

Georgia Debates Secession



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✧ In 1861, the Georgia General Assembly debated whether the state should join its fellow southern states in breaking away from the Union.



Two Sides of the Debate



During the debate there were those who did not want to leave the Union, including representatives from the northern counties, small farmers and non-slave holders, and most importantly Alexander Stephens, who gave an eloquent speech against secession.

Two Sides of the Debate

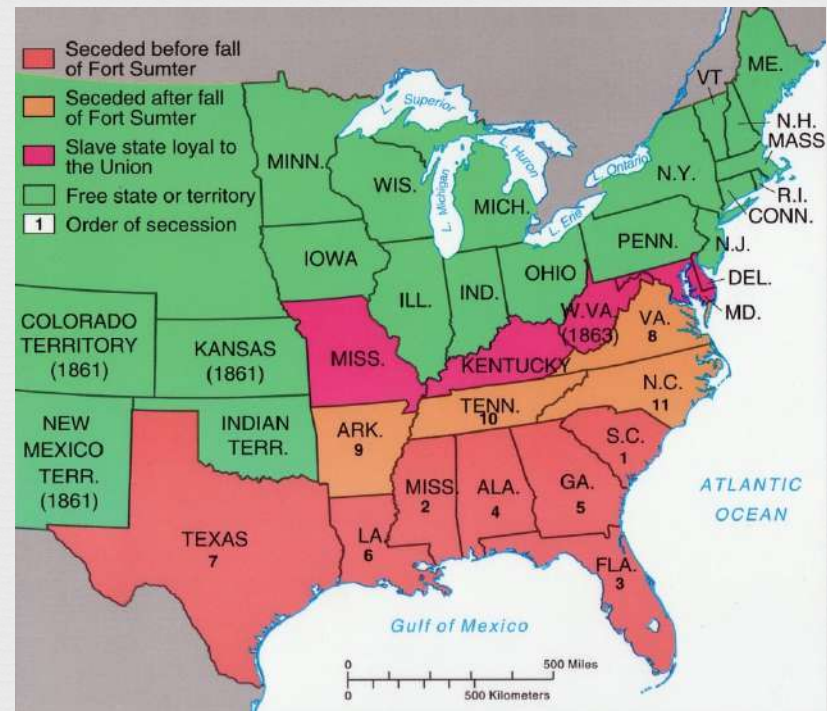


On the other side, were large farmers and slave holders, Georgia Governor Joseph E. Brown, and powerful and influential men such as Robert Toombs, who had a social and economic stake in the continuation of the institution of slavery.

Georgia Secedes



- Though there were strong supporters for both sides of the issue, Georgia eventually seceded from the Union.
- The General Assembly voted 208 to 89 in favor of Georgia seceding from the union becoming the 5th state to do so.
- It was part of the Confederacy from 1861-1865.



Task



- Read the Excerpts from **Ordinance of Secession of Georgia 1861** to determine the reasons Georgia gave for seceding from the Union.
- Use the guiding questions to help you find the reasons Georgia sided with other Southern states.

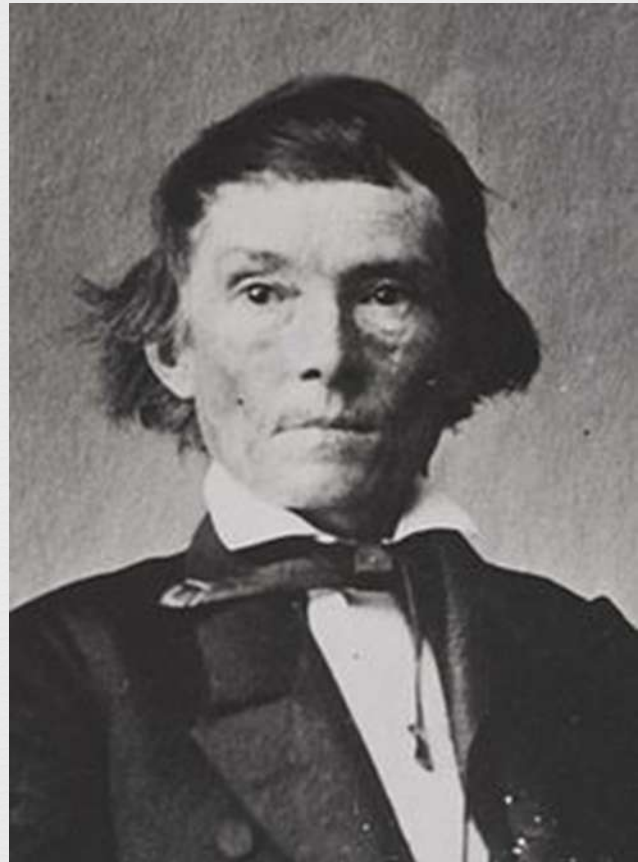
Alexander Stephens



Before, During, and After
the Civil War



✧ Alexander Stephens was a sickly man who never weighed over 100 pounds. Still, one northern politician called him "the strongest man in the South".



