed with the idea of neutrality in 1861 but soon abandoned it when faced with federal military intervention. Lincoln viewed neutrality as virtually equivalent to rebellion, but he accepted Kentucky’s action as a temporary necessity until he believed the state was safe for the Union. “I think to lose Kentucky is nearly the same as to lose the whole game,” Lincoln wrote on September 22, 1861. “Kentucky gone, we can not hold Missouri, nor, as I think, Maryland. These all against us, and the job on our hands is too large for us,” he concluded. “We would as well consent to separation at once, including the surrender of the capitol [sic].”

This gloomy assessment came in sharp response to a letter from his Illinois friend Orville H. Browning criticizing Lincoln for countermanding the antislavery provision in an August 30 proclamation by General John C. Frémont. The proclamation had ordered the confiscation of rebel property, including the freeing of slaves, in Missouri and in parts of Kentucky. The Bluegrass State had only recently, after the Confederate occupation of Columbus, Kentucky, abandoned its policy of neutrality and officially joined in the war on the Union side. It did so on the condition that the federal government leave slavery alone. As Lincoln informed Browning, the news of Frémont’s proclamation had reversed loyal sentiment in the Kentucky legislature and caused Union army recruits in the state to throw down their arms and disband. Under the circumstances, the president told his friend, as well as others, that he had no choice but to countermand Frémont’s emancipation decree.
Abolitionists and antislavery elements in Lincoln’s party did not view his repudiation of Frémont’s proclamation in a similar light. They denounced the president’s border state policy and his appeasement of slavery, not only in Kentucky but also in the other border slave states. Antislavery zealots and supporters of a hard war against the rebels attacked the president for his acquiescence in Kentucky’s neutrality and his refusal to “throttle” secessionist sympathizers in the border states. The silver-tongued orator Wendell Phillips of Massachusetts became Lincoln’s harshest critic. In a speech at Tremont Temple, Boston, in January 1862, Phillips announced that the nation was burdened by a “President who could not open his eyes any wider than to take in Kentucky.”

Black spokesman Frederick Douglass concluded that Lincoln’s coddling of the border states to keep them in the Union was a criminal waste of time. Douglass naively claimed that if Lincoln acted against the slave institution in Kentucky, slavery and the rebellion would come tumbling down in the South.

James Russell Lowell, literary lion, editor, and commentator on public affairs, in 1861 criticized Lincoln’s “Little Bo Peep policy” toward the border states and cried out to a friend after the president revoked Frémont’s antislavery proclamation, “How many times we are to save Kentucky and lose our self-respect?” But by the end of the year Lowell agreed with Lincoln that the border states must first be saved before the war could become a crusade against slavery. Few radical leaders in Lincoln’s Republican Party, however, ever acknowledged the wisdom of his border state strategy. The president’s misguided policy, Senator Benjamin F. Wade sneered, “could come only of one born of ‘poor white trash’ and educated in a slave State” (which Lincoln was not).

Despite what his antislavery critics and some historians have claimed, Lincoln firmly believed in the immorality of slavery, a view that he had notably expressed in a speech at Peoria, Illinois, on October 16, 1854, and repeated on other occasions. Despite his moral abhorrence of slavery, Lincoln believed that the institution should be confronted and ultimately eradicated within the political and constitutional framework established by the Founders. As president, in addition to recognizing the political necessity of retaining the support of border state whites and northern conservatives, he had trouble in finding the constitutional authority to take steps against slavery. In his first inaugural address, on March 4, 1861, he promised not
to interfere with the institution in the southern states. But once the war began, Lincoln sought a way to act against it.

Lincoln first proposed a compensated emancipation plan for the border states that would require state approval and would be funded by Congress. This strategy, the president reasoned, would not violate these states’ authority over slavery and, by extension, over freed blacks. Later, when he issued his Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln argued that, as commander in chief, he had the constitutional duty to suppress the rebellion in the South. He explained that freeing the slaves in the rebel states had become a military necessity in order to win the war and preserve the Union. That does not mean that Lincoln’s antislavery policy was solely tactical and without an important moral dimension to it. Not only did Lincoln view slavery as an evil, but he also saw it as a danger to republican institutions. In closing the Emancipation Proclamation, the president also expressed the belief that his decision was “an act of justice” in which he invoked “the considerate judgment of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God.”

The president introduced his compensated emancipation plan for the border states in December 1861 as a trial balloon for Delaware’s consideration and then in March 1862 for all the border states. The proposal, as described in chapter 5, became the focus of much of his antislavery efforts in 1862. Lincoln insisted that the plan could achieve two important objectives: it could abolish slavery in these Union states and produce an early end to the war. The approval of his plan, Lincoln contended, would deprive the rebels of the expectation that the border states would join them in the war, thereby dashing their hopes for independence and causing them to cease their rebellion.

Lincoln’s proposal would permit and even urge the cooperating states to develop a timetable for gradual emancipation. This reflected his long-held position (as well as that of his idol Henry Clay) that gradual emancipation was preferable to immediate abolition because, Lincoln announced, it would “greatly mitigate [southern] dissatisfaction” over the loss of slavery. Furthermore, he said, “The time spares both races from the evils of sudden derangement.” Lincoln expected the border states and Congress to work out the details of the compensation plan. During the period of transition from slavery to freedom, the president indicated, an apprenticeship system for young blacks would be acceptable. Despite Lincoln’s repeated appeals for the approval of his compensation proposal, all the border states, including Delaware, rejected the plan.
After he issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, which applied only to the rebel states, Lincoln urged the border states to end slavery, with or without compensation. Earlier he had dangled the prospect of voluntary black colonization outside the country before these states partly in order to gain support for emancipation, but probably also to lessen northern conservative and Democratic opposition to the proclamation. The colonization scheme, which actually was disastrously attempted on an island off Haiti, was an unrealistic and unworthy effort that Lincoln, in principle, had favored before the war.

Due to a considerable extent to Lincoln’s prodding, Maryland in October 1864 became the first border state to abolish slavery, followed by Missouri in January 1865. (In 1863 West Virginia, as a congressional requirement for statehood, had abolished slavery in its constitution.) Both Kentucky and Delaware refused to change their constitutions or repeal their laws protecting slavery, and they also declined to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Freedom for the last slaves in Kentucky and Delaware did not occur until several months after the war, when the Thirteenth Amendment became a part of the Constitution.

Few problems during the Civil War created more anguish for Lincoln than the factionalism among Unionists in the border states and the often-related conflict between military commanders and civil officials. He lamented that he was “tormented . . . beyond endurance” by the factionalism. The president believed that the “pestilent factional quarrel,” as he characterized these disputes, threatened the course of emancipation, weakened support for the Union and for civil government, and thwarted the suppression of guerrillas and other lawless elements in the border states. The renewal of old party antagonisms between Whigs and southern rights Democrats and the heightened tensions of war contributed greatly to the divisions in these states. In Missouri, radical Unionists, sometimes referred to as “Charcoals” (they preferred “Unconditional Unionists”), gained control of the state government late in the war and enacted prescriptive legislation against rebels and their sympathizers. Because Lincoln was insufficiently radical for them and supported conservative Unionists, they attempted unsuccessfully in 1864 to prevent his renomination by the National Union (Republican) Party.

At the other end of the political spectrum, Kentucky conservatives, whose reasons for opposing Lincoln were different from the radicals’,
sought a coalition with national Democrats in the 1864 election on a platform supporting the suppression of the rebellion but leaving all other issues, including slavery, to the states. The Democrats, however, controlled by the party’s peace wing or “Copperheads,” adopted a war-failure platform and called for a cease-fire preparatory to negotiations with the Confederates. Bitterly opposed to Lincoln and the Republicans, most Kentucky conservatives swallowed their disappointment and voted for the Democratic candidate, General George B. McClellan, who had promised to restore the Union despite the party’s platform. The general easily captured Kentucky’s electoral vote; he also won Delaware but lost Missouri and Maryland to Lincoln.

Governors Hamilton R. Gamble of Missouri, Augustus W. Bradford of Maryland, and Thomas E. Bramlette of Kentucky repeatedly reminded Lincoln that their states were loyal and that therefore the federal government should treat them the same as the northern states. They, along with border state senators and representatives in Congress, demanded that their state laws and the constitutional rights of their citizens should be respected by the military and federal government. Their governors and congressmen often protested against arbitrary arrests and imprisonments without due process of law.

Lincoln on occasion directly acted to curtail civil liberties in the border states. Shaken by the virtual siege of Washington after Fort Sumter and by rioting in Baltimore on April 19, 1861, the new president suspended the writ of habeas corpus in Maryland and gave General in Chief Winfield Scott carte blanche to impose martial law in the state. He later approved the military arrests of suspected secessionist legislators and Baltimore officials. In 1864, prior to the August state elections in Kentucky, Lincoln suspended the writ of habeas corpus in the Bluegrass State. Nonetheless, he frequently attempted to satisfy border state officials when they brought violations of civil liberties to his attention, particularly in cases where commanders had violated state election laws and exceeded their authority in suppressing loyal political dissent. Lincoln, however, always reserved to army commanders the right to intervene in order to combat “traitors,” guerrillas, and those obstructing military operations.

Historians have concluded that by December 1861 the border states were secure for the Union. However, Confederate military campaigns in those states in 1862–1864 and the insecurities caused by guerrilla activities in
Missouri and to a lesser extent in Kentucky kept the border region in turmoil. Political and social conditions remained volatile, and in the Bluegrass State, the Union cause continued to be at great risk. The Union success in the border states during the first months of the war, although tenuous, did establish a foundation for the growth of loyalty and for the suppression of the rebellion. Nonetheless, Lincoln’s patient and judicious management of border state affairs, though not free from error (for example, his vacillation in removing controversial military commanders), proved crucial in keeping the border states in the Union, gaining their support for the war effort, and ultimately securing the end of slavery. The failure of Lincoln’s border state policies would have ensured the independence of the southern slave republic, dealt a serious blow to the Republican Party in the North, and greatly complicated emancipation, even to the extent of postponing indefinitely the death of slavery. It also would have forever tarnished Lincoln’s reputation and his presidency.

The late William E. Gienapp has written that Civil War historians lost interest in the border states after these states supposedly “unequivocally cast their lot with the Union” in 1861. Historians, Gienapp wrote, “have concentrated on the opening months of the struggle, from the call for troops to Lincoln’s first annual message in December, and except for his efforts to get them to adopt a program of gradual emancipation have given only limited attention to Lincoln’s policies concerning the border states during the remainder of the war.”10 Professor Gienapp’s premature death prevented him from writing the history of Lincoln and the border states during the Civil War.

In this book, I attempt to fulfill the long-standing need for such a study. I have benefited not only from primary sources but also from state and local accounts on the Civil War and related works (for example, on emancipation). Biographies have also proved useful. These works are cited in the endnotes. My book begins with an account of the region’s early influence on Lincoln and describes the role of the border states’ political leadership in the presidential election of 1860. It explores the often-troubled relationship of Lincoln and the Unionists of Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri in their efforts to maintain state authority while sustaining the Union in the secession crisis and during the war. Political attitudes and divisions, conflict over emancipation and black troops, control of state military forces, civil liberties in the border states, and military interference in state and local affairs, including elections, are described. Lincoln’s relations with the
border state governors and regional military commanders and his handling of the serious factionalism among Unionists are interwoven in the account. Because of Delaware’s small size and its relative unimportance in the war, I do not devote separate chapters to the state. Where appropriate, I integrate its story into the narrative. Delaware’s material and other interests lay to the north, and it declared for the Union early in the war. However, Delawareans in the beginning were divided over the state’s participation in the conflict, and the majority remained hostile to Lincoln and the Republicans. Most Delawareans felt a kinship with southerners, due to a great extent to the presence of slavery in the state and to their opposition to abolitionists who, they believed, were intent upon establishing racial equality in the South. In 1860 they gave their electoral votes to John C. Breckinridge, the Southern Rights Democratic candidate for president (Lincoln received 3,815 popular votes out of 16,039 cast in Delaware). Conceivably, Delaware could have gone with Maryland had that state joined the Confederacy. The editor of the *Wilmington Journal and Statesman* fairly accurately described the state’s situation when he wrote, soon after Lincoln’s election, “We of Delaware live in the South. It is a Slave State; and yet there is no man within her boundaries who dares utter seriously the word secession. We are all for the Union.”

That editor, however, probably exaggerated the unanimity of Union sentiment in the state. During the war Delaware’s Democratic senators in Congress, though Unionists, proved a constant thorn in Lincoln’s side on issues relating to the purpose of the war, constitutional rights, and slavery.

West Virginia, although it became a border state during the war, is not included in this study. Granted statehood in 1863 after seceding from Virginia, the state had an unusual history. In the beginning of the war, Unionists in western Virginia, backed by the federal army, secured the president and Congress’s endorsement for the creation of a loyal government for the state of Virginia. Called the Restored Government of Virginia, it gave permission for the formation of a separate state to be known as West Virginia. The new state consisted mainly of the mountain and Ohio Valley counties of the Old Dominion. West Virginia lacked the importance of Kentucky, Missouri, and Maryland in the Civil War, though, like these border states, it remained divided over Lincoln’s antislavery policies and the enlistment of black troops in the Union army. In Congress, the rump Virginia and the West Virginia senators and representatives usually voted with the border state members while dependent on Lincoln to sustain their governments.
The role of border state members of Congress in opposing Lincoln and the Republicans is one of the important themes of the book. Historians have usually referred to these senators and representatives as Democrats, a designation that many of them as former Whigs would have resented. Regardless of past political affiliations, the border state members, often in spirited exchanges with Republican colleagues and even with President Lincoln, usually reflected the public sentiment and concerns at home and also those of conservative northerners.
Chapter I

The Border States and Lincoln’s Election

Abraham Lincoln was a product of the border country between the North and the South, first as a small child in middle Kentucky, then during his youth and early adulthood in southern Indiana and central Illinois. He lived in communities populated overwhelmingly by settlers from the upper South and the border slave states. As a young man in New Salem, Illinois, Lincoln aligned with the Whig Party of Kentuckian Henry Clay and read the conservative *Louisville Daily Journal*, the Whig newspaper organ of the region. The *Journal*, edited by George D. Prentice, wielded considerable influence in Kentucky and adjacent states, and it would continue to do so into the Civil War.

Most of Lincoln’s associates in his rise to prominence were Whigs and natives of the border states, especially Kentucky. These included his three law partners, John Todd Stuart, Stephen T. Logan, and William H. Herndon, and Circuit Judge David Davis, Orville H. Browning, and Richard Yates. They also included Mary Todd Lincoln’s family in Springfield and Lexington, and Joshua Speed, Lincoln’s closest friend, who lived most of his life on his large family farm near Louisville and only resided in Springfield for a few years. Lincoln spoke in the Kentucky vernacular, and his legendary sense of humor reflected a rural idiom that flourished during the early nineteenth century throughout the Mississippi-Ohio Valley. His father, Thomas, handed down to his son an appreciation for the backcountry humor of the region.
As a Whig in Illinois, where his party was usually in the minority, Lincoln’s political instincts inclined him toward a conservative position on issues, including slavery. Nonetheless, he was influenced in his political views by the influx of antislavery Whigs in the northern part of the state and also by his opposition to Democratic senator Stephen A. Douglas’s popular sovereignty provision in the Kansas-Nebraska bill. The bill, enacted in 1854, opened the door for slavery’s expansion into the territories, particularly the Kansas Territory, where proslavery Missourians sought to control the voters’ decision on slavery. Lincoln emerged as the leader of an antislavery coalition in Illinois that opposed the expansion of slavery, but, as a constitutional and political necessity, he recognized the institution in the states where it existed. By 1856 the Lincoln-led coalition had become the state Republican Party. Lincoln had cleverly advanced a conservative antislavery political strategy that he calculated could win the critical central counties of Illinois, even though border state and other southern transplants dominated local politics in those counties. These counties had traditionally favored the Democratic Party of Senator Douglas.

A conservative approach to ending slavery, Lincoln believed, would also appeal to diverse political elements throughout the state, such as nativist Whigs, dubbed “Know Nothings” because of their refusal to divulge the contents of their secret meetings. Paradoxically, the Know Nothings, while calling for restrictions on immigrant naturalization and voting, tended to oppose slavery, partly because their Democratic adversaries defended it. Despite his dislike of nativism, Lincoln avoided public attacks on the Know Nothings, many of whom had formerly associated with him in the Whig Party and were strong in the border states.

During the 1850s, Lincoln proclaimed the immorality of slavery, while opposing its expansion. His position sharply contrasted with Douglas’s popular sovereignty doctrine and “care not” attitude toward slavery, which, Lincoln repeatedly charged, would perpetuate the institution. Lincoln insisted that his approach would place slavery en route to “ultimate extinction,” a course that he argued had been sanctioned by the Founding Fathers. True to his conservative instincts and his Kentucky and southern Indiana origins, Lincoln rejected any federal action against slavery in the South. Indeed, he went so far as to support the federal Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, a law that the radical antislavery advocates vehemently opposed. Unlike many radicals and immediate abolitionists, Lincoln also refused to label slaveholders as evil people, and he denied that he had any “prejudice
against the Southern people.” “They are just what we would be in their situation,” he declared at Peoria in October 1854. “If slavery did not now exist amongst them, they would not introduce it. If it did now exist amongst us, we should not instantly give it up.”¹

Lincoln hoped that the inhabitants of border states, particularly old Whigs like the prominent Kentucky senator John J. Crittenden, would understand his position on slavery and would reject the inflammatory anti-Republican rhetoric of the Democrats and ultraconservatives in both the North and the South. But this did not happen. Like other southerners, border state political leaders saw little difference between Lincoln’s antislavery position and that of radicals like William H. Seward of New York and Salmon P. Chase. Lincoln’s House Divided speech, which launched his 1858 senatorial campaign against Douglas, contributed mightily—and mistakenly—to the border state belief that he was a radical who favored direct northern action against slavery in the South. Crittenden, Henry Clay’s heir as a Whig leader, encouraged his Illinois friends to support his old Democratic enemy in the election; he viewed Douglas as less threatening to sectional peace. After losing the election, Lincoln wrote Crittenden expressing his mortification that the use of Crittenden’s name against him among old Whigs had contributed to his defeat.²

Border state leaders played an even more active role against Lincoln and the Republicans in the presidential campaign of 1860. Most border state Democrats, who opposed Douglas’s candidacy because of his refusal to endorse slavery’s rights in the territories, threw their support behind Southern Rights Democratic nominee John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky. Douglas, however, retained the loyalty of Missouri Democrats. Border region Whigs, including Senator Crittenden, fearful of the sectional consequences of a Republican triumph and unwilling to support either Democratic candidate, provided the leadership for the formation of the Constitutional Union Party. They nominated Senator John Bell of Tennessee for president on a platform that ignored the slavery issue and appealed to voters on the sole issues of support for the Constitution and the Union. They hoped to win enough conservative upper South, border state, and lower North electoral votes to throw the presidential election into the House of Representatives. There, each state had one vote, and Bell’s chances for election, they believed, would be good.

