

# A Civil War Chronology

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## The Antebellum Era

- 1607:** Virginia Company founds first permanent English settlement in North America.
- 1619:** First slaves imported into North America through Virginia.
- 1620:** Mayflower passengers, bound for Virginia, settle instead on Cape Cod.
- 1630:** Massachusetts Bay Company founders settle in Boston.
- 1682:** Pennsylvania settled by anti-slavery Quakers.
- 1754–63:** Seven Years' War marks British triumph over French in North America.
- 1765–75:** Amid tensions with Britain, inter-colonial cooperation grows in form of Stamp Act Congress, Committees of Correspondence, and Continental Congress.
- 1775–83:** American Revolution.
- 1781:** Mason–Dixon line marks commonly accepted boundary between North and South.
- 1785–6:** Northwest Ordinances bar slavery from new states of upper Midwest.
- 1787:** Constitutional Convention works out sectional tensions via three-fifths Compromise, ending of the international slave trade in 1808, and Fugitive Slave provision, convincing Southern states to ratify the agreement.
- 1793:** Eli Whitney invents cotton gin, intensifying demand for slave labor.
- 1797:** Responding to the Alien & Sedition Acts, Virginia and Kentucky legislatures pass resolutions that assert states' right to void national measures.
- 1803:** Louisiana Purchase more than doubles the territory of United States.
- 1804:** Essex Junto plans northern confederacy of New England, New York, and New Jersey opposed to policies of the Thomas Jefferson administration.
- 1812–14:** War of 1812 with Britain.
- 1814:** Hartford Convention denounces federal actions in the War of 1812, leading to accusations of disloyalty to the Union. Treaty of Ghent resolves the War (December).
- 1816:** American Colonization Society founded to buy freedom for slaves and send them to Liberia.

- 1819–20: Missouri Compromise (also known as the Compromise of 1820). Missouri admitted to union as slave state, Maine as free state, and 36°30' line going west to henceforth demarcate boundary between future free and slave states.
- 1828–32: Nullification Controversy. South Carolina threatens to leave Union over tariff policy, then relents in the face of possible military retaliation by President Andrew Jackson's administration.
- 1831: First abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*, founded.  
Nat Turner slave insurrection.  
Virginia legislature debates, and rejects, emancipation proposals.
- 1836–44: US House imposes "gag rule" forbidding discussion of slavery.
- 1844–5: Texas annexation debate.
- 1846: Wilmot Proviso, proposing that any territory acquired from Mexico be designated as non-slavery.  
Mexican War begins.
- 1848: Treaty of Guadalupe–Hildago ends Mexican War.
- 1850: Compromise of 1850. Among its provisions: California enters Union as free state; slave trade abolished in Washington DC; stronger Fugitive Slave Act.
- 1851: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* begins serial publication as response to the Fugitive Slave Act.
- 1854: Kansas–Nebraska Act replaces Missouri Compromise by having territories vote to decide for themselves whether to allow slavery.
- 1856–7: Pro- and anti-slavery forces fight for control over Kansas government.
- 1857: US Supreme Court *Scott v. Sandford* decision rules that slaves have no rights under federal law and that property rights trump state laws regarding slavery.  
Kansas adopts pro-slavery constitution in election marked by widespread fraud.
- 1858: Lincoln–Douglas debates galvanize national conversation about slavery.
- 1859: John Brown leads failed abolitionist insurrection on Federal armory in Virginia.
- 1860: Abraham Lincoln elected president.  
South Carolina becomes first state to leave the Union (December).

### The American Civil War, 1861–5

- 1861: A total of ten more states leave the Union (January–May).  
Confederate constitution written and adopted; capital moves from Montgomery, AL to Richmond, VA (February–May).  
Fort Sumter, SC attacked and taken by Confederate forces (April).  
Confederates win decisive victory in First Battle of Bull Run, VA (July).  
Abraham Lincoln capitulates to British demands and releases Confederate agents captured aboard British ship in the *Trent* Affair (December).
- 1862: Union launches unsuccessful Peninsular Campaign in the East to capture Richmond (March–July).  
Confederates fail to stop Union advance down the Mississippi at the Battle of Shiloh, TN (April).  
Union amphibious force captures New Orleans (April).  
Confederates relieve pressure on Richmond from Peninsular Campaign with victory in the Second Battle of Bull Run (August).

- First major Confederate invasion of Northern-held territory at Battle of Antietam, MD, is a draw militarily, but becomes pretext for Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation (September).
- Confederates win decisive victory at Fredericksburg (December).
- 1863:** Emancipation Proclamation officially takes effect (January).
- Union forces approach and lay siege to Vicksburg, MS, the last Confederate stronghold on the Mississippi River (March–July).
- Confederates confound Union advance at the Battle of Chancellorsville (May).
- Confederates advance into Pennsylvania but are defeated at the Battle of Gettysburg (July).
- Vicksburg falls into Union hands; Confederacy split (July).
- Confederate counterattack in the West pushes Union forces back on Tennessee River at Chickamauga (September).
- Union line solidifies despite Confederate assault on the Tennessee at Chattanooga (November).
- 1864:** Fierce fighting with massive casualties marks Wilderness Campaign in the east; Union and Confederate forces wheel around Richmond and stalemate at Petersburg, south of the Confederate capital (March–December).
- Atlanta campaign commences on the Tennessee and culminates with capture of the city (May–September).
- Abraham Lincoln re-elected to second term as president (November).
- “Sherman’s March to the Sea” results in scorched earth policy from Atlanta to Savanna (November–December).
- 1865:** Congress passes and Abraham Lincoln signs the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution ending slavery everywhere in the United States; 27 states ratify it (February–December).
- Under threat of complete encirclement, Confederate forces withdraw from Richmond, culminating in their surrender at Appomattox Court House (April).
- Lincoln assassinated in Washington (April).
- Remaining major Confederate forces surrender in Louisiana and North Carolina (April–May).

### Reconstruction, 1863–77

- 1863:** Lincoln administration announces plan for Reconstruction whereby a seceded state would return to the Union when 10 percent of its citizens swear loyalty to the Union.
- 1864:** Congress responds to Lincoln plan with Wade–Davis bill requiring 50 percent of a state’s citizens to give loyalty to the Union; Lincoln vetoes it.
- 1865:** Lincoln’s successor, Andrew Johnson, tries to continue Lincoln’s approach amid growing Congressional resistance. Johnson gives amnesty to most Confederates, some of whom are then elected to Congress. Republican majority in Congress refuses to seat them.
- 1866:** Johnson vetoes bill to extend Freedmen’s Bureau created during the war to help newly emancipated slaves; “Black Codes” passed in Southern states restrict their freedom. Ku Klux Klan formed in Tennessee.

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- 1867:** Republican-led Congress passes Tenure of Office Act requiring Senate review of Cabinet dismissals, as well as Reconstruction Act dividing Southern into military districts and imposing more stringent rules for readmission.
- 1868:** Johnson impeached for violating Tenure of Office Act, but acquitted in the Senate. Ratification of Fourteenth Amendment guarantees Civil Rights on the federal level. Ulysses S. Grant elected president.
- 1870:** Fifteenth Amendment gives African American men the right to vote.
- 1877:** Last occupying US troops leave the South in aftermath of the presidential election of 1876. “Redemption” of former Confederate states complete. South will be “solid” for Democrats for next century. Jim Crow laws go on books, modeled on antebellum northern statutes.