

First Day

On Tuesday, March 5, Lincoln began his tenure with a letter from William Seward, confirming his acceptance of the secretary of state position. Seward reflected on his resignation from Congress, feeling fortunate to have avoided any major fallout. He acknowledged Lincoln's ambition to form a diverse cabinet, one that would face their shared turbulent political climate together, despite many being his former rivals for the Republican nomination. Seward expressed hesitation but felt compelled by duty towards a troubled nation.

Upon Lincoln's arrival at the White House, the pressing matter at hand was a communication from Major Anderson at Fort Sumter, detailing the troop and supply needs vital for the fort's defense against potential Confederate assault. Accompanying this report was a note from outgoing War Secretary Joseph Holt. Lincoln swiftly forwarded these documents to General Winfield Scott. Scott, after reviewing the information, concluded that surrendering Fort Sumter was the only viable option, marking the hopelessness of its situation amidst dwindling resources. He even drafted a directive instructing Anderson to evacuate peacefully, should he inform the Governor of South Carolina. Nevertheless, this order was never dispatched.

On that same day, the new Republican-dominated U.S. Senate confirmed Lincoln's cabinet nominees, solidifying Seward's position. In a move to establish communication and set a collaborative tone, Lincoln reached out to Seward, requesting an immediate meeting.

This chapter encapsulates Lincoln's initial foray into leadership, highlighting his attempts to unify a fractured government while confronting urgent military challenges. It vividly illustrates the weight of responsibility on Lincoln's shoulders and the immediate obstacles he faced from the outset of his presidency. The dynamics of his cabinet, combined with the looming threat of war, set the stage for a complex journey ahead.