

Why Did the Civil War Start at Charleston, SC?

The Confederate Stance

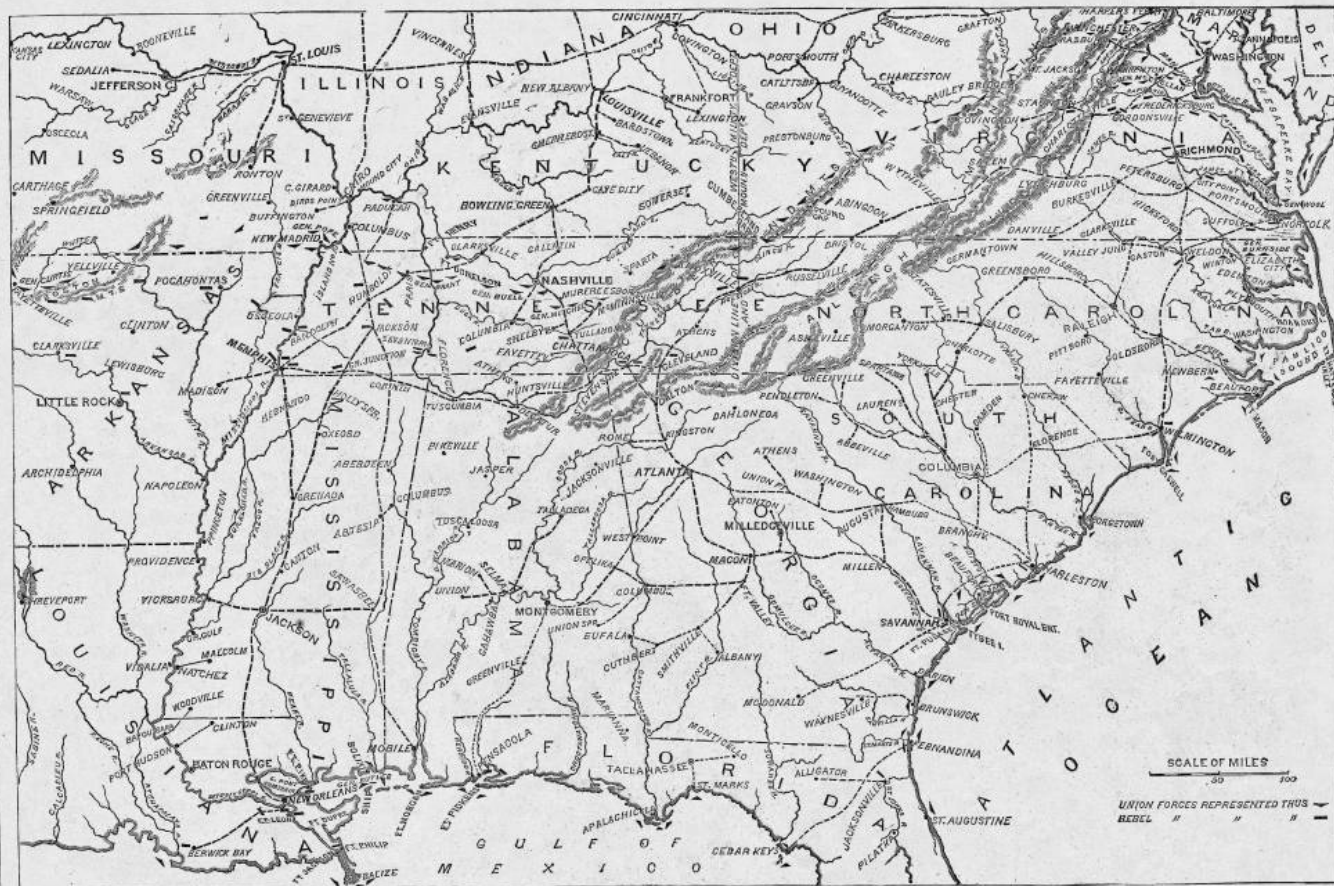
With the formation of the Confederacy in February 1861 by the seven states of the Deep South (South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas), Charleston, SC was the second largest city in the new nation. More importantly, it was the largest and most important seaport on the Confederacy's South Atlantic coast. Therefore, it was crucial for the survival of the Confederacy to have the port open for the shipping of products (rice, cotton, and tobacco) to foreign markets.

As a result, the South could not allow the U.S. to maintain control of Fort Sumter, which could control any shipping entering or exiting Charleston Harbor. Plus, in order to improve the Confederacy's chances for recognition by England and France it could not allow a "foreign power" (the U.S.) to hold the fort.

The United States Stance

With the exception of Fort Pickens at Pensacola, FL and Fort Sumter, all U.S. properties (custom houses, forts, and arsenals) had been taken by state authorities within their respective boundaries. As a result, President Abraham Lincoln had to determine which fort to concentrate his efforts to maintain. The logical selection was Fort Sumter. The following are points of discussion on this subject:

1. As North Carolina and Virginia were still in the Union the ability to communicate (mail and telegraph) with Fort Sumter was faster. Messages to Fort Pickens would take much longer.
2. As the Confederacy wanted a peaceful resolution to the situation (ie: the evacuation of the fort) representatives, traveling by railroad, from Washington were allowed to visit fort and Maj. Robert Anderson (the fort's commander) was permitted to send officers to Washington to confer with the government.
3. Any "relief expedition" to Fort Sumter would come from the sea. These would be launched from New York and could arrive in 3 to 5 days. Whereas, any mission to Fort Pickens would take many more days as the vessel(s) must sail down the east coast and then into the Gulf of Mexico and up to Fort Pickens.
4. As South Carolina was the first state to secede it had received more national attention in the media.



MAP OF THE SOUTHERN STATES, SHOWING THE STRATEGIC POINTS AND THEIR RAILROAD CONNECTIONS, THE PRINCIPAL RIVERS, AND THE PRESENT POSITION OF THE UNION AND REBEL FORCES.