

What Caused the Civil War Besides Slavery?

Article 1

There are many causes that led to the American Civil War. While slavery is generally cited as the main cause for the war, other political and cultural differences between the North and the South certainly contributed. Below we will discuss some of these differences and how they created a divide between the North and the South that eventually caused the Civil War.

States' Rights

The idea of states' rights was not new to the Civil War. Since the Constitution was first written there had been arguments about how much power the states should have versus how much power the federal government should have. The southern states felt that the federal government was taking away their rights and powers.

Expansion

As the United States continued to expand westward, each new state added to the country, shifted the power between the North and the South. Southern states began to fear they would lose so much power that they would lose all their rights. Each new state became a battleground between the two sides for power.

Industry vs. Farming

In the mid-1800s, the economies of many northern states had moved away from farming to industry. A lot of people in the North worked and lived in large cities like New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. The southern states, however, had maintained a large farming economy and this economy was based on slave labor. While the North no longer needed slaves, the South relied heavily upon slaves for their way of life.

Slavery

At the heart of much of the South's issues was slavery. The South relied on slavery for labor to work the fields. Many people in the North believed that slavery was wrong and evil. These people were called abolitionists. They wanted slavery made illegal throughout the United States. Abolitionists such as John Brown, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Harriet Beecher Stowe began to convince more and more people of the evil of slavery. This made the South fearful that their way of life would come to an end.

Bleeding Kansas

The first fighting over the slavery issue took place in Kansas. In 1854, the government passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act allowing the residents of Kansas to vote on whether they would be a slave state or a free state. The region was flooded with supporters from both sides. They fought over the issue for years. Several people were killed in small skirmishes giving the confrontation the name Bleeding Kansas. Eventually Kansas entered the Union as a free state in 1861.

Abraham Lincoln

The final straw for the South was election of Abraham Lincoln to President of the United States. Abraham Lincoln was a member of the new anti-slavery Republican Party. He managed to get elected without even being on the ballot in ten of the southern states. The southern states felt that Lincoln was against slavery and also against the South.

Secession

When Lincoln was elected, many of the southern states decided they no longer wanted to be a part of the United States. They felt that they had every right to leave. Starting with South Carolina, eleven states would eventually leave the United States and form a new country called the Confederate States of America. Abraham Lincoln said they did not have the right to leave the United States and sent in troops to stop the South from leaving. The Civil War had begun.

Article 2

Obviously, it's difficult to separate slavery from any discussion on the Civil War. But to say that slavery was the sole cause of the Civil War overlooks other differences that divided the North and South in the lead-up to it. Historians have speculated that even had the slavery question been resolved peacefully, war or secession still might have occurred during the westward expansion.

Below are five *other* causes of the Civil War. To be fair, each of these causes was impacted by the institution of slavery to one degree or another, but each cause also existed apart from the institution of slavery.

1. Sweeping Economic Changes

Southerners worried about their livelihood as more and more countries were ramping up production of raw cotton. While Southerners boasted that "Cotton is King," their primary export had become steadily less valuable in the decade leading up to the Civil War. Since the South had no financial system to speak of, one bad crop often sent plantation owners to Yankee banks (or London ones). "In effect, the South had all the disadvantages of a one-crop economy," wrote the historian Paul Johnson. The North, on the other hand, was a strong industrial economy with a variety of ways to support the economy.

2. The Union Was Rapidly Changing

The Missouri Compromise of 1820 was a settlement reached between the pro-slavery and anti-slavery people so that Missouri was admitted as a slave state and Maine as a non-slave state at the same time, keeping balance between slave and free states.

However, in the 1850's four states all wanted to become states including California, Minnesota, Oregon and Kansas. Two free states joined the Union (Oregon and Minnesota), while a slave state (Kansas)

was initially denied entry. All of these things occurred under Democratic presidents relatively sympathetic to slavery. The prospect of a president opposed to slavery struck fear in the hearts of Southerners.

As the nation changed, the South remembered John C. Calhoun's warning (made just days before he died) that if the South waited too long to act it would no longer be strong enough to leave the Union (peaceably or not).

3. There Was a Breakdown of Decorum and Civil Discourse

Both North and South burned with righteous anger because both passionately believed in the justice of their cause. This caused not just harsh language, but some acts of violence that troubled the nation.

One of the earliest instances involved Elijah P. Lovejoy, a printer who was killed in 1837 when his small abolitionist (anti-slavery) newspaper was attacked by a mob of slave sympathizers.

One of the last was John Brown's attempt to free slaves that ended in a deadly failed raid on Harpers Ferry in 1859.

In Washington, Preston Brooks attacked Charles Sumner in his Senate office with a cane, leaving Sumner in a bleeding heap surrounded by cane shards. (It took two years for Sumner to recover.)

4. Fundamental Disagreement on Constitutional Principles

Uncertainty as to what the federal government could and could not do began before the ink on the U.S. Constitution was dry. If, how, and to what extent the federal government could limit or abolish slavery loomed over American history.

Lincoln—both before and during the Civil War—said the federal government lacked the power to force emancipation on the states. The Founders had created a system “conceived in liberty”—but one, he admitted, that lacked the power to liberate the enslaved. Radical Republicans disagreed. All constitutional issues aside, the radicals probably were correct that no nation conceived on such principles of freedom could support a system that enslaved people.

Even before the Constitution was written, Samuel Johnson ironically asked, “How is it that the loudest yelps for liberty come from the drivers of Negroes?” By the 1850s the hypocrisy could no longer be ignored because of the sheer scope of slavery. The Census of 1860 shows there were some 4 million slaves in the South—compared to 78,000 in 1727 and 697,000 in 1790.

The South might have had the Constitution on its side, but history was not. Radical Republicans with increasing frequency came to believe they had a moral duty to abolish slavery.

5. Different Nations, Different Dreams

The North and the South shared a common history, but they effectively became two nations in the early 19th century. The South was an agrarian (farming) society reliant on slave labor that exported cash crops; it had little liquid capital, less manufacturing, was debt-dependent, favored low tariffs, and opposed direct taxation. The North was an industrial economy that favored high tariffs (to protect industry), favored direct taxation, had an elaborate financial system, and was eager to expand into the West through homesteading and railroads.

The anti-slavery movement, many in the South believed, was merely a vehicle to achieve Northern dominance by adding free states. "It is so that you may have an opportunity of cheating us that you want to limit slave territory. You desire to weaken the political power of the Southern states. And why? Because you want, by an unjust system of legislation, to promote the industry of the North-East states, at the expense of the people of the South and their industry."

In conclusions, there were more factors - economic and political - that led to the Civil War.

Various Factors

<https://study.com/academy/lesson/the-american-civil-war-causes-impacts.html>

Economic Reasons

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cTCClj8tOSI>

Was the Civil War only about Slavery?

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-history/civil-war-era/slavery-and-the-civil-war/v/start-of-the-civil-war>

<https://study.com/academy/lesson/states-rights-the-civil-war.html>