The Border States and Lincoln’s Election

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But the Republicans, meeting in Chicago, dealt a serious blow to the Constitutional Unionists’ strategy. Republicans rejected the reputedly radical Seward and nominated Lincoln on a conservative, albeit antislavery, platform designed to win the key states of the lower North. Lincoln could have written the platform, whose key plank was that there should be no expansion of slavery. The *Louisville Daily Courier*, the most influential southern rights newspaper in Kentucky, wasted no time in denouncing Lincoln and predicting that the election of the “Black Republican” candidate would result in a breakup of the Union and civil war. In a long editorial on May 26, the *Courier* announced, “The mind shrinks” from contemplation “of the triumph of the party of which Mr. Lincoln is the representative and leader.” The editor argued, “Lincoln’s doctrines are the most subtle and dangerous form of anti-slaveryism,” even though Lincoln did not advance the whole cloth of abolitionism. Lincoln, the *Courier* editor told Kentuckians, had supported Senator Seward’s radical pronouncement of an “irrepressible conflict” between the North and the South. Furthermore, the editor reminded his readers that Lincoln had preached the pure and alarming doctrine that “slavery is an evil.” He professed to know of no winnable arguments with which to oppose Lincoln and the Republicans “except to strike at the very foundation of the whole superstructure of fraud and delusion [that] anti-slaveryism has erected.” The editor, along with other border state Democrats, rejected the controversial Douglas as the man to lead an Armageddon campaign against Lincoln and the “Black Republicans.” “To nominate Douglas,” he contended, “is at once and in advance to give up the fight” to defeat the Republicans.3

The *Courier* editor and southern rights activists insisted that Breckinridge was the only candidate who could win enough electoral votes to throw the election into the House of Representatives, where a victory over Lincoln was possible. With some exceptions, southern rights advocates in the border states denied that they supported secession if the “Black Republican” (Lincoln) won the election. Even Breckinridge rejected the charge that he was a disunionist. In a long speech at Ashland, Kentucky, he repeatedly affirmed his devotion to the Union, but with the usual qualifications that northerners should faithfully uphold the constitutional rights of southerners regarding slavery and check the abolitionist assault on the institution.

The *Louisville Daily Journal*, whose principal editor was still George D. Prentice, gave its readers a less ominous view of Lincoln’s nomination than
did the Courier. Nonetheless, it predicted that the Illinois Republican’s election would seriously divide the nation and lead to terrible consequences. “We have a favorable opinion of the personal and even the political integrity of Abraham Lincoln,” the Journal declared. “But he is, as the whole nation knows, a sectional candidate and only a sectional candidate.” The editor reminded its readers of Lincoln’s House Divided speech of 1858, and he repeated the misleading claim that it expressed the same “irrepressible conflict” and “higher law” doctrines put forth by Senator Seward. “There is reason to believe that Mr. Lincoln still entertains the views to which he gave such vehement utterance in 1858, and that they have probably been strengthened and rendered even more violent since by the wild and powerful and raging partisan influences by which he is now continually surrounded.” The Journal called upon “the conservative men of the North . . . to ponder deeply” the disastrous implications of Republican control of the government and to “use every honorable means and patriotic exertion to prevent the election of Abraham Lincoln to the Presidency of the United States.”

Prentice, Crittenden, and other Kentucky conservatives believed that the key to preventing a Lincoln victory lay in neighboring Indiana. They focused their attention on securing an anti-Republican fusion in the state. At the same time, they had some hopes for a similar movement in Lincoln’s home state of Illinois, where Douglas Democrats and Know Nothing Whigs, if combined, could conceivably, though not probably, defeat the Republicans. (Indiana actually had more electoral votes in 1860 than Illinois.) The fusionist success in Indiana depended on gaining the support of the former Whigs in the Know Nothing movement who had cast their ballots for Millard Fillmore, the American Party candidate, in 1856. The Fillmore vote had cost the Republicans the presidential election in the swing states of Indiana, Illinois, and Pennsylvania. Lincoln also recognized that a major threat to his success in 1860 was the border-state-backed effort to arrange an anti-Republican fusion strategy in Pennsylvania as well as in Indiana; Lincoln believed his home state was safe for the Republicans. The October gubernatorial elections in Indiana and, to a lesser extent, Pennsylvania, as Lincoln and others correctly assumed, would foretell the winner of the presidential contest in November.

During the campaign, Crittenden and Kentucky conservatives bombarded Indiana with speeches, printed addresses, and editorials arguing for anti-Republican fusion tickets in both the gubernatorial and presidential
elections. Speaking at Louisville on August 2 and echoing the views of Prentice’s *Louisville Daily Journal*, Crittenden told his friends across the Ohio River, “Mr. Lincoln may be a very worthy, upright and honest man,” but if elected president, “he must be governed by the political influence and voice of his party. Mr. Lincoln is at the head of the great anti-slavery party, a purely sectional party, which, according to all its antecedents, threatens the existence of slavery everywhere.” His election, Crittenden warned, “would be, therefore, a great calamity to the country, though he never should do an act positively offensive or injurious to any interest of the country.”

To counter the fusionist threat in Indiana, Lincoln dispatched his secretary, John G. Nicolay, to meet secretly with Richard W. Thompson, the leader of the state’s Know Nothing Party, and seek his support against the movement. Thompson, an old Whig, had served with Lincoln in Congress during the late 1840s, and despite his proslavery leanings, he promised Lincoln that he would oppose fusion with the Douglas Democrats. Thompson told Lincoln that his “primary object was to beat the Democracy by holding off” Know Nothing opposition “in the doubtful northern states.”

When the Indiana State Constitutional Union convention met in August, consisting mainly of Know Nothings, the delegates heard a rousing speech for fusion by former Know Nothing governor Charles S. Morehead of Kentucky. Like Thompson, Morehead had been a Whig colleague of Lincoln in Congress, but in 1860 Morehead viewed Lincoln as a threat to the Union and to slavery (Morehead owned a plantation in Mississippi). The Constitutional Union delegates, however, followed Thompson’s lead and refused to merge their John Bell electoral ticket with Douglas’s. Then, five days before the critical October 9 gubernatorial election, Thompson, irritated by the repeated interference of Kentuckians in the campaign, issued a printed circular, *To the Conservative Men of Indiana*, announcing that he would vote not only for Lincoln but also for the Republican candidate for governor, Henry S. Lane. Thompson’s support for the Republicans among conservatives, combined with divisions in the Indiana Democratic Party between Douglas and Breckinridge supporters, produced a victory in Indiana for Lane in October and for Lincoln in November.

Border state pressure on Know Nothings and conservative Whigs in Illinois and Pennsylvania was not as great as that in Indiana. Lincoln’s presence on the presidential ticket deflated much of the opposition to the antislavery Republicans among conservative elements in his home state.
John J. Crittenden, U.S. senator and representative of Kentucky. Political heir of Henry Clay and conservative Union leader in the border states who unsuccessfully sought a compromise to restore the Union, he opposed Lincoln’s antislavery policies. Crittenden’s death in 1863 removed an important border state leader in Congress. Courtesy of the Abraham Lincoln Library and Museum of Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee.
Still, diehard conservatives of border state Whig antecedents formed a National Union Party and nominated John Todd Stuart, Lincoln’s political mentor and first law partner, as their candidate for governor in November. However, they rejected fusion with Douglas Democrats, their old political enemies, in the presidential election. Stuart came in third to Republican Richard Yates in the gubernatorial election; Lincoln easily won the state.\(^8\)

In Pennsylvania, political rivalries also prevented a fusion of the Know Nothings with the Democrats, despite the warnings of Kentucky, Maryland, and Virginia conservatives that a sectional crisis and perhaps civil war would follow the election of Lincoln. On the eve of the election, Prentice made a passionate appeal in the *Louisville Daily Journal* for northerners to reject both Lincoln and Breckinridge. He cried out, “Men of the American Union, if you would have your consciences and your names free from the ineffaceable and damning stain of liberticide, defeat the Republican candidate for the Presidency together with his Seceding accomplice [Breckinridge], and bury the two in one common pit of ruin and shame.”\(^9\)

Prentice’s plea fell on deaf ears, despite a late desperate effort to arrange an anti-Lincoln fusion in New York. The election returns demonstrated clearly that the Constitutional Union–border state strategy to defeat the Republicans had failed. Lincoln swept the northern states except for New Jersey, where he had to share the electoral votes with Douglas. The Constitutional Union Party won only Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginia. Breckinridge captured two border states, Maryland and Delaware, and also the other slave states except for Missouri, which was carried by Douglas. Lincoln only polled 26,396 votes in the four border states. Missourians cast 17,028 of those, mainly in Saint Louis, where there was a relatively large antislavery German American population. He won 1,364 votes in Kentucky and 2,294 in Maryland. The *Dover Delawarean* reflected the sentiment in the border states, as well as that of many future historians, when it concluded that Lincoln’s victory could be attributed to nothing less than the “folly of his enemies” in their failure to fuse in an anti-Republican ticket.\(^10\) Actually, as historian William E. Gienapp pointed out in 1986, even with fusion in the states where it was possible, Lincoln still would have received twenty-seven more electoral votes than needed to win.\(^11\)

Predictably, Lincoln’s election triggered a sectional crisis. Disunion sentiment overwhelmed the lower South and traumatized North Carolina, Ten-
nessee, Arkansas, and Virginia. In these upper southern states, secessionists remained in a minority until after the fighting in Charleston Harbor in April and Lincoln’s call for troops to suppress the insurrection in the lower South. Caught in the middle of the furor, border state citizens reacted with dismay and uncertainty to Lincoln’s election and to the disturbing news from the cotton states. In Kentucky, Garret Davis, a former congressman who in 1861 would play an important role in saving the state for the Union, feared the worst as a result of the Republican triumph. On December 10, he excitedly wrote Senator Crittenden, “Unless there is some satisfactory indication shortly given by the free states that they intend to permit the fugitive slave law to be executed and to cease their assaults upon slavery, Kentucky with an overwhelming majority will range herself with the South.”

