

# Mystic Chords

The chapter "Mystic Chords" opens with a reflection on Washington, noting its unusual quietness and somber atmosphere on Inauguration Day, March 4. Journalist Henry Villard comments on the city's transformation into a Southern-centric locale despite the federal ban on commercial slave trading. With a significant but decreasing enslaved population, tensions were palpable, tipping the city into a state of unrest, as General Scott remarked on the fragile situation.

Lincoln, struggling with anxiety about his inaugural speech, awoke early to a dreary morning marked by threatening rain. On the day of his inauguration, he grappled with the senator's abrupt decision to reject the position of Secretary of State. His correspondence with William H. Seward sought to reverse this refusal, emphasizing the demands of public interest and his personal feelings.

The procession to the Capitol involved President Buchanan and several dignitaries moving through a city filled with onlookers. Decorative flags and a carriage procession, including representations from the states, emphasized unity despite the brewing conflict. The Capitol itself, partially completed and disorderly, symbolized the nation's instability. Buchanan, eager to abandon his presidency, soon met with Lincoln before the ceremony commenced.

In preparation, General Scott appeared to reassure Seward about troop deployments, contrasting with the reality of military presence amidst rumors of potential unrest during the ceremony. Lincoln's inauguration unfolded before a vast audience, as he donned a formal outfit distinct from his usual attire and took to the podium, where the audience greeted him warmly.

Lincoln's speech, carefully crafted, aimed to bridge divides yet ultimately evoked mixed reactions. It favored conciliation while simultaneously provoking anxiety among secessionists, leading some to interpret it as a signal of conflict. Amidst these reactions, Lincoln insisted on peace rather than threats of coercion and maintained a hopeful stance of preserving the Union without military force.

As the new First Family entered the White House, Buchanan's contrived farewell encapsulated the varying emotions surrounding this notable transition. That evening, the Lincolns attended the Inaugural Ball, which proved less lively than anticipated, leading observers to comment on the subdued nature of the celebration in contrast with expectations.

Throughout the events, themes of tension, hope, and uncertainty echoed as the nation stood on the brink of a civil schism.