

Two Viewpoints

Union or Secession?

President Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy, were inaugurated just several weeks apart. These excerpts from their inaugural addresses will help you understand differing points of view about secession from the United States in 1861.



Abraham Lincoln's Inaugural Address, March 4, 1861

“One section of our country believes slavery is right and ought to be extended, while the other believes it is wrong and ought not to be extended. This is the only substantial dispute...

Physically speaking, we can not separate. We can not remove our respective sections from each other nor build an impassable wall between them. A husband and wife may be divorced and go out of the presence and beyond the reach of each other; but the different parts of our country can not do this...

In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war.”



Jefferson Davis's Inaugural Address, February 18, 1861

“As a necessity, not a choice, we have resorted to the remedy of separation, and henceforth our energies must be directed to the conduct of our own affairs, and the (continuation) of the Confederacy which we have formed. If a just perception of mutual interest shall permit us peaceably to pursue our separate political career, my most earnest desire will have been fulfilled. But if this be denied to us... (we will be forced) to appeal to arms...”