

## The Origin of the Republican Party



Although John Brown failed in his attempt to launch a slave revolt, he was successful in elevating the fears of many southern white people. The fear of a widespread slave revolt had always been present in the southern white community. Brown's actions brought this old fear to the forefront. The incident at Harper's Ferry convinced many in the South that creating a southern nation, separate from the North with all its John Brown, William Lloyd Garrison, and Frederick Douglass type individuals, was the only way to protect their way of life.

**The Republican Party:** In March 1854, the Republican Party was born with its first official meeting taking place in Ripon, Wisconsin. Republicans were united by their **opposition to the spread of slavery** and soon established themselves as the main **opposition to the proslavery Democratic Party**. Most were for the eventual abolition of slavery nationwide, but they realized they would have to take one step at a time. The Republicans gained considerable support in the North when Congress passed the unpopular Kansas-Nebraska Act. The Republicans received considerably more support after the *dreadful and despicable* 1857 Dred Scott decision.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, Republicans in Congress would push for Civil Rights for the newly freed slaves in the South through the Reconstruction Period. Unfortunately, down the road the Democrats would prevail, bringing **Congressional Republican Reconstruction** and the accompanying early Civil Rights movement in the South to an end in 1876.

**Abraham Lincoln:** In 1858 one man rose to the forefront of the Republican Party. In accordance with his party's doctrine, Abraham Lincoln was against the spread of slavery in the growing United States. Accordingly, Lincoln spoke out against both the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the Dred Scott decision. Yet Lincoln's primary conviction was that no matter what happened with the issue of slavery, the nation had to remain united.

**The 1860 Election and Secession:** On November 6, 1860, Republican Abraham Lincoln was elected the sixteenth President of the United States. To Southerners, Lincoln's election as President was unacceptable. After the election, the southern states began declaring their independence from the Union. On December 20, 1860, South Carolina seceded from the United States. In January 1861 Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana followed suit. Thus, the Confederate States of America was born. Delegates from these states met on February 4 in Montgomery, Alabama to establish a Confederate government and a Confederate Army. Mississippian Jefferson Davis was elected the first and only president of the Confederacy. The early members of the Confederacy were

joined later by Texas, Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee. In May 1861 Richmond, Virginia was designated as the capital of the Confederacy.

**West Virginia:** Of note, the citizens of northwestern Virginia balked at secession. When Virginia seceded from the Union in April 1861, they, in turn, seceded from the state of Virginia. In 1863 West Virginia entered the Union as an independent state.

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