

## Maryland During the Secession Crisis

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**Grade Level:** Middle/High

**Duration of lesson:** 2 periods

**Overview:**

As southern states began to secede from the Union in 1860, the representatives of Maryland were torn between their allegiance to their slave-holding constituents and a desire to maintain good relationships with bordering northern states. Maryland politicians decided to hold a Secession Convention in an attempt to determine the appropriate course of action. These antebellum representatives had to weigh political, economic, and social factors in order to reach a decision about secession. In the course of this lesson, students will analyze the resolutions produced by the Convention, election data of the time, and slaveholding patterns in the state in order to determine independently the best course of action for the state.

This lesson teaches students how to locate and weigh the historical forces that pushed events forward in the Civil War Era, and gives students insight into the nineteenth century political mind by putting them in the place of those representatives who dealt with Maryland's dilemma. In the process, students will learn how to analyze quantitative data and how to interpret a complex historical context.

**Related [National History Standards](#):**

**Content Standards:**

**Era 5: Civil War and Reconstruction (1850-1877)**

**Standard 1:** The causes of the Civil War

**Standard 2:** The course and character of the Civil War and its effects on the American people

**Historical Thinking Standards:**

**Standard 2: Historical Comprehension**

E. Draw upon data in historical maps.

F. Utilize visual and mathematical data presented in charts, tables, pie and bar graphs, flow charts, Venn diagrams, and other graphic organizers.

**Standard 3: Historical Analysis and Interpretation**

B. Compare and contrast differing sets of ideas, values, personalities, behaviors, and institutions.

D. Consider multiple perspectives.

E. Analyze cause-and-effect relationships and multiple causation, including the importance of the individual, the influence of ideas, and the role of chance.

**Standard 4: Historical Research Capabilities**

A. Formulate historical questions.

- C. Interrogate historical data.
- D. Identify the gaps in the available records, marshal contextual knowledge and perspectives of the time and place, and construct a sound historical interpretation.

**Standard 5: Historical Issues-Analysis and Decision-Making**

- A. Identify issues and problems in the past.
- B. Marshal evidence of antecedent circumstances and contemporary factors contributing to problems and alternative courses of action.
- D. Evaluate alternative courses of action.

**Lesson Objectives:**

- Students will identify the problems Maryland encountered during the secession crisis.
- Students will analyze census data and through an examination of the resolutions made by Maryland's Southern Rights Convention of 1861.

## Topic Background

The presidential election of 1860 saw Abraham Lincoln of the relatively new Republican Party become the sixteenth President of the United States. Many Southern states saw the election of Lincoln as the end of the Southern way of life. The Republican Party platform did not call for the strict abolition of slavery. Instead, it called for a halt to slavery's spread to new territories. Southern states saw this as an attempt to further isolate them from future endeavors in newly acquired territories and as an assault on Southern rights.

South Carolina was ready in the event of a Republican victory. The state's legislature remained in session during the month of November so that they could respond immediately if Lincoln emerged victorious. When word of a republican victory reached South Carolina, the legislature immediately called for a secession convention to be held on December 17. On December 20, South Carolina's secession convention officially seceded from the United States.

Within a few weeks Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas followed South Carolina and passed their own Ordinances of Secession. These seceded states formed the Confederate States of America, drafted a constitution, and named Jefferson Davis of Mississippi as its first president.

In March, during his inaugural address, Lincoln reiterated his feelings about the current crisis. He had no intentions of ending slavery where it currently existed. His goal was to end its spread, which would allow slavery to continue unimpeded where it currently existed. He also warned that he could not, and would not, accept secession. He hoped that this entire crisis could be ended through peaceable means.

The crisis intensified. Finally, on April 12, 1861, the first shots of conflict were fired as batteries along Charleston's harbor bombarded Fort Sumter. The federal forces inside the fort surrendered on April 14, making the first conflict of between the United States and the Confederate States a Southern victory.

Shortly after this victory, Lincoln's subsequently called for federal troops to put down the rebellion. As a result, four more states joined the Confederacy: Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina. This brought the number of states within the Confederacy to eleven. Yet, there were still four states that accepted slavery but remained in the Union. Among these states were Missouri, Kentucky, Delaware, and Maryland.

These four states, referred to as Border States, were important to both sides of the impending conflict. Lincoln could not afford to see any more states secede to join the Confederate States of America, especially Maryland whose territory bordered the nation's capital. Southern states, on the other hand, knew that more members within the Confederacy would only strengthen their legitimacy. These Southern states, especially those within the deep South, sent individuals to implore these undecided states to place their lot with the Confederacy.