Border state political leaders and newspaper editors, even those who had supported Breckinridge, somberly warned against hasty action by their states. While condemning the northern crusade against slavery, they favored a “watch and wait” policy toward Lincoln and the Republicans. Crittenden cautioned Kentuckians to remain calm, and border state representatives in Congress attempted to work out a compromise to save the Union when Congress met in December. The Lexington Kentucky Statesman, a Democratic newspaper, advised its readers that “the election of Lincoln per se, under all the forms of law, ought not to be made the occasion of severing the present relations of the States and disrupting the confederacy.” Its editor admitted, “The principles enunciated” in the Republican platform “are directly opposed to the Constitution, are utterly subversive of the equality of the States, are destructive to all the rights of African slavery, and if enforced, must inevitably upturn our whole social system in the South and destroy the present Union.” But as long as Lincoln did not “attempt to carry out the avowed [antislavery] purposes of his party,” the editor counseled Kentuckians and other southerners to acquiesce in his inauguration as president: “There is hope that Lincoln will not be so insane as to attempt” to implement the principles of the Republican Party. “Wait, wait, wait, and if we fail to preserve the Union with a Constitution intact, then let us have a UNITED SOUTH.”

One week later, that Democratic editor argued that Lincoln could do nothing as president without the consent of Republican opponents in Congress: “[The opposition will] have it in their power to stop the machinery of government, to withhold supplies and vacate the public offices. [Lin-
coln] will be powerless for evil now as when a private citizen of Illinois, if the opposition to him is concentrated and well directed.” The Statesman editor perceptively remarked, “All this advantage would be lost if the cotton States secede and withdraw their members” from Congress.14

In Maryland, the Baltimore Sun, the leading Democratic newspaper in the state, announced, “Lincoln is elected, and it becomes us, as law-abiding and Union-loving citizens to submit quietly and await the result,” and added hopefully, “our noble ship of State” would be able to sail “safely through the dark and troublous waters of the present. Should the North attempt to subvert our rights it will be ample time to speak of redress, and even then dissolution will be madness.”15 Baltimore American editor Charles C. Fulton, a former Whig and Know Nothing who had earlier referred to the Republican candidate as “a third rate district politician,” two days after the election reaffirmed what the editor of the Lexington Kentucky Statesman and other border states spokesmen were arguing. Fulton reminded his readers that Lincoln, faced with an anti-Republican majority in Congress, would be powerless to subvert the Constitution and the rights of the people. “While we are in the Union, we are Mr. Lincoln’s master,” he wrote.16

The Frederick Herald urged western Marylanders to shun secessionist talk and stand for the Union. The editor proclaimed, with typical hyperbole, that “though we have been taunted and insulted, until every nerve of every limb seemed to cry out for shame or further forbearance, . . . though they [Republicans?] have vilified the bond of our association” and instilled “the venom of their slanderous and corrupting treachery into the whole body politic, we say hold on to the Union! They [southerners] are our brothers still by the ties of common memories, a common glory, and common hopes for the future.”17 Maryland senator James A. Pearce, a former Whig, reminded his constituents, “The Union has given us for seventy years . . . a blessing of inestimable value,” and said that Marylanders should not throw away that heritage because of Lincoln’s election.18

Many in the border states urged President-elect Lincoln to reassure southerners of his good intentions. Joined by conservatives and Democrats in the North, they demanded that he break his policy of public silence and issue a strong statement promising southerners that their rights and institutions would be protected by his administration. Lincoln, however, refused to do so.19 Nathaniel P. Paschall, editor of the Saint Louis Daily Missouri Republican, requested a public statement from Lincoln, who on November
16 wrote in response, “I could say nothing which I have not already said, and which is in print and accessible to the public.” Lincoln irritably argued that such a public statement “would do positive harm [because] the secessionists, per se believing that they had alarmed me, would clamor all the louder.” Furthermore, he told Paschall, it would be “persistently garbled, and misrepresented [by] papers, like yours.”

Upset by Lincoln’s reaction to his request, Paschall, also a former Whig, wrote the president-elect that it would be impossible “to keep Missouri in her conservative stand” for the Union “if something [was] not done to keep down the excitement now pervading the South.” Paschall published his letter in the *Saint Louis Daily Missouri Republican.* Lincoln believed that no matter how much the secessionists in the lower South and their sympathizers inflamed the public mind, the border states and the upper South would not leave the Union on the basis of his election alone. The president-elect, at least publicly, played down the secessionist threat, even as South Carolina and the other lower southern states moved to cut their ties with the Union. He had concluded that quiet firmness on his part as well as on that of his party would restore political sanity in the South. Lincoln’s failure to issue a soothing public statement to southerners, however, had made the political situation more difficult in the border states. Without repudiating the Republican platform against slavery, Lincoln could have reassured the border states of his good intentions by making such a statement and reduced the uncertainty of retaining them in the Union once the cotton states seceded.

The border state governors, by virtue of their constitutional responsibilities, assumed the lead in their states’ official response to the crisis created by Lincoln’s election and the secession of the lower South during the winter of 1860–1861. Like the overwhelming majority of southerners, the four governors, Thomas H. Hicks of Maryland, Beriah Magoffin of Kentucky, Claiborne F. Jackson of Missouri, and William Burton of Delaware, had opposed the Republicans and supported the southern position on slavery. All but Burton were slaveholders, and three of them (Jackson, Magoffin, and Burton) had been elected as Democrats. The governors, as well as their constituents, differed on the courses that their states should take as the crisis unfolded. The political party antecedents of the governors, as well as the circumstances that they faced in their states, influenced their actions.
The geographic position of their states vis-à-vis the free states and neighboring southern states (in Maryland’s case, Virginia and Pennsylvania, as well as the District of Columbia) also contributed to how the governors handled the sectional tempest.

Of the four governors, Jackson proved the strongest southern rights supporter and the most determined to resist any effort by Lincoln to coerce the seceded states. Magoffin, however, was not far behind him in devotion to the southern cause, but he was not in favor of secession. Jackson was the only border state governor who ultimately cast his lot with the Confederacy. Elected governor of Missouri in August 1860, Jackson had favored Breckinridge for president, though he endorsed Douglas because, he explained, the Illinois senator was the candidate most likely to defeat the “Black Republican” in the fall election.22 Shunning a fusion with the John Bell supporters in the conservative Constitutional Union Party, Jackson helped Douglas win Missouri, the only state that the “Little Giant” captured outright (he shared the New Jersey electoral votes with Lincoln).

When Jackson assumed office on January 3, 1861, he devoted much of his inaugural address to a denunciation of Lincoln’s election, equating it with an abolitionist triumph. Jackson announced that Missouri had “ever been devoted to the Union, and she will remain in it so long as there is any hope that it will maintain the spirit and guarantees of the Constitution.” His denial stretched the truth about his own commitment to the Union. The governor assumed that Lincoln would inevitably violate his presidential oath to protect the constitutional rights of Missourians, as Jackson interpreted these rights. Furthermore, he plainly announced that any attempt by Lincoln to coerce the seceded states would justify Missouri’s immediate withdrawal from the Union. Meanwhile, Jackson recommended that the legislature call for the election of delegates to a state convention whose purpose would be to determine Missouri’s course in the crisis.23

Missouri Unionists, however, feared that the convening of a state convention would lead to secession. The convention method, as the Unionists knew, was the constitutional procedure used by the lower South secessionists to take their states out of the Union, and without the ratification of the voters. Jackson’s southern rights faction controlled the Missouri state legislature, and it dutifully followed the governor’s recommendation by authorizing an election for convention delegates, who were to convene on February 18. At the same time, Jackson moved to activate the militia for the purpose of maintaining order and defending Missouri in case of federal intervention.
Much to Governor Jackson's disappointment, conservative and steadfast Unionists handily won the election of delegates to the state convention. When the convention met in late February 1861 in Jefferson City, it adopted a series of resolutions designed to keep Missouri in the Union. The convention resolved that “at present there is no adequate cause to impel Missouri to dissolve her connection with the Federal Union, but on the contrary she will labor for such an adjustment of existing troubles as will secure the peace, as well as the rights and equality of all the States.” The delegates urged the calling of a national convention to adopt constitutional amendments for the protection of slavery. One amendment would permit the extension of slavery into the territories, which, the delegates optimistically—and naively—claimed, would “successfully remove the causes of difference forever from the arena of national politics.” The convention also passed a strongly worded resolution opposing the use of military force against the seceded states. An attempt by Lincoln to coerce the South, the delegates predicted, would “inevitably plunge this country into civil war, and thereby entirely extinguish all hope of an amicable settlement of the fearful issues now pending before the country.” They recommended the withdrawal of federal troops from the southern forts in order to avoid an armed collision that would result in war. Finally, the delegates to the Missouri convention provided for the selection of a thirteen-member committee, chaired by Hamilton R. Gamble, a conservative Whig, with the authority after adjournment on March 22 to call the convention into special session in case “the public exigencies require” it. The committee was also to provide the convention with a report on the existing relations of the state and the federal government when it reassembled in regular session in December.24

