

Southern and Northern Reactions to the Civil War



ABOUT THE SOURCE When Abraham Lincoln assumed the presidency in March 1861, the seven states of the Deep South had already seceded. Confederate forces in these states seized federal forts. Only Fort Sumter, in South Carolina's Charleston harbor, remained in Union hands. Its commander refused to surrender. On April 12, 1861, Confederate guns fired on the fort, marking the start of the Civil War. In the passages below, two women describe how southerners and northerners reacted to the outbreak of war.



*As you read note how the perspectives of the two women differ. The following words may be new to you: **solaced, insurrection, furrow, rendezvous, festooned.** You may want to use a dictionary to look them up.*

Mary Boykin Chesnut

Chesnut was in Charleston, South Carolina as the Confederates prepared to attack Fort Sumter. She wrote the following in her journal on April 7, 1861.

The air is too full of war news. And we are all so restless. News so warlike I quake. My husband speaks of joining the artillery . . . Now the agony was so stifling—I could hardly see or hear . . . And I crept silently to my room, where I sat down to a good cry. Mrs. Wigfall came in, and we had it out on the subject of civil war. We **solaced** ourselves with dwelling on all its known horrors, and then we added what we had a right to expect, with Yankees in front and negroes in the rear.

“The slave-owners must expect a servile **insurrection**, of course,” said Mrs. Wigfall, to make sure that we were unhappy enough. Suddenly, loud shouting was heard. We ran out. Cannon after cannon roared . . . Governor Means rushed out of his room . . . and begged us to be calm.

“Governor Pickens has ordered . . . seven cannon to be fired as a signal to the Seventh Regiment . . .”

No sleep for anybody last night. The streets were alive with soldiers, men shouting, marching, singing.

Source: *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, edited by C. Vann Woodward

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. How did Chesnut feel about the outbreak of war? Why did she feel this way?
