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Western Virginia Secedes - I

Lead: In 1863, during the Civil War, the western counties of Confederate Virginia, after decades of dissatisfaction, seceded from the Commonwealth to form a new state as part of the Federal Union.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Following the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860, eleven states, including Virginia, seceded from the Union. Most of the Virginia population west of the Appalachians opposed secession. Wealthy plantation owners, dependent on slave

labor, dominated the eastern tidewater region and southside Virginia. The western part of the state, the trans-Allegheny region, was populated by frontiersmen and late-arriving immigrants from Scotland, Germany, Ireland and Wales. They raised their own livestock and farmed land they had cleared with their own hands. Comparatively few slaves or slaveholders could be found in the west.

By the early nineteenth century cultural and economic differences between the regions began to heighten with some westerners beginning to call for separate statehood or for the attachment of their region to Maryland or Pennsylvania. The

westerners asserted they were underrepresented in Virginia's legislature and in 1829 and 1850, reform conventions attempted to address western concerns. The frontier counties received broader representation in the state legislature and the west secured the popular election of the governor and other state officials.

Yet, other issues continued to embroil the regions. The tax system was viewed by westerners as giving advantage to slaveholders and state power brokers were seen as unresponsive to the west's perceived need for more money for public education and internal improvements such as new roads and railroads. Ever

simmering western resentment came to a head in April 1861. When Virginia voted to secede from the Union, the majority of the western delegates to the Secession Convention, voted against the move. Next time: a new state. Research assistance by Ann H. Johnson and Bill Williams.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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