

Lincoln's Cabinet

“I would be very happy to oblige you, if my passes were respected. But the fact is, sir, I have, within the last two years, given passes to two hundred and fifty thousand men to go to Richmond and not one has got there yet.”

Lincoln replying in 1863 to a man seeking a “safe passage” pass to Richmond.

Background for the Committee:

By the time Abraham Lincoln took office in 1861, South Carolina had started a wave of southern states seceding from the union that included Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas, with the federal government taking little action under the lame duck administration of James Garfield. After Lincoln established in his Inaugural Address that he would hold federal properties, without declaring an intention to militarily bring the South back under the Union and holding out hope for peaceful resolution, the federal Fort Sumter in South Carolina was taken under siege by South Carolina on April 12, 1861. It is in the immediate aftermath of this event that the committee will begin its work. Composed of Democrats and Republicans, Washington insiders and figures of influence from outside the (at this point) proverbial Beltway, the committee, like Lincoln's original cabinet of 8, will need to find ways to accommodate its own clashing interests, ideologies, and personalities in order to act decisively and aggressively so that the Union, which all members of the committee hold foremost allegiance to, may be preserved.

Current State of the Union:

With 7 southern states having seceded from the Union, their respective congressional representatives have also withdrawn, giving the Republican Party effective control of both Houses. Merely because the President's party controls both Houses of Congress, however, does not mean that the legislative branch will march in lockstep with the

President. While it will be initially inclined to give the commander-in-chief what he asks for in order to win the War, it is constitutionally designed to be jealous of the President usurping powers it sees as exclusively belonging to it, and is composed of many figures with both above-average talent and ego, and so may challenge the President aggressively if either it as a body or powerful enough members within it feel that the war effort is being run poorly. Radical Republicans believe strongly in the importance of using the Civil War to abolish slavery, some even advocating equal rights, while more moderate Republicans are merely staunch Unionists. Democrats, crippled at the beginning of the Civil War by the exodus of so many of their Southern members, are opposed to strong government actions and are much more amicable to the idea of preserving both slavery and the Union.

States on the Edge:

After Ft. Sumter, many other Southern states are considering secession, with the greatest significance going to Virginia and Maryland. Virginia is economically and militarily the powerhouse of the South, and the top general in the nation, Robert E. Lee, who is currently mulling over accepting command of the Army of the Potomac, hangs in the balance. Should Virginia secede, as is extremely likely, Maryland becomes of paramount concern, as Washington, D.C. is located on the Maryland-Virginia border, and the secession of Maryland would locate the Union capital in the Confederate South, requiring abandonment and evacuation.

Maryland:

Maryland's Eastern Shore is culturally and economically closely aligned with the South, holding many slaves and possessing a militant States Rights ideology that has led to many of the most powerful and prominent Maryland families pushing hard for the state legislature to secede and join her "sister" states. Baltimore in particular is a hotbed of secessionist and Southern sentiment. Western Maryland, however, has traditionally aligned itself more with Northern sentiment.

The State of the Military:

While neither the South nor the North were immediately prepared for War, and if one were it would have likely won a swift victory, the North has a much larger population as well as the vast majority of the industry, railroads, and telegraph lines, meaning that it would almost always be better supplied with arms and men. However, many of the top West Point graduates of recent years were of Southern heritage, and joined the Confederate army, allowing it to fight effectively without as many advantages.

The Constitutional Issues of War

The President is declared to be the Commander-in-Chief of the United States military, and so has tremendous autonomy in running military affairs in wartime. However, the right to declare war is reserved to Congress, as is "the power of the purse", and so all funding must come from it. While the Constitution provides that the writ of habeas corpus, where a person may be brought before a judge to challenge their arrest, may be suspended in time of rebellion or invasion and does not specify who may suspend it, the

relevant words are found in Article I, which otherwise deals exclusively with the Legislative Branch.

Foreign Affairs

Great Britain is the industrial and textile giant of the world, making it heavily dependent on American cotton grown in the south for economic growth. As such, it is heavily courted by the South to break the blockade that President Lincoln has established and to supply the woefully underfunded Southern military with arms and money. For Great Britain to do so would represent a major power shift in the war, and must be attempted to be avoided.

