

# The Landscape of Fear

The Landscape of Fear presents a vivid portrayal of the growing tensions in 1860, especially in the mind of Edmund Ruffin, a staunch advocate for Southern secession. Ruffin, disheartened by Abraham Lincoln's nomination as the Republican candidate, had hoped for someone more vehement and divisive, such as William H. Seward, to take the lead for the Republicans. He believed that Seward's rhetoric would inflame Southern sentiment and propel the region toward secession. Instead, Ruffin was left with the belief that Lincoln's moderate approach would not provoke enough of a response to ignite the necessary outrage for secession. As he traveled through Virginia, en route to meeting his daughter Mildred, Ruffin found himself engulfed by a widespread fear of slave uprisings, fueled by recent incidents like John Brown's raid and unsettling rumors of poisonings and revolts circulating through the South. These fears seemed to echo the growing sense of insecurity, as Southern leaders grew increasingly convinced that their way of life was under direct threat.

Throughout his travels, Ruffin encountered a series of unsettling events that seemed to corroborate his worst fears. One particularly disturbing incident involved the murder of Congressman Keitt's brother by enslaved individuals, further exacerbating the pervasive fear that slave revolts were imminent. Alongside these violent events, natural disasters such as a severe drought in the South were affecting crops and food supplies, which heightened the region's anxiety and distress. The economic strain added to the pressure of the already tense political environment, as Ruffin, like many others in the South, believed that these disasters were harbingers of the destruction of the region's future prosperity. The Southern states, already grappling with fears about Lincoln's election, now faced additional threats, both real and imagined, that only served to fuel the growing tension. These compounded anxieties placed the South in a heightened state of fear, convinced that their way of life and the institution of slavery

were on the brink of extinction.

When Ruffin finally reached White Sulphur Springs in Virginia, he found himself in a bustling resort, traditionally frequented by Southern elites seeking refuge from the tensions of everyday life. However, he was struck by the indifference of the other guests, who seemed more interested in leisure than in engaging with the pressing political issues of the day. Ruffin's impassioned advocacy for secession was met with little enthusiasm, leaving him feeling increasingly isolated and frustrated. His hopes of reuniting with his daughter, Mildred, were dashed when he learned she would not be joining him at the resort, further deepening his sense of solitude. This realization prompted a shift in his journey, as he then traveled to Frankfort, Kentucky, where he encountered even more opposition. There, he was confronted by strong Union sentiments, even from his son-in-law, further complicating his already tense political environment. His attempts to sway others toward the cause of secession through letters to Southern newspapers went largely ignored, and the release of his own book, *Anticipations of the Future*, was met with complete silence. This lack of support from both within and outside his immediate circle only intensified his feelings of alienation and solidified his growing belief that the South was on the verge of an irreversible shift.

As Election Day loomed, Ruffin's conviction that Lincoln's presidency would signal the end of slavery and the South's prosperity deepened. His isolation grew as the South appeared divided and unwilling to stand united in the face of what he saw as a grave threat. The chapter underscores the growing frustration and anxiety felt by Southern leaders like Ruffin, who viewed Lincoln's election as the final nail in the coffin for their way of life. Yet, despite his mounting sense of isolation, Ruffin remained unyielding in his commitment to the cause of secession, steadfast in the belief that the South must act in order to preserve its honor and its institutions. The emotional tension of this period is palpable, as Ruffin and others like him grappled with the difficult reality that the nation was teetering on the brink of civil war. The growing divide between the North and South was becoming more evident with each passing day, and Ruffin's

reflections capture the sense of urgency and fear that permeated the South as it faced an uncertain and potentially disastrous future.

Ruffin's journey through the politically charged landscape of 1860 encapsulates the deepening divide in the nation. His own personal frustrations with the lack of support for secession in the South mirror the larger frustration felt by many Southern leaders who saw themselves as fighting a losing battle. Their belief that the North's victory in the election of Lincoln was the beginning of the end for their way of life was coupled with an increasing sense of dread about the future of slavery and Southern sovereignty. As Ruffin and others like him waited for the inevitable to unfold, their actions and words became a reflection of the intense emotional turmoil that gripped the South. Their belief that Lincoln's presidency marked the beginning of the end was only solidified by their growing sense of fear, which was amplified by the perceived indifference of the North and the unyielding attitude of the Union's government. This sense of impending doom, combined with the desire for secession, would lead the South down a path from which there would be no return.