Maryland was stuck between the proverbial 'rock and a hard place.' Maryland was bordered by Pennsylvania, a free state, to the north and wished to retain positive relations with this large state. Yet Maryland's economy, as well as its culture, was tied to the South. In 1860 there were 87,189 slaves in Maryland, more than 25,000 more

than Florida, as state already found within the Confederacy. Marylanders were pulled into two separate directions.

The Governor of Maryland during this crisis was Thomas Holliday Hicks. Hicks' personal beliefs were indicative of Maryland's predicament. Hicks was a Unionist who believed that secession was unconstitutional. He also felt that it was the fault of an aggressive northern policy that had forced the southern states to secede. In other words, his heart was with the South.

In 1861, months before the second wave of seceding states, Maryland held a secession convention in Baltimore on February 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>. Its purpose was to discuss the current political situation and to determine what course of action Maryland was to take during this crisis. All counties, as well as Baltimore City, sent delegates to this convention in order to promote their viewpoints about secession. This convention did not make a solid decision as to Maryland's course. The end result was that the committee condemned secession as unconstitutional, condemned the northern states for forcing southern states to feel as if this was their only option, and called for a new convention within a month's time to further discuss this problem. Maryland would not secede at this time, unless one event occurred. This convention suggested that since Maryland's fortunes were tied with Virginia, Maryland should seriously consider secession if Virginia seceded. With these proclamations, the Secession Convention of Maryland drew to a close.

The attempt of Maryland's politicians to refrain from choosing sides did not spill over into the general population. On April 19, 1861, soldiers from the 6<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Volunteer Regiment were passing through Baltimore on their way to Washington D.C. Within Baltimore, they were accosted by a pro-Southern mob. Shots were fired and when the smoke cleared, four soldiers and twelve civilians lay dead. To avoid further riots, the federal government decided to send troops through Annapolis, and sent the military to secure the city on April 22.

When Virginia seceded in 1861, Marylanders knew that a serious decision had to be made. Governor Hicks decided to call a special session of the State Congress in order to determine Maryland's course now that Virginia had seceded. Since federal troops occupied Annapolis, Hicks wanted to ensure that the presence of an army as well as anti-government sentiment by the populace for being "occupied" would not influence the Congress in any way. Thus, he convened this special session in Frederick. Here, Maryland Congressmen met and debated the feasibility of secession. Both a bill and a resolution calling for Maryland to secede were introduced to the Assembly. However neither of these measures garnered enough support to be passed. Why? Legislators felt that although they understood why Southern states were leaving the Union, they did not feel that they had the authority to secede. The Assembly was clear on one main issue: Maryland would not secede from the Union but they would not allow Union troops to use Maryland as a highway for troop movement. Maryland was intent on remaining neutral. The Assembly adjourned, but agreed to meet on September 17 in order to reevaluate the political circumstances and their decisions of neutrality. The September meeting never occurred because the Federal Government took matters into their own hands. On the date of the next meeting, federal troops and Baltimore City police officers arrived in Frederick with orders to arrest all convention members who were pro-South, and possibly pro-secession.

Maryland's political fate was sealed. Secession would not be formally voted upon again. Maryland, although a slave owning state, would remain within the Union.

**Annotated Bibliography:**

Brewer, W.M. "Lincoln and The Border States." *The Journal of Negro History*, Volume 34, Issue 1 (Jan., 1949).

Brewer discusses Lincoln's strategies for appeasing the border states and to ensure that they remained loyal during the conflict.

Brugger, Robert J. *Maryland: A Middle Temperament*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988.

An admirable work which looks at Maryland history from its founding to the 1980's. Brugger provides information about political thought and prevailing feelings towards slavery and the coming conflict from all regions of the state.

Dew, Charles B. *Apostles of Disunion: Southern Secession Commissioners and the Causes of the Civil War*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001.

Dew discusses how states within the "Deep South" sent emissaries to other southern states in an attempt to persuade them that secession from the United States was justified in order to preserve the current social and political climate of the South.

## **Vocabulary**

**Secession:** The formal withdrawal of a state from the Union.

**Popular Sovereignty:** A system in which the residents vote to decide an issue.

**Dred Scott Decision:** In 1846, Dred Scott filed suit for his freedom in the St. Louis Circuit Court. He claimed his freedom on the basis of seven years of residence in a free state and a free territory. This suit began an eleven-year legal fight that ended in the U.S. Supreme Court, which issued a landmark decision declaring that Scott remain a slave. This decision contributed to rising tensions between the free and slave states just before the American Civil War.

## Teaching Procedures

### Materials Needed:

- Colored pencils
- Wall map of The United States
- Four pieces of yarn
- 8 small pieces of scotch tape.

1. As a motivational activity, ask students which side Maryland supported during the Civil War. For the most part, students seem to feel that Maryland (since it was not part of the Confederacy) was on the Union side.