How we got here:

Often described as “an invitation to struggle”, the Constitution itself lays the groundwork for many of the divisions that exist in the country by 1861. Because of the power split between states and the federal government mandated by the 10th amendment and the Supremacy Clause, the primary political division in American history has usually been along the lines of supporting greater power for the federal government and supporting greater power and independence for the states. The heavily commercial and mercantile North was from the time of Alexander Hamilton’s Federalist Party in favor of a strong central government that could protect its industry with tariffs and provide a predictable set of standards and laws between the states. The South, on the other hand, usually favored a much more aggressive position of States Rights, for as an agricultural society, it

had little need for a robust federal government, preferring a Washington that allowed it to easily sell cash crops and would not interfere with what the South saw as its own business, especially its “peculiar institution”, slavery. For among the greatest fears in an often hyper-sensitive South was that the federal government would attempt to eliminate slavery, which it saw as being of unparalleled importance to both its social order and economy. The Constitution delayed conflict over the issue for the first 20 years of the nation’s history, as it mandated waiting twenty years before consideration of the African slave trade, which was promptly outlawed. The first major crisis came with the proposed admission of Missouri into the Union in 1820. The sharp conflict between slave states wanting to avoid admitting a free state that would upset the Senatorial balance and free states not wanting a slave state majority led Thomas Jefferson to declare the situation, “a firebell in the night”, warning about future conflict over the issue of territorial slavery. The Missouri Compromise of 1820 that defused the situation admitted Missouri as a slave state and Maine as a free state simultaneously, while drawing a line at Missouri’s southern border, below which future slavery would be allowed and above which it would be prohibited.

In a separate but relevant conflict a decade later, South Carolina declared the Constitution to be a pact of sovereign states, which had the authority to “nullify” federal actions as pertained to them if they deemed it harmful to their dignity as a state, and more radical elements even proposed the right to withdraw from the Union altogether. Andrew Jackson’s swift threat and show of force suppressed the conflict and the Nullification Crisis was averted, but the South Carolinian seeds of discontent were laid with ideological precedent.

After the Mexican-American War in the mid-1840s, new life was breathed into the issue of the expansion of slavery, as the Missouri Compromise covered the Louisiana Territory and future states made thereof, not accounting for future acquisitions, such as those made during the War. The South had grown increasingly paranoid and aggressive in their legislative demands and constitutional interpretation over the years as abolitionist sentiment had grown in the North, along with Free Soil opposition, not to current slavery but to expanding it, and a growing perception of slavery as morally troubling at best, and more often outright condemned. This sentiment led to some places in the north forbidding their local police to assist in the capture of runaway slaves as required by the Fugitive Slave Act, and Southerners being further outraged as what they saw to be part of a broader conspiracy against slavery. Tensions built to what was at the time their highest point to date, and with talk of secessions starting to swirl around the South, the Compromise of 1850 was struck, the last epic compromise of Henry Clay, who actually had to hand it over to Senator Stephen Douglas, who broke the bill up into pieces and passed each, forbidding the slave trade in the District of Columbia, and strengthening the Fugitive Slave Act, among other actions. The 1850s followed with violent turmoil over the admission of Kansas and Nebraska to the Union, the attack by John Brown on Harper's Ferry, which shot tension and paranoia in the South to unprecedented levels, and the Supreme Court Decision in *Dred Scott v Sanford*, in which Chief Justice Roger Taney declared that the Congress had no power to regulate slavery whatsoever and that blacks could not be citizens because of a naturally inferior standing, fractured the political life of the United States, with the Election of 1860 culminating in 4 candidates running, Abraham Lincoln for the Republicans, Stephen Douglas for the Northern

Democrats, John Breckenridge for the Southern Democrats who did not think Douglas's popular sovereignty doctrine in regards to slavery sufficiently strong enough anymore, and John Bell, running for the short-lived Constitutional Union party, which attempted to find consensus and balance in a country that would have none of it. When Lincoln won, the South saw him as a candidate that, despite his protesting to the contrary, would move to abolish slavery, and so South Carolina seceded in December of that same year.

