

First Day

On March 5, the first day of Abraham Lincoln's presidency, he was immediately thrust into the turbulent realities of leading a deeply divided nation. He received a letter from William Seward, who had agreed to serve as Secretary of State, confirming his acceptance of the position. Seward reflected on his resignation from Congress, acknowledging the delicate political landscape and how fortunate he felt to have avoided major fallout from his decision. Despite their past rivalry during the Republican nomination process, Seward understood the magnitude of the national crisis and recognized the necessity of setting aside personal differences for the sake of the country's future. While Seward expressed some doubts about the challenges ahead, he ultimately felt a sense of duty that guided his decision to support Lincoln's efforts. This mutual commitment to the nation's well-being, despite past tensions, was emblematic of the unity that Lincoln sought to cultivate in his cabinet and in the country at large.

As Lincoln settled into the White House, the weight of the national crisis became even clearer. Major Anderson's letter from Fort Sumter arrived, outlining the increasingly dire situation and the urgent need for troops, supplies, and reinforcements to defend the fort. Alongside this communication was a note from the outgoing War Secretary, Joseph Holt, which further illustrated the precariousness of the fort's position. Lincoln's immediate response was to forward these reports to General Winfield Scott, asking for a thorough assessment. After reviewing the situation, Scott advised that surrendering Fort Sumter seemed to be the only feasible option. The fort's position was too isolated, its resources dwindling, and the Confederate forces were too numerous and well-equipped to withstand an extended siege. Despite the grim conclusion, Scott drafted an order instructing Anderson to evacuate peacefully if the South Carolina Governor demanded it, but this order was never sent. The situation at Fort Sumter, which would

become the flashpoint for the Civil War, remained unresolved, increasing the uncertainty surrounding Lincoln's early days in office.

While the military situation at Fort Sumter dominated much of Lincoln's attention, the political landscape was also evolving rapidly. The newly elected Republican-dominated U.S. Senate moved swiftly to confirm Lincoln's cabinet appointments, with Seward officially taking the position of Secretary of State. The swift confirmation was a significant milestone, signaling the Senate's support for Lincoln's leadership. In a move to establish early cooperation with his cabinet, Lincoln immediately reached out to Seward, requesting an urgent meeting to discuss the strategy moving forward. Lincoln was acutely aware that, with the threat of secession hanging over the Union, it was crucial to foster a collaborative atmosphere in his administration. This proactive approach set the tone for his leadership style, one marked by openness and a willingness to engage in direct dialogue with those who could shape his presidency.

Through these early days, it became apparent that Lincoln was intent on unifying a fractured government, but the weight of national tensions and the looming crisis at Fort Sumter were never far from his mind. The immediate focus on addressing the military threat posed by the Confederacy, alongside the process of settling into the White House, painted a picture of a president who was both reflective and resolute. The decisions he would make in these early moments would lay the groundwork for his approach to leadership throughout the remainder of the Civil War. However, as the nation stood on the brink of secession and war, Lincoln's administration would soon face numerous trials, each one more complex and challenging than the last. The time would come when the unity and strength of the Union would be tested, and Lincoln's commitment to preserving the nation would be pushed to its limits. But in these early days, Lincoln's swift action and measured responses to the crises unfolding around him revealed a leader determined to navigate the turbulent waters ahead.