Present the question “If I told you that there were almost 90,000 slaves in Maryland in 1860 and that Maryland’s electoral votes went to the presidential candidate who was perceived as a protector of the Southern way of life, would this change your answer at all? Why or why not?”

Inform students that this information is true and that we will examine just how much Maryland had in common with southern states. We will also examine why Maryland, which had so much in common with the South, would remain in the Union.

2. Distribute Resource Sheet #1, “The Number of Slaves Maryland’s Municipalities 1860” to the students. Review the information provided by the top portion of the sheet with them. Next, read the directions for the map key orally to insure understanding. Allow students to prepare the key.
3. Distribute Resource Sheet #2, “Mapping Slavery in Maryland.” Allow students time to color in the municipalities of Maryland, using their key and the information provided within resource sheet.
4. Discuss the results of the map using questions found on the bottom of Resource Sheet #2, “Mapping Slavery in Maryland.”
5. Distribute Resource Sheet #3, “Election of 1860.” Orally review this sheet with students in order to allow them to contrast the viewpoints regarding slavery of the four political parties fighting to gain control of the White House.
6. Distribute Resource Sheet #4, “Electoral Map 1860.” Have students study the data, alone or within pairs, using the questions at the bottom of the resource sheet. Review the results.

Allow this discussion to “piggy-back” on the first activity to give students a sense that Maryland had strong similarities to southern states. Ask students to identify what these similarities were.

7. Distribute Resource Sheet #5, "Maryland's Secession Convention" and Resource Sheet #6, "Secession Convention Analysis Sheet." Have students break into pairs, or groups of three depending upon your class size. Have students read the resolutions from Maryland's Secession Convention together. Using Resource Sheet #6, have students place the reasons for calling the secession convention (the "whereas" statements). Next, have students fill in the resolutions (the "resolved" statements) being made by this group.
8. As a whole class, discuss the following questions.

**What was Maryland's secession convention's position on secession?**

**Who does the convention blame for the current crisis?**

**What will Maryland do, according to the resolutions?**

9. By now, students should have a good sense of Maryland's similarities to southern states. Distribute Resource Sheet #7, "Arrest of the Maryland Legislature." Read this page with your students. After this is complete, ask

**How would this have affected how Maryland reacted in 1861?**

**Do you think that this played any role in Maryland's decision to remain in the Union? Why or why not?**

10. Finally, focus attention to your United States wall map. Ask: "If northern states are going to respond to Lincoln's call for troops, how will they get to Washington D.C.?" Hopefully, your students will remember discussions about early transportation systems and respond by railroad. Select 4 students and give them a piece of yarn and two small pieces of scotch tape.

**Student #1** – You are from Massachusetts. Starting there, use your yarn to make a direct path from your state to Washington D.C.

**Student #2** – You are from Maine. Starting there, use your yarn to make a direct path from your state to Washington D.C.

**Student #3** – You are from Pennsylvania. Starting there, use your yarn to make a direct path from your state to Washington D.C.

**Student #4** – You are from Michigan. Starting there, use your yarn to make a direct path from your state to Washington D.C.

Ask:

**What do you notice about all 4 lines?** Lead students the fact that all four lines intersect Maryland in some way.

**How could this have influenced Maryland to remain in the Union?**

11. As a closing activity, review the material covered during the lesson, especially Maryland's Southern characteristics and the factors that may have kept them from seceding. Referring back to the maps of Maryland, ask:

**Do you think all Marylanders were upset about remaining in the Union?**

Have student predict how Marylanders will react to the impending Civil War.

12. Extension activities could include students writing a letter to a cousin in Mississippi explaining to them Maryland's stance and actions on the eve of war. You can also use a cousin in Massachusetts to defend Maryland's stances and/or actions.

### **Primary Source Annotation:**

*Addresses and Resolutions Adopted at the Meeting of the Southern Rights Convention of Maryland, Held in the Universalist Church in the City of Baltimore, February 18<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, 1861.* 1861. Baltimore: J.B. Rose & Co. p. 4.

This pamphlet was published after Maryland's secession convention in February of 1861. The purpose of the pamphlet was to inform the populace of the convention's proceedings and to lay out Maryland's course of action for the future.

<http://www.uselectionatlas.org/USPRESIDENT/frametextj.html>

From Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections website. This website offers in-depth looks at the presidential elections throughout American history. It breaks many of these elections down to state level. Students will examine the 1860 election which shows that Maryland sided with the Southern states in her support of the Southern Democrat, John Breckenridge.

<http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census/>

From the United States Historical Census Browser. Students will use census data from 1860 in order to determine the slave populations within Maryland's counties and Baltimore City.