

Definition: **Confederate States of America** from *Merriam-Webster's Geographical Dictionary*

Name of the 11 Southern states of the U.S. during their secession from the Union 1860–65: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, Arkansas, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia; \* Montgomery, Alabama 1861, but soon moved to Richmond, Virginia; dissolved shortly after defeat in Civil War 1865.

Summary Article: **Confederacy**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

name commonly given to the Confederate States of America (1861–65), the government established by the Southern states of the United States after their secession from the Union. (For the events leading up to secession and for the military operations of the Confederacy in the conflict between North and South which followed, see Civil War.)

### Formation of the Government

South Carolina, the first Southern state to secede (Dec. 20, 1860) after the election of the Republican President Abraham Lincoln, was soon followed out of the Union by six more states—Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas. On Feb. 4, 1861, delegates from these states (except the Texans, who were delayed) met at Montgomery, Ala., and organized a provisional government. The convention passed over the radical secessionists R. B. Rhett and W. L. Yancey and elected (Feb. 9) Jefferson Davis of Mississippi and Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia president and vice president respectively. The convention also drafted a constitution (adopted on Mar. 11) and functioned as a provisional legislature pending regular elections.

The constitution closely resembled the Constitution of the United States, even repeating much of its language, but naturally had states' rights provisions. Slavery was “recognized and protected,” but the importation of slaves “from any foreign country other than the slave-holding States or Territories of the United States of America” was prohibited. The general welfare clause of the old Constitution was omitted, protective tariffs were forbidden, and for most appropriations a two-thirds vote of congress was required. There were other, less important, departures from the U.S. Constitution, e.g., the president and vice president were to be elected for six years, but the president was not “reelignible”; members of the president's cabinet might be granted seats in either house of the Confederate congress to discuss legislation affecting their departments; and amendment to the constitution (by two thirds of the states, with congress having no voice) was made easier.

The new government seized or pressed its claims for U.S. property within its domain, especially forts and arsenals, and, when the Union declined to surrender Fort Sumter, ordered the firing (Apr. 12–13) that formally began the hostilities. Lincoln's immediate call for troops brought four more Southern states—Arkansas, North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee—into the Confederacy, which now comprised 11 states. The border slave states of Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri remained in the Union although they contained many Southern sympathizers; Confederate state governments were established at Neosho, Mo., and Russellville, Ky., in opposition to the official governments. In May it was decided to transfer the capital from Montgomery to Richmond, Va., because of Virginia's prestige; that move,

considering Richmond's proximity to the North, has generally been regarded as a serious mistake.

The new constitution was ratified (the approval of only five states was needed), general elections for congress and for presidential electors (as under the federal Constitution) were held in Nov., 1861, and on Washington's birthday in 1862, the "permanent" government was inaugurated at Richmond. Davis and Stephens had been chosen without opposition to head it. Judah P. Benjamin, successively attorney general, secretary of war, and secretary of state, was the most important figure in Davis's cabinet. Only two other men remained in the cabinet for its entire brief existence—Stephen R. Mallory, secretary of the navy, and John H. Reagan, postmaster general.

### **Search for Recognition and Support**

The story of the Confederacy is essentially the story of the loss of the Civil War. Even with its early military triumphs, the Confederacy experienced trying days. It never won recognition as an independent government, although Southerners had been confident that "king cotton" would bring this about. In 1861 they instituted an embargo on the export of cotton and voluntarily limited cultivation of the staple on the theory that these self-imposed and unofficial restrictions would make a cotton-hungry England eager to acknowledge the new nation that could supply in abundance the most important raw material in Britain's industrial system. The British, however, were well provided with cotton from previous boom years, and when their stocks finally were depleted, other sources of supply became available.

Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation enhanced the Union cause in the eyes of the average Briton, and the British government, no matter how pro-Confederate some of its individual members were, was not disposed to fly in the face of popular opinion. The Confederate cruisers built or bought in England were a scourge to the U.S. merchant marine, and later at the settlement of the Alabama claims, Great Britain was adjudged partly responsible for their depredations; but beyond this the Confederate missions of James M. Mason, John Slidell, William L. Yancey, and others in Europe achieved little. Napoleon III would probably have followed Britain in recognizing the Confederacy, but not even the Confederate offer to recognize the French-dominated government of Maximilian in Mexico could induce the emperor to go off on this diplomatic venture alone.

On the other hand, both the British and French recognized the blockade of the South, which the Union had proclaimed at the beginning of the war. This was particularly galling to Southerners because at first the blockade was not very effective; it is estimated that not more than a tenth of the ships running the blockade in 1861 were captured. But as the war progressed the blockade became more effective, and by 1865 one of every two blockade runners was being taken. When, in Oct., 1863, Davis expelled the British consuls who had remained in the South, the Confederacy had resigned itself to European nonrecognition, which was mostly influenced by the rising tide of Union successes in the war.

### **Conscription and States' Rights Extremists**

The Confederate army early found that volunteers alone were insufficient, and the first conscription law was passed in Apr., 1862. By a later act (Feb., 1864), white men within the ages of 17 and 50 were drafted into military service. Provisions permitting the hiring of substitutes and exempting one owner or overseer for each 20 blacks were highly unpopular among the yeomanry, who grumbled about "a rich man's war and a poor man's fight." Joseph E. Brown and Zebulon B. Vance, the governors of Georgia and North Carolina, led the denunciation of conscription and further berated Davis for the assumption of state troops into the Confederate army, the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, and the Confederate tax program. Their extreme states' rights views represented a logical development of

the theory that had led the Southern states to secede, but their insistence on maintaining these views at a time when unity was imperative was an added factor in the Confederate defeat. The fact that Brown, Vance, and others like them were able men and no less set on victory than was Davis only emphasizes this glaring deficiency in the nature of the Confederacy.

## **Financial Difficulties**

From the very beginning, the Confederacy was in bad financial condition, lacking in both specie and banks. It had difficulty in negotiating loans and was forced to finance its operations through issues of paper money, which by 1864 reached \$1 billion in face value, more than twice that of the greenbacks issued by the Union. The gold value of these notes declined dangerously. Christopher G. Memminger, secretary of the treasury, was forced to resign in 1864, but the situation was beyond the abilities of any person.

## **The Collapse of the “Lost Cause”**

With the men at war, the women of the Confederacy carried on at home. They did not face wholesale death as did the soldiers in the field, yet they knew war; it was brought to them in the mighty Union invasion of 1864–65. Feeling the pinch of the Union blockade and already lacking the bare necessities of life—shoes, iron goods, paper, clothing—because the South was nonindustrial (the armies were kept supplied with ammunition, but beyond that industry was negligible), they now saw their country devastated by Union forces such as those led by Sherman and Sheridan. Many, both men and women, cried for peace, but the Union price was too great (see Hampton Roads Peace Conference), and most Southerners hung on grimly. Benjamin's proposal that blacks who willingly enlisted in the fight be freed indicates how desperate affairs became before the Confederacy collapsed.

That the Confederacy was able to continue the war as long as it did is a tribute to its stout soldiers and a few brilliant commanders, notably Robert E. Lee. For the South, less populous than the North and largely made up of scattered agricultural communities, defeat was inevitable. However, the measures adopted by the South during the Civil War resulted in a remarkable degree of self-sufficiency and a highly successful mobilization effort. The heroic aspect of the South's struggle was tarnished by its retention and defense of the institution of slavery, yet it long revered the “lost cause” of the Confederacy as its greatest tradition.

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"Confederacy." *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, Paul Lagasse, and Columbia University, Columbia University Press, 8th edition, 2018. *Credo Reference*, <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/confederacy>. Accessed 20 Sep. 2019.