The American Civil War
A NATION DIVIDED

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Photos National Archives

Abraham Lincoln's victory in the presidential election of 1860 sent a Republican to the White House for the first time. It also ensured a standoff with the slave states of the South who had promised to secede from the United States if Lincoln became president. With the nation rapidly headed toward civil war, hard choices on loyalty had to be made, and many who wanted to remain **neutral** found it increasingly difficult to do so.

After the election, some states immediately chose rebellion. The cotton states of the Lower South were dominated by "**fireaters,**" or those who favored secession. South Carolina took the lead and seceded from the United States in December 1860. Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana followed in January 1861, and Texas joined them in February.

These states formed the Confederate States of America. They wrote a new Confederate Constitution,

Jefferson Davis

electing Jefferson Davis of Mississippi president and Alexander Stephens of Georgia vice-president.

The states of the Upper South and the border states were less sure what action to take. All eight were slave states and had many Southern **sympathizers.** For the time being, they remained in the Union — a top priority for Lincoln – but it wasn't long before they were forced to choose.

In April 1861, Lincoln tried to send food and water to soldiers manning the federal **garrison** at Fort Sumter, located in the harbor of Charleston, S.C. Confederate forces opened fire on the fort. After more than 30 hours of bombardment, the federal soldiers were forced to abandon the fort as United States property. The Civil War had officially begun.
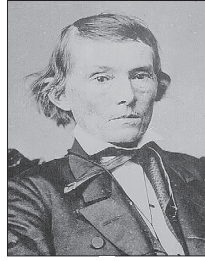

Alexander Stephens

Choosing sides

Lincoln immediately called for states to send troops to stop the rebellion.

Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee responded by joining the Confederacy. The border states of Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri stayed in the Union; however, these states were caught up in a political tug of war as both Northern and Southern states tried to **coerce** them onto their side. Missouri's situation was especially **precarious.** The Union and Confederacy fought furiously within its borders for control, but the Union eventually won Missouri at the Battle of Pea Ridge, Ark.
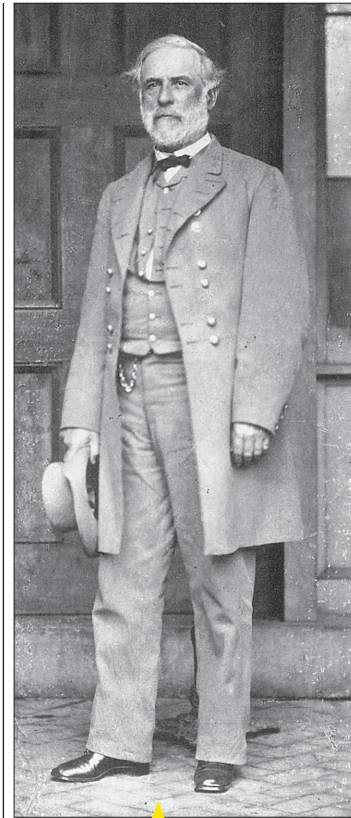
As states were being torn apart by war, individuals faced wrenching personal decisions, including Robert E. Lee. A Mexican War veteran and U.S. Army commander of the troops that captured John Brown at Harpers Ferry, Lee also was a native of Virginia. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Lee was offered a high command to fight for the Union. He instead
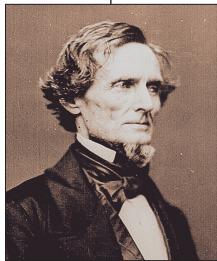
Confederate General Robert E. Lee is pictured at his home after surrendering to the Union at Appomattox. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Lee wrote to his sister that he would rather see compromise than secession. However, given the choice of loyalty to the U.S. Army or his home state, he chose Virginia. "Save in the defense of my native State, I never desire again to draw my sword," he said.

resigned, choosing to remain loyal to his home state of Virginia.

Lee eventually became commander of all Confederate Army forces, but his decision came at tremendous personal cost. During the war, the Union **confiscated** Arlington, his home plantation located across the Potomac River from Washington D.C. It was used as a burial ground for soldiers killed in the Civil War and was never returned to Lee. Today it is known as Arlington National Cemetery.

Across the United States, citizens and states like Missouri were forced to choose sides. The decisions were difficult and the stakes were high as Americans confronted the horror of a nation divided.

Did You Know?

■ Friends, families, and even instructors and students found themselves on opposite sides of the war — sometimes on the battlefield. As the Confederate commander at Charleston, S.C., Pierre Beauregard initiated the bombardment of Fort Sumter, which was under the command of his former West Point artillery instructor, Major Robert Anderson.

■ The Battle of Carthage and the Battle of Wilson's Creek, near Springfield, were both fought to determine whether Missouri would remain with the Union or defect to the Confederacy. Missouri's secessionist governor, Claiborne F. Jackson, tried to take Missouri out of the Union by another tactic. In Neosho, Jackson joined members of the state legislature in passing an ordinance of secession for Missouri. This ordinance was never legally recognized however, and Missouri remained with the Union after the Battle of Pea Ridge.

In the Spotlight

THE CONFEDERATE FLAG

■ The official flag of the Confederate States of America (right) was called the "Stars and Bars." It was created shortly after the Confederacy formed in February 1861. It usually had seven stars representing each of the original seven states to secede from the Union.

■ The more commonly known Confederate flag (right) is actually a flag that was used in battle because the "Stars and Bars" was too easily confused with the Union flag. The Confederate Battle Flag was usually square and had 13 stars, one for each of the 11 states of the Confederacy and two more for the states that passed illegal ordinances of secession, Missouri and Kentucky.

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