Members of the Committee

Members of the Executive Branch:

Secretary of State: William H. Seward:

William Seward was a former Governor from New York and a former United States Senator. He was a radical opponent of slavery, he emerged as the leader of the anti-slavery wing of the Whig Party. An opponent of the Fugitive Slave Act, he defended runaway slaves in court. He was a big proponent of westward expansion, and would be one of the main negotiators of the Alaskan purchase. He would be an aggressive supporter of the war effort, though during the attack on Fort Sumter he argued against taking any action that would antagonize. He was essential in hunting down Southern sympathizers in the North, often using dictatorial powers in arresting and prosecuting suspected spies. In public, he took an aggressive stance against the involvement of the European powers in the war, though privately, he was more conciliatory to the foreign diplomats.

Secretary of the Army: Edwin Stanton:

Edwin Stanton was a lawyer from Ohio. Lincoln and Stanton were able to work well together despite his being a political opponent of Lincoln's administration. He had agreed to sever under the then secretary of War, Simon Cameron, as a legal advisor. Stanton wrote a section that called for freed slaves to be armed and used against the Confederate Army in the Secretary of Wars. President Abraham Lincoln was opposed to

this policy and ordered Cameron to remove the offending passage. When he refused he was dismissed. Lincoln, who was unaware of Stanton's role in the report, appointed him as his new Secretary of War. He was crucial in censoring the press and in reducing corruption and inefficiency in the War Department.

Secretary of the Treasury: Salmon P. Chase:

Salmon Chase was a lawyer from New Hampshire, before serving as secretary of the Treasury, he had served as the Governor of Ohio, and Senator from Ohio. He failed to achieve the Republican nomination for President three times. His relationship with President Lincoln was not the best; he consistently submitted unsolicited advice to Lincoln and during the war offered his resignation four times. He faced many daunting tasks as Treasurer financing the war and ensuring that the economy did not collapse.

Attorney General: Edward Bates:

Edward Bates was a lawyer and statesman and the first Cabinet member to come from west of the Mississippi river. He was in favor of keeping the territories free, and unlike many Cabinet members did not overtly question the President's decisions and attack him politically. Bates held that free blacks should be deported to Africa, one of the few areas in which he conflicted with President Lincoln.

Postmaster General: Montgomery Blair:

Montgomery Blair was a lawyer and soldier, he had graduated from West Point and served in the Seminole war. He was one of Dred Scott's lawyers, and despite the fact

that Dred Scott was denied freedom, Blair gained attention for his efforts on Mr. Scott's behalf. He took an active part in Lincoln's campaign. As Postmaster General, Blair reformed the postal service, instituting money-orders and railway cars. He had an old rivalry with Salmon Chase. He was the only Cabinet member to recommend reinforcing Fort Sumter.

Secretary of the Interior: John Palmer Usher:

A New York lawyer and politician, Usher became Assistant Secretary of the Interior under Caleb Blood Smith. Smith was an uninterested Secretary at best, delegating more and more responsibility to Usher, until he finally resigned due to health issues. Usher favored a more humane treatment of the American Indians, a rarity for the time.

Secretary of the Navy: Gideon Welles:

Gideon Welles was a Connecticut politician, who came to the Republican party by way of the Free-Soilers. His anti-slavery positions were reflected in the paper he founded, which would espouse Republican politics for decades. He was instrumental in founding the Medal of Honor. The Navy Department he inherited was in disarray due to Southern officers desertions, and he had to rebuild the Navy and blockade the South.

Vice-President: Hannibal Hamlin:

Hannibal Hamlin was a politician from Maine. He had strong anti-slavery convictions, and opposed the Kansas-Nebraska Act which repealed the Missouri Compromise, though at the time he was a Democrat, it was only later that he would become a Republican. He

played a key role helping Lincoln's Cabinet, selecting old political allies and others to fill key roles, Seward and Welles in particular.

