

## The South Secedes

Lincoln and the Republicans had promised not to disturb slavery where it already existed. Many people in the South, however, did not trust the party, fearing that the Republican administration would not protect Southern rights. On December 20, 1860, the South's long-standing threat to leave the Union became a reality when South Carolina held a special convention and voted to secede.

### Attempt at Compromise

Even after South Carolina's action, many people still wished to preserve the Union. The question was *how*. As other Southern states debated secession—withdrawal from the Union—leaders in Washington, D.C., worked frantically to fashion a last-minute compromise. On December 18, 1860, Senator **John Crittenden** of Kentucky proposed a series of amendments to the Constitution. Central to Crittenden's plan was a provision to protect slavery south of 36°30'N latitude—the line set by the Missouri Compromise—in all territories “now held or hereafter acquired.”

Republicans considered this unacceptable. They had just won an election on the principle that slavery would not be extended in any territories. “Now we are told,” Lincoln said,

“the government shall be broken up, unless we surrender to those we have beaten.”

Leaders in the South also rejected the plan. “We spit upon every plan to compromise,” exclaimed one Southern leader. “No human power can save the Union,” wrote another.

### The Confederacy

By February 1861, Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, and Georgia had joined South Carolina and also seceded. Delegates from these states and South Carolina met in Montgomery, Alabama, on February 4 to form a new nation and government. Calling themselves the **Confederate States of America**, they chose **Jefferson Davis**, a senator from Mississippi, as their president.

Southerners justified secession with the theory of states' rights. The states, they argued, had voluntarily chosen to enter the Union. They defined the Constitution as a contract among the independent states. Now because the national government had violated that contract—by refusing to enforce the Fugitive Slave Act and by denying the Southern states equal rights in the territories—the states were justified in leaving the Union.

### Reactions to Secession

Many Southerners welcomed secession. In Charleston, South Carolina, people rang church bells, fired cannons, and celebrated in the streets. A newspaper in Atlanta, Georgia, said the South “will never submit” and would defend its liberties no matter what the cost.

Other Southerners, however, were alarmed. A South Carolinian wrote,

“My heart has been rent [torn] by . . . the destruction of my country—the dismemberment of that great and glorious Union.”

Virginian Robert E. Lee expressed concern about the future. “I see only that a fearful calamity is upon us,” he wrote.

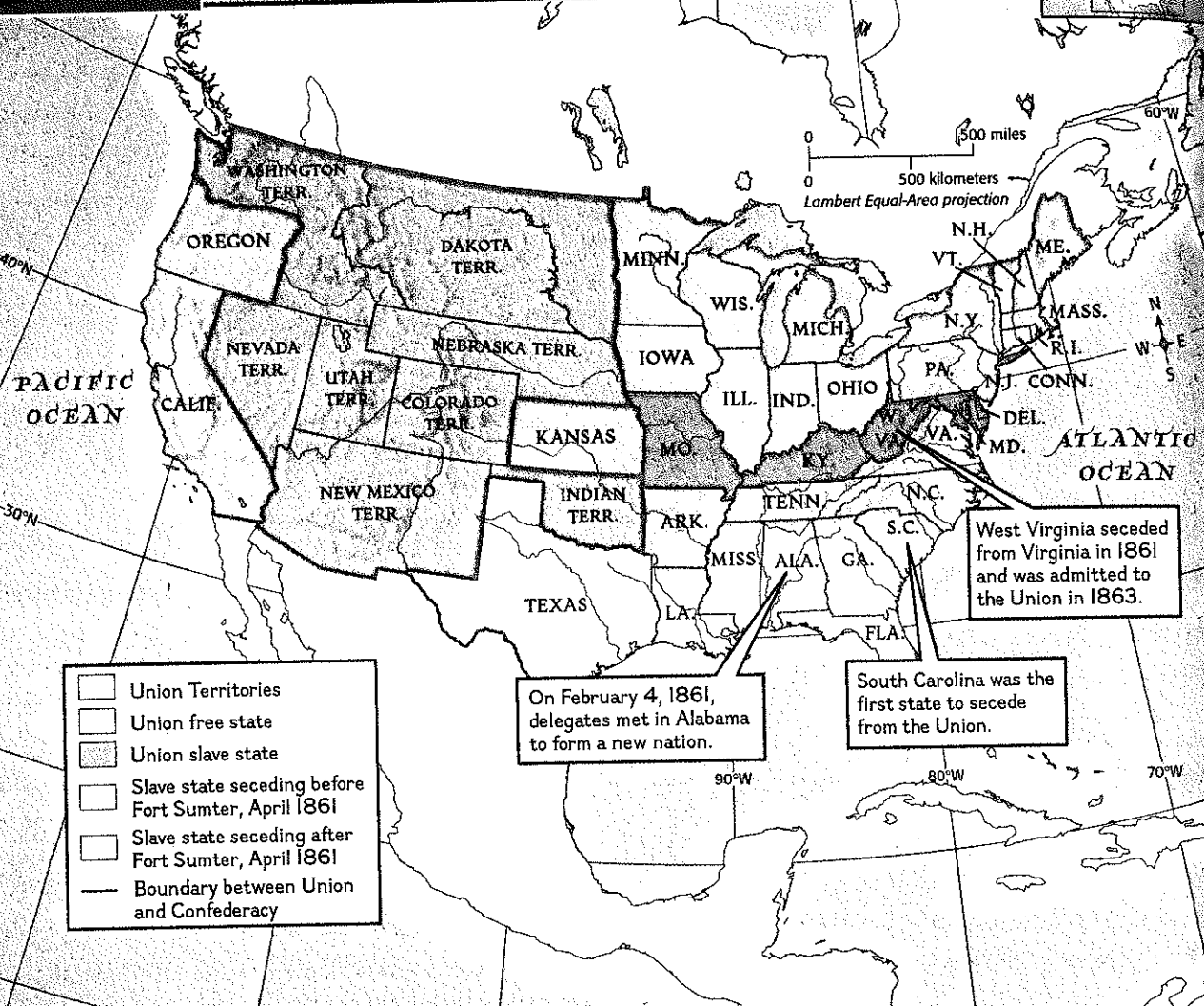
In the North some abolitionists preferred to allow the Southern states to leave. If the Union could be kept together only by compromising on slavery, they declared, then let the Union be destroyed. Most Northerners, however, believed that the Union must be preserved. For Lincoln the issue was “whether in a free government the minority have the right to break up the government whenever they choose.”

### Presidential Responses

Lincoln had won the election, but he was not yet president. James Buchanan's term ran until March 4, 1861. In December 1860, Buchanan sent a message to Congress saying that the Southern states had no right to secede. Then he added that he had no power to stop them from doing so.

As Lincoln prepared for his inauguration on March 4, 1861, people in both the North and the South wondered what he would say and do. They wondered, too, what would happen in Vir-

# Seceding States, 1860–1861



## Geography Skills

After the attack on Fort Sumter, four more Southern states joined the seven that had already seceded from the Union.

- 1. Region** Which slave states remained in the Union after the Fort Sumter attack?
- 2. Analyzing Information** Which states did not secede until after the Fort Sumter attack?

ginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, and Arkansas. These slave states had chosen to remain in the Union, but the decision was not final. If the United States used force against the Confederate States of America, the remaining slave states also might secede. In his Inaugural Address, the new president mixed toughness and words of peace. He said that

secession would not be permitted, vowing to hold federal property in the South and to enforce the laws of the United States. At the same time, Lincoln pleaded with the people of the South for reconciliation:

“We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection.”

**✓ Reading Check Explaining** How did the seceding states justify their right to leave the Union?