Before the War



- ✧ Alexander Stephens was born in Crawfordville and went on to graduate from the University of Georgia in 1832.
- ✧ After a stint as a schoolteacher, he studied law and then served as a successful defense lawyer in Crawfordville starting in 1834.
- ✧ In 1836, soon after passing the Georgia Bar to become a lawyer, Stephens was elected to the Georgia Assembly where he served as a member of the Whig party.

Before the War



- ☞ Stephens was a strong supporter of states' rights and regularly switched political parties whenever he felt they drifted too far from his principles. While he began his career as a Whig, he would later serve as both a Democrat and a Constitutional Unionist.
- ☞ While in Congress, Stephens played a major role in assisting with the passage of the Compromise of 1850 and the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

Before the War



- Even though he was a strong supporter of slavery, Stephens argued for Georgia to stay with the United States.
- Once the General Assembly voted for secession, Stephens signed the "Ordinance of Secession" and was immediately chosen as one of Georgia's representatives to Confederate Congress.



During the War



While serving in the Confederate Congress, he was elected vice president of the Confederate States of America. As a former Unionist, it was hoped that his election would help gain the support of those who opposed secession and bring the Border States into the Confederate States.

During the War



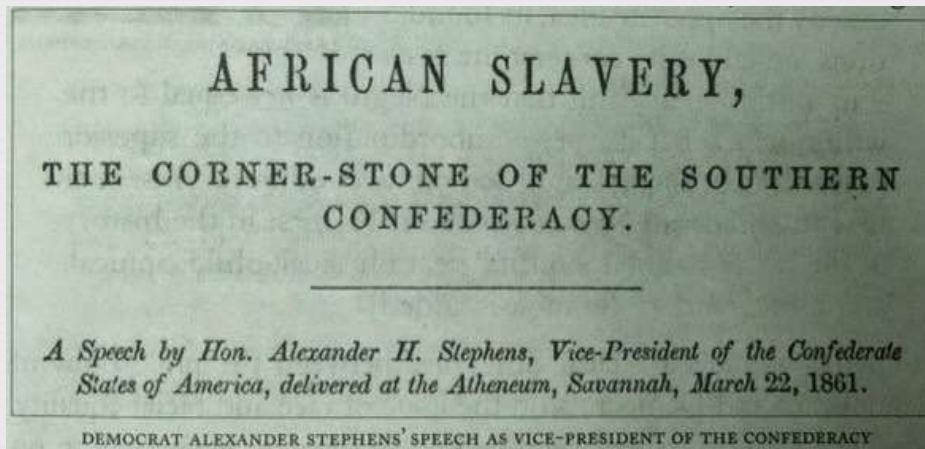
Early on, Stephens played an important role in the Confederacy. President Jefferson Davis often consulted him and made him apart of the president's trusted advisors.



During the War



He played an influential role in drafting the Confederacy's new constitution. He then introduced the new government during a stump speech in Savannah on March 21, 1861. In what became known as the "Cornerstone Speech," Stephens argued that the new Confederate government was based upon "the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man."



During the War



Once the war started, Stephens' role became less significant. His weak stature never allowed him any military experience. Once the Confederate States of America's focus turned to fighting, Stephens had little to do.



During the War



✧ In July 1863 Stephens was sent to Washington, D.C., on a mission to discuss prisoner exchanges with the Union. Anxious to end the war, Stephens also hoped to broach the subject of reaching a peace agreement. His journey only took him as far as Newport News, Virginia, where—following the crucial Union victory at the Battle of Gettysburg—he was informed that the U.S. government would not consider opening negotiations with him.

During the War



- ❧ He often argued with President Jefferson Davis because he believed in limited government and felt Davis was overstepping his power.
- ❧ In March 1864 he gave a speech to the Georgia state legislature outlining his criticisms of Davis, and was denounced by many Southerners as a traitor.
- ❧ His opposition to Davis became so pronounced that in late 1864 he received a letter from Union General William T. Sherman—then undertaking his “March to the Sea”—encouraging Stephens to meet and discuss the possibility of Georgia forming an independent peace agreement with the Union. Stephens refused the invitation, but his relationship with Davis remained strained for the rest of the war.

After the War



- ❧ On May 11, 1865, Stephens was arrested and jailed at Fort Warren in Boston Harbor.
- ❧ After five months, he was pardoned by President Andrew Johnson in October of 1865.



After the War



- ☞ Upon his release, the people of Georgia elected him as their U.S. Senator. However, the Senate Republicans refused to sit the former C.S.A. vice president so soon after the war was over.
- ☞ Stephens then devoted himself to writing his memoirs of the war, and later composed a history of the United States.

After the War



- ☞ He was eventually elected and allowed to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1877, where he served until 1882.
- ☞ He was elected Governor of Georgia in 1882, but died shortly after.
- ☞ Stephens County is named in his honor.