Beriah Magoffin, a southern rights Democrat like Jackson, had been elected governor of Kentucky in 1859 on a platform advocating slavery in the territories and denouncing the abolitionists. Although a firm supporter of Breckenridge in the presidential election, Magoffin wanted to keep Kentucky in the Union. Ten days after the election, he announced in a letter to the Frankfort Tri-Weekly Yeoman that Lincoln's success was not a reason to secede. Like many border state spokesmen who expressed support for the Union, Magoffin pointed out that those opposed to the Republicans would control Congress and the Supreme Court; furthermore, the presi-
dent would be bound by the Constitution not to commit any overt action against the South. The governor's letter, however, contained an ominous threat. He warned that if Lincoln adopted an aggressive policy against the seceded states, “then Kentucky can and will join her sister Southern States” in secession. Magoffin thought that Kentucky’s continuance in the Union also depended on southern unity, including the border states, that would force Lincoln and the Republicans to respect southern rights in the territories and would insist on the return of slaves escaping to the North.

With that in mind, Magoffin on December 9 wrote all the slave state governors and proposed a southern convention. Its purpose, he said, was to save the Union. He outlined a plan that he believed would reverse the secessionist tide in the lower South. Magoffin argued that if most of the slave states agreed with his plan, Lincoln and the Republicans would have no choice but to accept it. The proposal called for the division of the western territories along the thirty-seventh parallel; above the line, the territory would be free; below it, slavery would exist. Magoffin also proposed a constitutional amendment that would invalidate the personal liberty laws of the northern states that had been enacted to prevent the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Another amendment would prohibit the federal government from interfering with slavery in the states, though Lincoln had never contested individual states’ rights to allow slavery. The territorial concession to slavery constituted a sticking point in the governor’s plan. Even if it could derail secession in the lower South—a highly unlikely prospect—Lincoln would not accept any proposal permitting the expansion of slavery. The nonextension of slavery had been the centerpiece of his and the Republican platform in 1860. Furthermore, any plan involving concessions to the South had to come from Congress, not from the southern governors.

The governors immediately rejected Magoffin’s call for a southern convention to propose a compromise. Instead, deep South disunionists dispatched “commissioners” to the border states and to the upper South (Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas) seeking support for secession. Most of the commissioners were natives of the states they visited. David Clopton of Alabama, while still a member of Congress, appeared in Dover to lobby for Delaware’s secession. Clopton told Governor Burton that the “Black Republicans” intended “to circulate insurrectionary documents and disseminate insurrectionary sentiments among [the] hitherto contented servile population.” The ultimate objective of Lincoln’s
party, Clopton claimed, “was the establishment of an equality of races” in the South. Although Burton partly agreed with Clopton’s characterization of the Republicans, he refused to recommend secession to the Delaware legislature.

Other southern commissioners repeated Clopton’s racialist argument as they sought support in the border states and the upper South. Alabama commissioner Stephen F. Hale, a native of the Bluegrass State, arrived in Frankfort on December 26, 1860, and immediately wrote a long letter to Governor Magoffin in which he covered all the grounds for secession.

Partly influenced by Hale’s appeal and disturbed by cascading events, Magoffin on December 27 called for a special session of the Kentucky General Assembly on the crisis. He proposed that the legislature provide for the election of a state convention to consider “the future of Federal and interstate relations of Kentucky.” Spokesmen of the John Bell Constitutional Unionists and Stephen A. Douglas Democrats expressed alarm at what they believed was the governor’s intention to take Kentucky out of the Union. They met in Louisville on January 8 and formed the Union State Central Committee to oppose immediate secession. Led by conservatives George D. Prentice of the Louisville Daily Journal, former congressman Garret Davis, and James Speed, the older brother of Lincoln’s close friend Joshua, the Union coalition resolved that although Kentucky had been provoked by the Republicans, it had no cause for secession because of Lincoln’s election. At the same time, the Unionists announced their determination to oppose any federal policy by which the country would be “held together with the sword, with laws to be enforced by standing armies; it is not such a Union as our fathers intended, and not worth preserving.” They stopped short, however, of threatening secession if Lincoln attempted to use force against the seceded states. Instead, they called for the adoption of a proposed compromise on slavery that Senator Crittenden had introduced in Congress when it met in December (see below).

When the Kentucky legislature assembled on January 17, Governor Magoffin issued a strong warning to President-elect Lincoln and the Republicans that Kentucky “[would] not be an indifferent observer” to any effort to coerce South Carolina and the lower southern states. “The people of Kentucky,” he declared, “will never stand by with arms folded while those States are struggling for their constitutional rights and resisting oppression, or being subjugated to an antislavery government.” Magoffin denied the charge by the Unionist coalition that his words placed him on the
side of the secessionists. Rather, he sought to impress upon Lincoln that unless the Republicans avoided a policy of coercion, events could quickly get out of control and, tragically, Kentucky would be drawn into the vortex of secession.

Even so, the governor’s recommendation for a state convention was a red-flag issue for staunch Unionists. These Unionists, as in Missouri, feared that a convention, elected in the heat of the crisis and with the encouragement of the seceded states and the governor, would be controlled by extreme southern rights advocates and would adopt a secession ordinance. Kentucky, the Unionists claimed, would have seceded before Lincoln had an opportunity to demonstrate a conciliatory policy toward the South. Prentice’s *Louisville Daily Journal* reported, “The chief secession [newspaper] organs of Kentucky intimate quite clearly, that, if the Legislature fails to call a State Convention for the passage of an Ordinance of Secession, rebellion and civil war in the State shall be the consequence.” The *Journal* increased its attacks on the “Southern conspirators” after southern rights Democrat Breckinridge, recently elected to the U.S. Senate by the General Assembly, announced his support for a state convention. The *Journal* charged that Breckinridge, Magoffin, and the other “conspirators [aimed] to precipitate Kentucky into war with our friends along the Ohio river,” despite their pretensions of support for the Union.

While the Kentucky General Assembly was meeting on the crisis in early 1861, and before Lincoln’s inauguration in March, Unionists held rallies throughout the state. They filled the columns of the state press with appeals for the legislators to vote down Governor Magoffin’s request for a state convention. Their statements, however, revealed that support for the Union was not unconditional. Almost all the rallies and newspaper articles demanded that Lincoln and the Republicans disavow their antislavery platform, support a compromise on the territories and on other issues troubling the South, and reject any policy designed to coerce the seceded states. Gradually strong public sentiment in favor of a “watch and wait” policy toward Lincoln developed, strengthening the hand of the Unionists in the legislature. On February 11, the last day of the session, the members of the General Assembly, having heard from their constituents, disapproved the resolution calling for a convention. But the struggle to keep Kentucky in the Union was far from over and would critically divide the state when the war began in April.
During the secession winter of 1860–1861, no state except Virginia had a greater, more immediate importance for the Union than Maryland. This border state virtually surrounded the national capital and contained America’s third-largest city, Baltimore, with a population of 212,418 in 1860. As in Missouri and Kentucky, political divisions in Maryland over the course of the state should take in the crisis developed soon after Lincoln’s election. The relatively large slaveholding counties of the southeast were a hotbed of southern rights sentiment, with many supporting secession if Lincoln showed the cloven hoof or if neighboring Virginia seceded. Zealous southern rights leaders predicted that the fence-straddlers and lukewarm Unionists like the editors of the Baltimore Sun would eventually abandon their “watch and wait” policy toward Lincoln and support secession. Contributing to the tension in the state, particularly in the eastern counties, was the presence in Baltimore of a large free black community. The city’s white population, with a troubling number of recent immigrants, had dramatically increased during the 1850s, producing racial and ethnic conflict in the city. Free blacks alone numbered 25,680 of the city’s population in 1860; 2,218 blacks were still held in slavery. Baltimore had voted for Breckinridge in 1860 by the slender margin of 1 percent over Bell, the Constitutional Union candidate. At the same time, the state had reelected a Democratic legislature that supported southern rights. No one knew which way Maryland would go if the secession fever afflicting the lower South reached Virginia.

The man that Lincoln and Maryland Unionists depended on to save the state was Thomas H. Hicks, a former Whig. Elected governor in 1857 as a Know Nothing, Hicks had supported Bell for president. A devotee of deceased Whig icon Henry Clay and governor of a state with a slight Democratic majority in 1860, Hicks naturally reacted cautiously to Lincoln’s election. Furthermore, the state’s strategic and vulnerable position between Virginia and Pennsylvania, as well as its close proximity to Washington, necessitated a careful approach by Hicks to the secession crisis. Although a Unionist and, paradoxically, a supporter of southern rights, Hicks realized that he had to walk a tightrope if he hoped to save Maryland for the Union while also preserving its “sovereign” rights, including those relating to slavery.34

After Lincoln’s election in November 1860, Governor Hicks assumed that his task as a Unionist would be virtually impossible if he called the Democratic General Assembly into a special session to consider the state’s
position. Even though many southern rights Democrats might be unwilling to jump into the secessionist frying pan without provocation, the legislature, the governor believed, could still take steps that would spark a confrontation with the Republican administration in Washington and lead to secession. Hicks, ever wary of his old Democratic adversaries in the General Assembly, did not want to take that risk if the legislature met.

Hardly had the votes been counted in the fall election when southern rights supporters demanded that Governor Hicks summon the legislature to Annapolis to consider Maryland’s position in the crisis. On November 27 Hicks, as expected, rejected out of hand their demand and announced that though he supported southern rights, a meeting of the General Assembly unfortunately would intensify, rather than defuse, the excitement and divisions in the state. Like other Union leaders in the border states, he argued that Lincoln would be restrained by the Constitution and laws in his policy toward the southern states, including Maryland. Southern grievances against the North, Hicks insisted, could be handled within the Union.35

Hicks followed this announcement with an address to the people of Maryland in early January, after South Carolina’s secession and while other lower southern states prepared to leave the Union. He reminded the people that Maryland was “a conservative Southern state” and that they should take no part in the effort to pull down the Union. “The whole plan” of those demanding the convening of the General Assembly was “to fully commit this State to secession,” Hicks charged. “I firmly believe that a division of this Government would inevitably produce civil war,” an eventuality that “the secession leaders in South Carolina, and the fanatical demagogues of the North have alike [predicted].” Nonetheless, Hicks promised, Maryland would stand with her southern neighbors in demanding that northerners purge their laws of the “offensive, unconstitutional statutes” that interfered with the return of fugitive slaves. Slaveholding Marylanders keenly felt the issue of escaping slaves because of their proximity to the free states and the easy access of militant abolitionists to their communities. John Brown’s shocking raid at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, in 1859, from a base in Maryland, was fresh in their minds.36

If the southern appeals were “in vain,” Hicks announced, Maryland “would make . . . common cause with her sister border States in resistance to tyranny.” Such a course, “if need be,” would be determined “more effectively by the people themselves, in their meetings, than by the Legisla-
ture” that had been chosen before the crisis, the governor declared. At the same time, Hicks decried any effort by federal authorities to coerce South Carolina or any other state to remain in the Union. 37

Governor Hicks flirted with the idea of a central confederacy of border states in case Lincoln and the Republicans violated southern rights and made war on the seceded states. On January 2 he wrote Governor Burton of Delaware suggesting the formation of a central confederacy of border states if the Union was disrupted. Burton replied on January 8 that Delaware had too many commercial ties with the North to leave the Union, though he admitted that the two lower counties sympathized with the South. The third county, New Castle, containing Wilmington, was staunchly Union. When other border states showed little interest in a separate confederacy, Hicks dropped the matter. 38 Meanwhile, in early 1861, the compromise movement in Congress to preserve the Union gained the governor’s support, as well as that of other border state leaders. Hicks himself attended the much-heralded but futile Peace Conference in Washington in late February that sought to resolve the controversy over slavery and save the Union.

As occurred in Kentucky, both southern rights and Union supporters in Maryland held large rallies during January and February 1861. Gradually the tide of opinion turned in favor of the Union and in opposition to the assembling of the legislature. No one was more important in influencing opinion for the Union than Reverdy Johnson, a longtime conservative Whig leader, former U.S. attorney general, and former senator who had voted for Douglas in 1860 as the only candidate likely to defeat Lincoln. In meetings in Baltimore and elsewhere, Johnson backed Governor Hicks’s decision not to call the legislature into special session. On January 10 Johnson, who was almost blind, addressed a huge rally in Baltimore and outlined the case for a conservative Union policy for Maryland. Though he proclaimed his support for southern rights on slavery and condemned the “heresies of political abolitionism,” Johnson argued that Maryland’s Union tradition and its political and economic interests dictated that the state shun the excitement afflicting the lower South. He reminded Marylanders that the state had played a leading role in the establishment of the republic and should not now desert it. Like Hicks, Senator James A. Pearce, and other Unionists, Johnson argued that Lincoln as president would be impotent to do harm. He also urged the border states to get together and propose constitutional amendments safeguarding slavery. How-
ever, unlike other border state spokesmen, he insisted that Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, which had become a flashpoint in the crisis, “must at all hazards be defended, [and] the power of the National Standard preserved.”

Far away in Springfield, Illinois, Lincoln remained determined to pursue a policy of “masterly inactivity in both word and deed” until he became president on March 4, in the words of George Ashmun of Massachusetts who had chaired the Republican convention that nominated Lincoln. But privately, Lincoln stated his opposition to secession and declared that the government possessed “both the authority and the power to maintain its own integrity.” The president-elect wrote Worthington G. Snethen, a rare Baltimore Republican, on December 17 and expressed his views. Although the letter has not been found, its substance is suggested in Snethen’s reply on December 21. Apparently taking his cue from Lincoln, Snethen told Lincoln that “the real object of the politicians of the States . . . in forming this excitement, and pretending to go with that nest of tories [secessionists],” was “to try the nerves of the Republican party and this President whom they have elected.” He informed Lincoln, “The poison of rebellion has seized upon many of our merchants and lawyers” in Maryland. Snethen, however, predicated that Governor Hicks would not “yield to the pressure upon him [and] call the legislature together” for the purpose of arraying Maryland with South Carolina and other states that plotted to leave the Union.

Two important Republican visitors in the state did not share Snethen’s confidence in Governor Hicks’s ability to resist the secessionists. Joseph Medill, editor of the Chicago Tribune and a political associate of the president, confidentially reported to Lincoln on December 26, 1860, that in Baltimore “loyal sentiment [was] gradually giving way, and the vicious rabble [were] getting control.” He continued, “If things go on thus for the next 60 days as they have for the last 30, the city will be under the complete control of Disunion vigilance committees and a reign of terror will domineer over that city.” Medill told Lincoln that when Baltimore was “stormed by the enemy and in their hands, Maryland [would] go the same way [since] the city rules the state.” He wrote, “It is the intention of the dis-unionists . . . to ‘clean out’ the Republicans” in Washington and to “take possession of the capitol and proclaim the Southern Confederacy.”
“At all events,” he continued, “they will call a southern convention” in Washington “to ‘reconstruct’ the Constitution, as they term it.”

On January 15, 1861, Alexander K. McClure of Pennsylvania reported to the president-elect, “The pressure upon Hicks is fearful; & if he should be compelled to yield,” which McClure suggested that he would, “you could never get to Washington except within a circle of bayonets.” Not until Lincoln arrived in Pennsylvania on February 21 en route to his inauguration did he seem to realize the seriousness of the situation in Baltimore and eastern Maryland. This awareness would influence his reaction to events in the Old Line State and particularly in Baltimore during the first critical months of the war.

Although he refused as president-elect to issue an address on the crisis, Lincoln sought to reduce southern, including border state, opposition by appointing southerners to his cabinet. He first approached Edward Bates, a conservative Republican of Saint Louis, and offered him the office of either secretary of state or attorney general; the position, he said, would depend upon Seward’s acceptance of the secretary of state office. Bates agreed, and Lincoln later appointed him attorney general. Lincoln also wanted another southerner in his cabinet. When James Guthrie of Kentucky, a former secretary of the treasury in Franklin Pierce’s Democratic administration, showed no interest in joining the new administration, Lincoln asked John A. Gilmer, an old-line Whig congressman and large slaveholder of North Carolina, to visit him in Springfield with the understanding that a cabinet position would be offered. Gilmer, probably fearing severe repercussions at home if he accepted an appointment from a Black Republican, turned down the invitation. Lincoln then selected Montgomery Blair, the scion of a prominent Maryland political family and a founder of the Republican Party, as postmaster general. He admitted, however, that the appointment of Blair did not really satisfy the need for a true southerner in the administration. The Bates and Blair appointments might have helped somewhat to assuage border state concerns, but they did little to reduce apprehension regarding Lincoln’s future policies or that of his party toward the seceded states and slavery.

