




# The Causes of the Civil War

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John Brown's Raid on Harpers Ferry  
The Election of 1860



# John Brown's Raid on Harpers Ferry (1859)

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- On October 16, 1859, John Brown led a small band of men— including his own children into Harpers Ferry, Virginia, to capture the federal arsenal there. His plan was to arm as many slaves as possible across Northern Virginia and lead an uprising to free them.
- But, slaves did not flock to Brown's insurrection, instead angry and frightened white Southern townspeople did. Soon, a detachment of US Marines led by Robert E. Lee (the future commander of the Confederate armies). Brown was eventually captured after a bloody standoff.
- On December 2, 1859, John Brown was executed. He was tried for treason against the state of Virginia. Northerners saw Brown as a martyr. Southerners now saw that abolitionists and Northerners alike, would use lethal violence to try to end the institution of slavery.

# The Election of 1860

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- In the Presidential Election of 1860, the Democratic Party became divided into Northern and Southern factions. Stephen Douglas ran as a Northern Democrat, after having alienated Southerners in his own party, who nominated John Breckinridge of Kentucky for the office of the Presidency.
- Complicating matters, a third party, the Constitutional Union Party further divided Southern votes by nominating John Bell, the governor of Tennessee.
- Seizing on divisions in the electorate, the Republicans nominated Abraham Lincoln, who for the first time in a national election campaigned on a platform of stopping the expansion of slavery into the West (though he also campaigned on a promise not to interfere with the institution where it already existed).
- Just a few weeks after Lincoln's election, on December 20, 1860, South Carolina became the first state to secede from the Union.

# Secession and Civil War (1861)

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- During the late winter and early spring months of 1861, seven states seceded from the Union. Eventually eleven states would form the Confederacy, including: Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Texas, Louisiana, Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina.
- Lincoln's first concern was to ameliorate the tensions between the two sections of the country in his inaugural address where he spoke directly to the South. However, it did not work, neither did last minute attempts as compromise.
- The second concern that Lincoln had were the federal forts and arsenals that were still located in the South. A number of them had already been seized by Southerners, but one fort still held out— Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina.
- On the morning of April 12, 1861, Confederate forces began bombarding the fort. After two days of constant bombardment, the fort surrendered. It was a bloodless beginning to the bloodiest conflict in American history. The Civil War had begun.