

CIF

History 225

Re: Notes w/ Sumter Crisis

Source: Boritt, Why the War Came

Deals w/ the question of Lincoln and individual responsibility for the war coming.

Emphasis on individual (Davis is also a candidate here) rather than on institutions and movements, etc.

The basic burden of Boritt's essay is to examine why Lincoln was so slow, or resistant to see that war was close to inevitable. The choices seemed to be either killing that came with slavery or killing that would come with war.

Boritt posits that Lincoln went through four discernible stages on the approaching war. Most of these were denial.

- When he was politicking in the 1850s
- When he ran for president in 1860
- When he gave his inaugural address
- When he was faced with the Sumter crisis. Then he and Davis were

the only voices that mattered.

He was not unaware of the violence of the 1850s over the slave issue. There was the violence in Kansas. Then the 1859 Brown raid on Harpers Ferry. Still Lincoln could not accept that these sectional differences would be resolved by war.

He was too attached to the idea of the Union. He was a man of peace who hated war and violence. He insisted that peaceful ballots and not bloody bullets would ultimately resolve these sectional differences. After all the US was the last great hope of humanity.

Lincoln's mystic dedication to the idea of the Union. It was his secular religion.

In addition there was his personal history. He was born in Kentucky. His wife was a native Kentuckian (Mary Todd Lincoln had three step brothers who would serve on the Confederacy side and die in the Civil War. The Lincoln's entertained the wife of one of these brothers in the White House on Christmas in 1863).

Lincoln's southern origins gave him the belief that he understood the South.

As we will see he did not. His strong and abiding belief in the strength of Southern Unionism would be a persistent theme in his policies during the first 15 months of the war. He overestimated Southern Unionism for longer than the facts would explain.

He never confronted the alternatives between freedom (for the slaves) and war. He would not see the consequences of the antislavery crusade in the North.

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As the secession crisis emerged w/ So. Carolina moving to leave the Union there were three distinct positions in the North (1) to let them go (2) To take the Jacksonian position and threaten to use force (3) A compromise to prevent war

Lincoln was willing to compromise in that he would accept New Mexico into the Union without restrictions on slavery (rather than popular sovereignty formula under the 1850 Compromise) and to support an Amendment to the Constitution that guaranteed safety to slavery where it already existed. This would have been the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment!!!! But no compromise on the matter of containment of slavery. That is no slavery in the territories. Might develop this w/ several points.

Point is that these gestures of good will were not going to turn the Palmetto State around. Nor the other 6 deep southern states that were preparing to leave following South Carolina's example.

Look at his Cabinet the make up did not suggest that it was a collectivity that was easily shifting into a war Cabinet:

8 Seward the most important compromiser among leading Republicans. Seward was for surrendering Sumter and other federal installations.

- Secretary of War was Cameron—a powerful politico from Pennsylvania but also a corruptionist and a disaster when the war began. Lincoln would soon remove him from office once the war came.
- Choice for Navy was a southerner—John Gilmer of North Carolina

Then came March and he was sworn in as President and was immediately faced with the news from Anderson at Sumter that supplies would only last for the next two months. The Sumter crisis was upon him.

Ask the class how McPherson handles the Sumter crisis. There are at least three distinct views:

- That Lincoln maneuvered the South into firing the first shot
- The Lincoln bungled. Desiring peace his actions actually produced the reverse-war
- Hoping for peace but recognizing tha war was possible he went ahead with the provisioning fleet.

By the time he was prepared to provision Sumter Lincoln had come to see that the war was a strong possibility. But others had seen this before.

Sherman, Jeff Davis, Lee, Alexander Stephens. And it would be a long war.