

# Secession is Unlawful

## **First Inaugural Address March 4, 1861**

I hold that, in contemplation of universal law, and of the Constitution, the union of these States is perpetual....It follows....that no State, upon its own mere motion, can lawfully get out of the Union; that resolves and ordinances to that effect are legally void; and that acts of violence, within any State or States, against the authority of the United States, are insurrectionary or revolutionary, according to circumstances. I, therefore, consider that, in view of the Constitution and the laws, the Union is unbroken.

## **First Inaugural Address March 4, 1861**

We find the proposition that, in legal contemplation, the Union is perpetual confirmed by the history of the Union itself. The Union is much older than the Constitution. It was formed, in fact, by the Articles of Association in 1774. It was matured and continued by the Declaration of Independence in 1776. It was further matured, and the faith of all the thirteen States expressly plighted and engaged that it should be perpetual, by the Articles of Confederation in 1778. And, finally, in 1787, one of the declared objects for ordaining and establishing the Constitution was "to form a more perfect Union."

## **Message to Congress in Special Session July 4, 1861**

The States have their status in the Union, and they have no other legal status. If they break from this they can only do so against law and by revolution.

---

**[Back to Lincoln on Secession \(/liho/historyculture/secessiontableofcontents.htm\)](/liho/historyculture/secessiontableofcontents.htm)**

**[Back to History and Culture \(/liho/historyculture/index.htm\)](/liho/historyculture/index.htm)**

## **CONTACT THE PARK**

### **Mailing Address:**

413 S. 8th Street  
Springfield, IL 62701

**Phone:**

(217) 492-4241

Hours are 8:30am-5:00pm, daily, except on  
Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Years  
Day, when the park is closed.

---



([www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov))  
National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior