

APRIL 29, 1861

Jefferson Davis's War Message

On April 29, 1861, the provisional president of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis, called the Confederate Congress into special session and delivered a message asking for power to conduct war.

In the message, Davis gave the following historical account as the justification for secession.

In the inaugural address delivered by President Lincoln in March last, he asserts, as an axiom, which he plainly deems to be undeniable, that the theory of the Constitution requires that in all cases the majority shall govern...

This is the lamentable and fundamental error on which rests the policy that has culminated in his declaration of war against these Confederate States. In addition to the long-continued resentment felt by the Southern States at the persistent abuse of the powers they had delegated to the Congress, for the purpose of enriching the manufacturing and shipping classes of the North, at the expense of the South, there has existed for nearly half a century another subject of discord, involving interests of such transcendent magnitude as at all times to create the apprehension in the minds of many devoted lovers of the Union that its permanence was impossible. When the several States delegated certain powers to the United States Congress, a large portion of the laboring population consisted of African slaves imported into the colonies by the mother country. In twelve out of the thirteen states, negro slavery existed and the right of property in slaves was protected by law. This property was recognized by the Constitution, and provision was made against its loss by the

escape of the slave....

The climate and soil of the Northern States soon proved unpropitious to the continuance of slave labor, whilst the converse was the case at the South. Under the unrestricted free intercourse between the sections, the Northern States consulted their own interests by selling their slaves to the South and prohibiting slavery, within their limits. The South were willing purchasers of property suitable to their wants, and paid the price of the acquisition without harboring a suspicion that their quiet possession was to be disturbed by those who were inhibited not only by want of constitutional authority but by good faith as vendors, from disquieting a title emanating from themselves. As soon, however, as the Northern States that prohibited African slavery within their limits had readied a number sufficient to give their representation a controlling voice in Congress, a persistent and organized system of hostile measures against the rights of the owners of slaves in the Southern States was inaugurated and gradually extended. A continuous series of measures was devised and prosecuted for the purpose of rendering insecure the tenure of property in slaves.

QUESTIONS

1. What does Davis think has been the fundamental motive of the Northern people as a whole?
2. What, aside from their efforts to "disquieten" slavery, does Davis claim the people of North have done to injure the South?