Charles Francis Adams, Sr, Minister to the Court of St. James:

He was the son of President John Quincy Adams and grandson of President John Adams. He was elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1858, where he chaired the Committee on Manufactures. He resigned in 1861 to become the ambassador to England. He would have the very important job of trying to keep England neutral in the conflict ahead.

Assistant Secretary of State: Frederick Seward:

He was the son of the Secretary of State, William Seward. He played a crucial role in the Baltimore Plot of 1861, for he brought the letter containing all the gathered evidence about the plot to Lincoln in Baltimore. His voice was critical in Lincoln's decision to go through Baltimore under the cover of night instead of during the day, perhaps saving his life. After Lincoln's inauguration, Seward would become the Assistant Secretary of State, in charge of consular service.

Members of Congress:

Speaker of the House: Schuyler Colfax:

Schuyler Colfax was a radical Republican who was strongly anti-slavery. He was a talented writer and orator, though his education had ended when he was 10. Lincoln initially opposed his appointment as Speaker in favor of another, which did not endear

Colfax to Lincoln or his administration.

President Pro Tempore: Solomon Foot:

Solomon Foot was a U.S. Senator from Vermont. His antislavery positions made him join the new Republican party. In the Senate he was recognized as a master of parliamentary law and established many customs in the Senate's procedure.

Senator Charles Sumner, Chair of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations:

He was the leader of the Massachusetts anti-slavery movement and the head of the Radical Republicans in the Senate. It was he that was beaten by South Carolinian Preston Brooks on the Senate floor, which helped to increase tensions that were already running high. For three years, he traveled Europe, and became fluent in French, Spanish, German and Italian, qualifying him for the position of Chair for the Senate Committee of Foreign Relations, for along with the languages he spoke, he also had made many friends on his tour.

Senator Stephen A Douglas:

Stephen Douglas was a politician from Illinois. It is his debates with Lincoln during the 1860 campaign that gave rise to the classic form of Lincoln-Douglas debates. He was a resourceful party leader, and a great tactician in passing legislation.

Senate Chair of the Committee on Military Affairs: Henry Wilson:

He was a Massachusetts Senator who was Chairman of the Committee on Military

Affairs and the Militia. He was also first elected to the Senate through the Know-Nothing party, a party which, while opposed to his morals and politics, allowed him to further his personal career. Such a move would not make him loved by the other Republicans who felt sold out as he had to throw the Governor's election to be elected U. S. Senator. He also raised the Twenty-second Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry in the months leading up to Civil War.

Senator Lyman Trumbull:

He was a U.S. Senator from Illinois. When it became clear in 1855 that his anti-slavery position would no longer allow him to remain a Democrat, he became a republican. Trumbull was not convinced that succession was necessary and argued for reconciliation until it was clear that no reconciliation was possible.

Other Major Figures of Influence:

Chief Justice: Roger Taney:

Roger Taney was appointed by President Jackson over strong Republican disapproval. He ruled in the majority on the Dred Scott case, voting to have Dred Scott remain a slave. He was a proponent of states rights, which showed through in his rulings. Despite his controversial legacy vis-a-vis slavery, he freed all his slaves, and gave pensions to those too old to work. Taney was criticized by the Republicans for many of his beliefs, and he held a difficult position as Chief Justice for he felt that the Union had no right to wage the Civil War.

Horace Greeley:

The son of a New England farmer, Greeley received irregular schooling until the age of fourteen. He founded the New Yorker when he was twenty-three after moving to New York and working for newspapers for three years. He then launched the Tribune which would prove to be his personal vehicle for politics. He was a vehement opponent of slavery, denouncing the Kansas-Nebraska act and his free-soil politics brought him quite strongly into the Republican party.

Thurlow Weed:

He was a New York political boss. He never held national office himself, but he was the principal political advisor to the prominent New York politician William H. Seward and was instrumental in the presidential nominations of William Henry Harrison, Henry Clay, Zachary Taylor, Winfield Scott, John Charles Frémont, and Abraham Lincoln. After Lincoln was elected, Weed advised Lincoln on matters of patronage, and he also served as unofficial diplomatic envoy to envoy.