When Congress met in December 1860, border state senators and representatives took the lead in an effort to find a compromise that, they hoped, would reverse the secession momentum in the South. The House of Repre-
sentatives immediately set up a committee of thirty-three—one member from each state, including the lower South states—to recommend a solution to the crisis. Two weeks later, the Senate formed a similar committee of thirteen members. Lazarus W. Powell, a Kentucky southern rights Democrat, chaired the Senate “Union Saving Committee,” as Seward, a committee member, facetiously dubbed it. However, border state and southern Unionists, as well as northern Democrats like Douglas, who was also on the committee, looked to Crittenden, Powell’s seventy-four-year-old colleague, for a compromise plan that Congress would approve. Since the new Republican administration would need to endorse the plan for it to succeed, the committee adopted a rule, offered by Senator Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, that only by a dual majority of the five Republicans and of the other eight members could a proposal receive the committee’s approval. This meant that Lincoln, if he chose to do so, could have an important influence on the votes of the Republican members of the committee and thus on the fate of any compromise plan. It was soon clear that the president-elect intended to play that role.45

From the beginning of the congressional session, Lincoln worried that the forces of compromise, backed by lame-duck president James Buchanan, would prevail in Congress on the critical issue of slavery’s expansion. The Republicans had won the election on a platform opposing the extension of slavery in the territories, and that position, Lincoln insisted, should not be surrendered. On December 10, 1860, he wrote Senator Lyman Trumbull, “Let there be no compromise on the question of extending slavery.” If slavery was permitted to expand, he continued, “all our labor is lost, and, ere long, must be done again.” “Stand firm,” he admonished the Republicans in Congress. “The tug has to come, & better now, than any time here-after.”46

The president-elect’s refusal to compromise on the territorial issue greatly distressed Crittenden and other border state members of Congress, who desperately sought to prevent the disruption of the Union. Nonetheless, the Kentucky senator as a member of the Union Saving Committee proposed a border state plan that would restore the Missouri Compromise line, thereby providing for the protection of slavery below 36 degrees, 30 minutes north latitude in the West. The Crittenden Compromise, as it became known, also proposed a constitutional amendment prohibiting any federal interference with slavery in those states where it already existed and a congressional resolution calling on the northern states to repeal their per-
sonal liberty laws. The part of the proposal permitting the expansion of slavery into the territories doomed the compromise package. Taking their cue from Lincoln, Republican members of the Senate committee rejected Crittenden’s plan.47

The venerable Kentucky senator, however, did not give up the fight for the compromise. Encouraged by concerned northeastern merchants and other conservatives, Crittenden in January, as the lower southern states moved toward secession, introduced his proposals on the Senate floor as a personal bill.48 Upper South and border state Unionists pleaded with Lincoln to throw his weight behind the compromise. Samuel T. Glover, a Missouri friend, grimly wrote Lincoln, “Much of the Union feeling in Mo is deceptive.” “Disunionists put on the ‘livery of Union’ everywhere,” he wrote, but unless the Crittenden Compromise was approved, he feared that the state under Governor Jackson’s leadership would leave the Union. Others in the upper and border South during the winter of 1860–1861 foretold a similar gloomy outcome if the compromise were to fail.49

These Unionists exaggerated the political situation in their states, partly to frighten Lincoln and the Republicans in Congress to support the Crittenden Compromise. Approval of the compromise was not essential to keeping the border states in the Union, or even to maintaining upper South loyalty. If Lincoln refrained from a policy of aggression against the lower South and gave assurances regarding slavery, these southern states, though traumatized and divided by events, would not abandon the Union. Lincoln, however, believed that if the suppression of the secessionists in the lower South became necessary to preserve the Union, the border states would rally to his call for troops. On December 24, 1860, an anonymous article in the Springfield Illinois State Journal, probably written by the president-elect, predicted that if armed forces were needed to put down the secessionists, “the border Slave States, whose tranquility and interests [were] more imperiled than those of any part of the country, [were] just as likely to furnish [troops] as any other part of the Union.”50 Lincoln was overly sanguine.

Despite the president-elect’s opposition to any compromise of the Republican platform that had produced victory in the fall, some concerned members of the party in early 1861 wavered on the territorial issue, including Senator Seward, who was also secretary of state-designate. When Critten-
den’s bill reached the Senate floor, Lincoln again admonished his friends in Congress to hold firm against any proposal that would permit slavery to expand.\textsuperscript{51} Although the Republicans in Congress also defeated the latest Crittenden effort to arrange a compromise, Lincoln still had to face another challenge to his policy when the so-called Peace Conference assembled in Washington before his inauguration.

The Virginia legislature had issued a call for a convention of all the states to meet in the capital in February and recommend a compromise for congressional approval. The border states quickly endorsed the move and dispatched delegations to the meeting. Several northern legislatures also appointed delegates to the Peace Conference. Privately, Lincoln seethed with anger at the call. He agreed with Orville H. Browning, a close Illinois associate, that “no good results would follow the border State Convention, but evil rather, as increased excitement would follow when it broke up without having accomplished any thing.”\textsuperscript{52}

Lincoln’s prediction that the Peace Conference would fail to resolve the crisis proved correct. The conference’s recommendations were similar to the Crittenden Compromise, and, as expected, Congress rejected the plan, except for a proposed constitutional amendment forever prohibiting federal interference with slavery in the states. Lincoln had no serious objection to the amendment, though he concluded that it was redundant because under the Constitution as it stood the federal government had no authority over slavery in the southern states. When the war began, the proposed amendment failed at ratification. Despite Lincoln’s fear that the Peace Conference would increase sectional passion, the mere fact that it met helped break the secessionist momentum in the upper South and bolstered Unionists’ morale in the border states. It also provided time for the political excitement to weaken and give Lincoln a better chance of gaining border state support after he assumed office.

No compromise proposal or soothing statements by Lincoln would have persuaded the lower southern states to return to the Union. They had cast their lot with secession, and there was no turning back. When Lincoln traveled to Washington in mid-February to take the oath of office on March 4, the real issue had become the military coercion of the seceded states, not compromise. At Indianapolis, on February 11, the president-elect launched a trial balloon on the question. He suggested to an audience that it was not coercion if the federal government “simply [insisted] upon holding its own forts, or retaking those forts which belong to it.”\textsuperscript{53} Al-
though he quickly said that he had decided nothing in the matter, the re-
mark rekindled secessionist talk in the upper South and the border states,
upset northern conservatives, and caused Lincoln concern. The Louisville
Daily Courier excitedly proclaimed it “a war proposition . . . without a
declaration of war, waged under false pretenses, and justifiable only to that
fanaticism of which Mr. Lincoln is at once the embodiment and representa-
tive.” The Saint Louis Daily Missouri Republican, a conservative Unionist
newspaper, denounced the Indianapolis speech and declared that it her-
alded the beginning of a civil war—“the North against the South, and the
latter to be subjugated at all hazards.” Border state Union leaders, how-
ever, generally refrained from publicly criticizing Lincoln’s coercion remark
at Indianapolis in order to avoid unduly inflaming sentiment before the
new president had an opportunity to reveal his southern policy.

Twelve days after his Indianapolis speech, Lincoln arrived in Washing-
ton, but only after he had secretly slipped through Baltimore and into the
national capital to avoid an assassination plot. The southern rights press
excoriated him for his furtive trip through Maryland and were joined by
newspapers elsewhere. Denying that any violence awaited the president in
the city, the Baltimore Sun declared, “Had we any respect for Mr. Lincoln
. . . the final escapade by which he reached the capital would have utterly
demolished it, and overwhelmed us with mortification.” The Sun, reflect-
ing the sentiments of many in Maryland, contended that the people of the
state had “much cause to fear that such a man, and such advisers as he has,
may prove capable of infinitely more mischief than folly when invested
with power.” Even the ardent Unionist Baltimore American was embar-
rassed by the president-elect’s secret ride through the city. It expressed the
opinion that the Baltimore police had made “ample precautions” to pro-
tect Lincoln, though the newspaper admitted that his appearance would
have “excited a spirit of stern opposition.” Governor Hicks, quick to
protect the reputation of his state, publicly expressed his belief that there
had been no plot against the president-elect’s life. Baltimore mayor George
W. Brown, writing years later, also denied that “a formidable conspiracy
existed to assassinate” Lincoln. Brown maintained that the incident unnec-
essarily inflamed the people of Baltimore against the new president and
contributed to the later violence against northern troops passing through
the city. Furthermore, Brown wrote, “fearful accounts of the conspiracy
flew all over the country, creating a hostile feeling against the city, from
which it soon afterwards suffered.”

The Border States and Lincoln’s Election
The question should be asked, was there a real conspiracy to assassinate Lincoln in Baltimore? Most historians have accepted the account, supposedly by Ward Hill Lamon, that no serious plot existed. In a book later ascribed to him but which he did not write, Lamon, an old friend of the president-elect who had accompanied him through Baltimore, quoted Lincoln as saying, “You . . . know that the way we skulked into this city [Washington] . . . has been a source of shame and regret to me, for it did look so cowardly.” A more reliable account, however, was that of Illinois congressman Elihu B. Washburne, who later wrote, “I was the first man to see him after his arrival in Washington, . . . and I know he was neither ‘mortified’ nor ‘chagrined’ at the manner in which he reached Washington.” Washburne insisted, “There can be no reasonable doubt” of a plot in Baltimore to kill Lincoln. The preponderance of evidence, as compiled and published by Norma B. Cuthbert in 1949, strongly suggests that Lincoln’s midnight ride through Maryland did indeed avert an attack on his life.

In the national capital, President-elect Lincoln held several meetings with border state and upper South senators and representatives. On these occasions, border state men, including Governor Hicks of Maryland, impressed upon Lincoln the difficult political situation they faced at home and forcefully warned him against any hostile action against the seceded states. Such action, they insisted, in addition to causing the upper South to leave the Union, would swing public opinion dangerously close to the secessionists in their own states. Furthermore, a coercive policy, they argued, would end any hope of restoring the lower South to the Union. After meeting with Lincoln and other Republicans, Hicks wrote Seward and expressed his concern that they did not understand “the condition of things here, and in the border states.” His state, Hicks reported, was on tenterhooks over the crisis, and, as he told Seward, if the legislature met without the governor’s constitutional approval, as had occurred in Texas, it might take the state out of the Union. Hicks made it clear to Seward that he was “a union man and supporter of your Administration,” but not a Republican. Seward forwarded the letter to Lincoln, who was receiving a quick lesson on the crisis in the border states as well as in Virginia.

