

The True Enemy

The chapter titled "The True Enemy" discusses the pivotal events surrounding Mississippi's secession from the Union during the early days of the Civil War. On January 9, 1861, Mississippi's secession convention unanimously favored leaving the Union, following South Carolina's lead. This decision was driven by a fervent belief in the necessity of protecting the institution of slavery, which the delegates viewed as vital to their economic interests. In their official declaration, the distinction between the North and the South was stark; they asserted that slavery was essential to global commerce and that any attempt to abolish it was viewed as an attack on civilization itself.

The declaration expressed a deep-seated fear of Lincoln and the Republican Party's intentions, anticipating a future devoid of slavery, which they felt would lead to their utter subjugation. The notion of secession was framed not as a choice, but as a desperate necessity. The delegates articulated their grievances regarding what they perceived as the Union's hostility towards slavery, characterizing it as a malevolent force intent on undermining their way of life. The emotional intensity of their statements marked the deep divisions within the country, as they believed the North had fomented animosity and insurrection against them.

President Buchanan's response to this burgeoning crisis illustrates a portrait of indecision and impotence. In his address titled "Message on Threats to the Peace and Existence of the Union," he acknowledged the gravity of the situation yet ultimately deferred responsibility for conflict resolution to Congress. His remarks indicated a belief in federal authority to counter aggression against federal property but fell short of any concrete action, leading to significant discontent. Buchanan's speech concluded with a somber note of resignation, revealing his internal conflicts about the presidency and the gravity of the Union's disintegration, while simultaneously expressing his earnest desire for the country he served.

Overall, this chapter captures the emotional and political turmoil at a critical moment in American history, showcasing the deep divisions over the institution of slavery and the challenges faced by national leadership in navigating these tumultuous waters.