

Hot Oxygen

Hot Oxygen enveloped the air as President Abraham Lincoln's proclamation on April 15, 1861, rang out, demanding the enlistment of 75,000 troops to suppress the rebellion that had begun to fracture the nation. This call for action came after months of tension and deepening divisions between the North and South, with Lincoln determined to preserve the Union at all costs. His directive was clear: suppress the secession of Southern states and restore federal authority, with a particular focus on ensuring that slavery, an institution crucial to the Southern economy, would remain untouched in the border states. The proclamation marked a critical point in American history, a dramatic shift in the conflict that would soon evolve into the Civil War. As the proclamation spread across the nation, it sent shockwaves of urgency through the Union states, where large-scale military mobilization became inevitable.

The immediate response to Lincoln's proclamation highlighted the stark divide between the North and South. In the Northern states, there was a groundswell of patriotic fervor, as citizens enthusiastically volunteered for military service to defend the Union's principles and preserve the nation's unity. However, in the Southern states, the call was met with widespread anger, as secessionist leaders condemned Lincoln's request as an infringement on their rights and sovereignty. Governors from states like North Carolina and Tennessee rejected the idea of sending troops to fight against their fellow Southerners, citing it as a violation of their freedom. Virginia, long considered a battleground state, shifted its stance and voted to secede within days of Lincoln's proclamation, marking a significant blow to the Union's efforts to maintain peace. This act of defiance, combined with the swelling tide of secessionist sentiment, further solidified the South's commitment to creating the Confederacy, deepening the rift between North and South.

In the midst of these tumultuous events, Charleston and other Southern cities erupted in jubilant celebrations. Local leaders, fervent in their belief that they had the right to govern themselves, reveled in Virginia's secession and the broader movement toward full Confederate independence. The decision of Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee to join the Confederacy only served to solidify the Southern cause, sending a clear message that they were prepared for war. The border states, which had long been on the fence, struggled to navigate their loyalty between the Union and the secessionist South. While some, like Kentucky, would attempt to remain neutral, others, such as Missouri, became sites of intense internal strife as factions within the state struggled to determine their allegiances. The growing number of states committing to secession created a fractured landscape, and as the South braced for what was to come, the Union's efforts to quell the rebellion appeared increasingly daunting.

At the heart of this turmoil was Robert E. Lee, a revered officer in the United States Army who found himself at a personal crossroads. Lee, a Virginian by birth, had always been loyal to the Union, but his allegiance to his home state took precedence when Virginia voted to secede. Despite his reservations about the Confederacy and secession, Lee could not bring himself to fight against Virginia, and he resigned from his position in the U.S. Army in late April. His decision to join the Confederate Army would have profound consequences, shaping the course of the war and cementing Lee's legacy as one of the most respected military leaders in American history. Lee's resignation marked not only a professional turning point but also a personal one, as he was torn between his duty to the United States and his loyalty to his state, a dilemma faced by many Southern military leaders during this period.

Meanwhile, as the conflict unfolded, British journalist William Howard Russell, who had traveled to America to observe the growing unrest, arrived in the South and documented the reactions of Southern civilians and political leaders. Russell's writings captured the exuberance of the South as they prepared for the war, noting the enthusiasm of armed civilians and political figures who were determined to defend

their rights. In Charleston, where the first shots of the Civil War would soon be fired, Russell observed large crowds celebrating the secession of Southern states, believing they were on the verge of achieving their independence. His reports painted a picture of a region brimming with confidence, with many in the South believing that the Union could never recover from this blow. The fervor with which they embraced their cause suggested a deeply held belief that the South had the moral and political high ground, further entrenched in their minds by their long-standing grievances with Northern policies.

This period of intense political and emotional upheaval set the stage for the eventual outbreak of war, as the divided nation faced its greatest test yet. Lincoln's call to arms and the subsequent secession of the Southern states accelerated the nation's descent into civil conflict. The war that would follow would not only reshape the political landscape of the United States but also alter the course of history forever. With deepening divisions, personal loyalties being tested, and military decisions on the horizon, the stage was set for a war that would define the nation's future. The proclamation that was issued by Lincoln on April 15, 1861, marked the beginning of a journey that would lead the United States into a violent struggle for its soul, and the repercussions of that call would reverberate throughout the nation for generations to come.