In his long-awaited inaugural address on March 4, Lincoln laid down a policy designed, in part, to allay concerns about him in the border states

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and the upper South but that did not recognize secession. He announced that all rights would be protected in the southern states, including the right of slaveholders to own slaves. He also promised that the Fugitive Slave Act, a bone of contention for border state Unionists as well as other southerners, would be enforced. At the same time, the new president declared that it was his constitutional duty to enforce the laws and protect federal property in the southern states, including military installations. “But beyond what may be necessary for these objects,” Lincoln promised, “there will be no invasion—no using of force against, or among the people anywhere.”

Repeating what he had said on February 11 at Indianapolis, Lincoln maintained that his policy would not constitute “coercion,” a definition of the term that most southerners rejected.

The new president concluded his inaugural address with a stirring appeal to the spirit of American patriotism. “In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not in mine,” he exclaimed, “is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you. You can have no conflict, without being yourselves the aggressors... We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching [sic] from every battle-field, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”

These patriotic sentiments resonated well with many leading border state Unionists, such as Governor Hicks and Reverdy Johnson of Maryland and Senator Crittenden of Kentucky. Johnson told a friend that Lincoln’s inaugural address meant no war.

John Pendleton Kennedy, Maryland literary icon, brother of Senator Anthony Kennedy, and a former member of President Fillmore’s cabinet, pronounced the speech “conciliatory and firm—promising peace, but breathing a purpose to resist aggression against the Government” and the Union of the Founding Fathers. Kennedy found it encouraging that Lincoln was “beginning to perceive the realities of the case” and was “growing more and more conservative” in his approach to the crisis.

Border state newspapers that were owned and edited by conservative old-line Whigs echoed Kennedy’s statement. These included Prentice’s Louisville Daily Journal, Fulton’s Baltimore American, and Paschall’s Saint Louis Daily Missouri Republican. The Republican Saint Louis Missouri...
*Democrat* announced, “We can only say this morning” that Lincoln’s inaugural address “meets the highest expectations of the country, both in point of statesmanship and patriotism, and that its effect on the public mind cannot be other than salutary in the highest degree.” The president’s speech, the *Louisville Daily Journal* insisted, meant peace. This newspaper predicted that Lincoln and his cabinet would “not undertake the adoption of any policy calculated to give to the country war.” Such a policy would be “an insane enterprise.” The administration, the *Journal* sanguinely—and naively—argued, might “continue to hold the forts now in the possession of the government, but this would be neither war nor coercion,” and business in the seceded states would continue uninterrupted. The *Journal* pointed out that Congress before adjourning on March 4 had rejected a Republican “Force bill” authorizing the military suppression of the seceded states. The editor probably did not know that Lincoln, working behind the scenes, had helped secure the defeat of the bill.

Fulton’s *Baltimore American* joined Prentice’s *Louisville Daily Journal* in maintaining that “the tone” of Lincoln’s inaugural address was “peaceful.” “Mr. Lincoln,” the *American* declared, “avows his determination to preserve peace, so far as it may be done, in the performance of his duty as he understands it. . . . While he announces his intention to collect the revenue and to possess and defend the forts, he distinctly declares that he will do these things in such a manner as to avoid the necessity for strife.” But even Fulton admitted that Lincoln’s promise to enforce the laws and hold federal properties in the South created the chilling prospect of a violent confrontation with the seceded states.

Southern rights leaders like former vice president Breckinridge, who would soon briefly replace Crittenden in the Senate (the aging senator did not seek reelection), and Governors Jackson of Missouri and Magoffin of Kentucky predictably saw the mailed fist in the inaugural address. They believed that Lincoln’s remarks revealed his intentions to use military force against the seceded states. However, they preferred to let their party press take the lead in publicly criticizing the speech. In Maryland, the *Baltimore Sun*, with readers not only in the state but also along the middle Atlantic seaboard, characterized the speech as “sectional and mischievous” and added, “If it means what it says, it is the knell and the requiem of the Union, and the death of hope” for peace. A Frankfort friend of Crittenden summed up sentiment in Kentucky regarding Lincoln’s inaugural address when he wrote the now former senator, “As a matter of course all
secessionists denounce it. Our friends to some extent are divided in opinion.”

For the moment, however, border state conservatives had the upper hand in their states. The real test would come, the Saint Louis Daily Missouri Republican predicted, when Lincoln attempted to put his policy into practice, specifically whether the forts could be “held or retaken and revenues collected without bloodshed.”

One month later, the test that border state men and women, as well as other Americans, had dreaded became a reality. On April 12 Confederate batteries at Charleston opened fire across the harbor on Fort Sumter after news arrived that Lincoln had dispatched a relief expedition to sustain Major Robert J. Anderson’s small garrison. On April 15 Lincoln issued a proclamation calling on the states for 75,000 militiamen to suppress “combinations” in the lower South “too powerful to be suppressed by the ordinary course of judicial proceedings.” The quota of troops for federal service for Missouri, Kentucky, and Maryland was four regiments, or more than 3,000 men each, and for Delaware was 2,000. The wording in the reply of Governor John W. Ellis of North Carolina to the request for troops was almost verbatim the same as that of his fellow governors in the upper South. Ellis informed Secretary of War Simon Cameron that he would be “no party to this wicked violation of the laws of the country, and to this war upon the liberties of a free people.” He promised, “You can get no troops from North Carolina.”

North Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, and Arkansas moved quickly to leave the Union and join the Confederate States of America that had been formed by the lower southern states in February.

A similar response to Lincoln’s call for troops came from Governors Jackson and Magoffin. Jackson wired Cameron that Missouri would supply no troops “to make war upon the people of the seceded states.” He pronounced the requisition for troops “illegal, unconstitutional, and revolutionary in its objects inhuman and diabolical, and cannot be complied with.” He too insisted, “Not one man will the State of Missouri furnish to carry on any such unholy crusade.” Governor Magoffin “emphatically” replied that Kentucky would “furnish no troops for the wicked purpose of subduing her sister Southern States.” Instead of answering by telegram, Governor Hicks hurriedly met with Lincoln to protest the call for troops and warned him of Maryland’s strong opposition to the decision to use force against the seceded states. Even Governor Burton of reliably safe Delaware refused to provide the War Department with the 2,000 requisitioned by the federal government.
tioned troops from his state, though he called for the organization of a militia to protect "against violence of any sort." Burton announced, however, that these troops would "have the option of offering their services to the general government for the defense of its capital and the support of the Constitution and the laws of the country." In his special message to Congress on July 4, 1861, Lincoln lamented the fact that only Delaware of the slave states had organized a regiment in response to his call.

John Pendleton Kennedy of Maryland pronounced Lincoln’s call for troops a “wicked blunder” because its purpose went far beyond defending the national capital to include a dreadful policy of coercing the southern states back into the Union. After having praised Lincoln’s inaugural address for its patriotic and pacific spirit, Kennedy now sorrowfully concluded, “We are driven into extremities by a series of the most extraordinary blunders at Washington, which I think must convince everybody that there is no ability in the Administration to meet the crisis. They have literally forced the Border States out of the Union, and really seem to be utterly unconscious of the follies they have perpetrated.” Such were the gloomy pronouncements of many border state men after the fighting in Charleston Harbor and Lincoln’s call for troops to suppress the insurrection.

Although border state defiance after Fort Sumter and the administration’s requisition for troops boded ill for Lincoln’s determination to suppress the rebellion, it would be inaccurate to conclude that no support for the decision existed in the border states. As early as January 10, 1861, Reverdy Johnson had declared that Fort Sumter must be defended “at all hazards” as a symbol of Unionism in the seceded states. German Americans in Saint Louis and a scattering of Republicans elsewhere in the border states agreed and quietly applauded the president’s action to hold Fort Sumter and use troops to save the Union. A Presbyterian pastor in Wilmington, Delaware, came out boldly for the coercion of the seceded states after Fort Sumter and exclaimed to his congregation that the conflict should become a holy war against the rebellion.

We know today that the border slave states remained in the Union. But this outcome was far from certain during the months after Fort Sumter and Lincoln’s call for troops. Events and developments, both political and military, could have tilted the border country into the Confederacy in 1861; and in these states, particularly Kentucky, the struggle for the Union con-
tinued almost until the end of the war. A sizable minority of the people in the border states sided with the South, though many of them were unwilling to show their Confederate allegiance because they might be subject to arrest. Some men, however, went south and joined the Confederate army; others, as the war became long and hard, engaged in violence and guerrilla activities at home, tactics that were often returned in kind by armed Unionists and federal forces. Political leaders and newspaper editors who contributed to the passions generated by the war sought to protect the rights of their states and loyal citizens against federal encroachments and at the same time maintain security in their bitterly divided communities. When the war began, Lincoln focused much of his attention on the crisis in the border states in an effort to prevent the region from falling to the “traitors.” Despite his ultimate success, Lincoln at times mismanaged border state affairs, for example, in Maryland during the early months of the war. There, after violence occurred in the streets of Baltimore and the national capital underwent a virtual siege, Lincoln associated southern rights supporters with secessionist conspirators, and he either approved of or acquiesced in their suppression. The first crisis of the war for the Union occurred in Maryland, and it would severely test Lincoln’s presidential leadership and the strength of Unionism in the state.