

The Road to the Civil War...

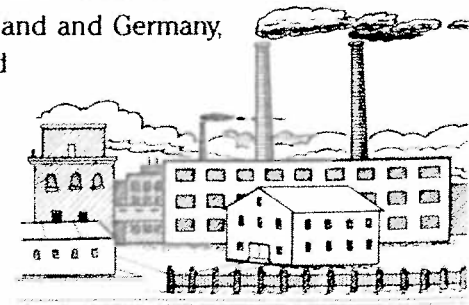
EVERYTHING CIVIL WAR BOOK

It's impossible to narrow the cause of the Civil War to a single issue or act. Most people today, if asked, would probably say slavery. But while it's true that slavery was one of the most important contributing factors to the conflict, it was not the singular cause. In truth, the war was the result of myriad cultural and political issues that perniciously set the North and the South against each other for decades before the first shots of the war were fired.

To understand why the Civil War occurred, it is important to know what the United States was like in the mid-1800s. Unlike the 50 states we have today, the United States in the years preceding the Civil War was more like two separate countries living together as one. The North and the South were more disparate than they were alike, and these differences became increasingly vivid until, like a bickering married couple on the verge of divorce, they simply couldn't bear to live together anymore.

A short 10 years before the war began, the vast majority of Americans in both the North and the South lived in rural areas rather than cities. Agriculture remained the biggest contributor to the nation's economy, and in this way, the two regions were very much alike. But between 1850 and 1860, the nation's burgeoning cities—particularly in the North—received a massive influx of immigrants. The number of farm dwellers increased by 25 percent during this period, while urban populations rose by a remarkable 75 percent. New York City, for example, reached a population of nearly 800,000 by 1860, making it the greatest city in the Western hemisphere.

Many of these new city dwellers were country folk looking for a new way of life, but a greater number were immigrants from overseas, primarily Ireland and Germany, hoping to strike it rich in the Land of Opportunity. As a result of this influx, the nation's population increased by 35 percent to nearly 31 million. But the South didn't benefit from this population spurt. By 1850, only a third of



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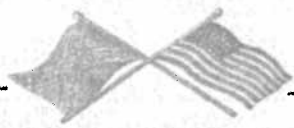
Americans lived in the South, compared to half at the beginning of the century. And of the nation's 10 largest cities, only New Orleans was located in the lower Southern region.

Indeed, the years before the war's onset saw some dramatic and fundamental changes in the nation's face. The North quickly took advantage of the amazing new products resulting from the industrial revolution, such as Cyrus McCormick's mechanical reaper, and great factories sprang up almost overnight as huge deposits of iron, coal, copper, and other important manufacturing basics were discovered and made available. It would be this industrial power, this ability to produce weapons and other goods, that would give the North a decided edge as the Civil War progressed.

The economy of the South, in comparison, remained based primarily on agriculture, with England and the Northern states being its biggest customers. (In 1852, a mere tenth of the goods manufactured in America came from Southern factories and mills.) Cotton, in particular, was a huge cash crop that brought large amounts of money to the region, though tobacco, rice, indigo, and other products were also widely grown. By 1860, the South was producing nearly three-fourths of the raw cotton used throughout the world—an estimated 1 billion pounds a year. But because the South lacked the manufacturing capability of the North, the region was forced to buy back the goods created from the products it grew, placing it at an economic disadvantage that angered many Southerners. This inequity played a large role in widening the division between the North and the South.

EXPANSION AND STATES' RIGHTS

As the United States thrived and flourished during the early nineteenth century, the demand for expansion grew increasingly loud. The Western regions cried to be settled, and a growing number of Americans felt the nation's borders were ordained by God to extend from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific, a philosophy known as Manifest Destiny. If regions owned by other countries could be purchased, so be it. If not, they were more than likely to be taken by force. The Mexican War (1846–48), for



THE MANY NAMES OF THE CIVIL WAR

*The War Against
Northern Aggression*
*The War for
Constitutional Liberty*
*The War for Southern
Independence*
*The War Between
the States*
The War for States' Rights
Mr. Lincoln's War
The Southern Rebellion
*The War for
Southern Rights*
The War of the Rebellion
*The War to Suppress
Yankee Arrogance*
The Brothers' War
The War of Secession
*The War for
Southern Nationality*
The War Against Slavery
The War of the Sixties
The Yankee Invasion
The War for Abolition
The War for the Union

CIVIL WAR FACTOID

The first combat fatality of the war was a man named Elmer Ellsworth, who was shot on May 24, 1861, while removing a Confederate flag from the roof of a hotel in Alexandria, Virginia. Ellsworth was a close friend of Abraham Lincoln.



example, was little more than a trumped-up conflict designed to wrest large tracks of Western territory from Mexico when that country refused to sell the desired lands. The United States provoked Mexico again and again until Mexico finally responded, and war was immediately declared. Though small in number, American forces were better equipped than their Mexican counterparts, and after several relatively one-sided battles, the war ended on September 14, 1847, with the American occupation of Mexico City. On February 2, 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo turned over to the United States 525,000 square miles of territory that would eventually become California, Nevada, Utah, most of Arizona and New Mexico, and parts of Colorado and Wyoming. It was the largest addition to the United States since the Louisiana Purchase in 1803.

The acquisition of this Western territory, as well as other tracts acquired earlier, created a growing rift between the North and the South in regard to the issue of slavery and, at the same time, states' rights. The South, naturally, wanted the new territories to allow slavery (years of planting land-depleting crops such as tobacco and cotton forced many Southern plantation owners to desperately seek new farmland), but the North did not. The Northwest Ordinance, enacted in 1787, stated that all territories north of the Ohio River were to be free and that those south were to be slave, and up to 1819, the two regions were equally divided, with 11 states each. However, pending growth required new action.

The first solution was the 1820 Missouri Compromise, legislation that was specifically designed to keep both sides happy. The issue came to a head in 1819, when Missouri requested admittance to the United States as a slave state—an act that went against the Northwest Ordinance, since most of the territory lay north of the Ohio River. Worse, the addition of a new slave state would disrupt the balance previously enjoyed between the North and the South. Luckily, Maine asked to be admitted as a free state at almost the same time as Missouri, thus maintaining parity.




THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

Despite its name, the Underground Railroad was not a real railroad but a loose system of safe havens (typically the homes or businesses of free slaves and white abolitionists) that helped slaves escape to freedom in the North.

Runaway slaves usually traveled the Underground Railroad by night, walking or riding from one safe-house, or "station," to another until they were able to cross the border into a free state. The most frequently traveled routes ran through Ohio, Indiana, and western Pennsylvania. Many slaves continued on until they were safely in Canada, which refused to deport escaped slaves.

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The Tenth Amendment to the United States Constitution states that "the powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people." To most citizens of the South, this amendment clearly prevented the federal government from interfering in a state's individual affairs—such as the institution of slavery. If changes were to be made, only the population of a given state could make them. The South felt the federal government was overstepping its bounds every time it attempted to abolish or otherwise deal with the issue of slavery in that region or in territories seeking statehood and balked loudly whenever challenges were made. In short, the proud Southern states didn't like being told what to do and begged simply to be left alone.

An example of how strongly the Southern states felt about Northern intrusion can be found in South Carolina's 1832 "nullification," or suspension, of a heavy tariff placed on imports four years earlier at the insistence of Northern merchants who wanted to protect their goods and profits by increasing the price of European imports. John C. Calhoun, one of the South's most vocal advocates of states' rights (and slavery), called the tariff unconstitutional and laid the groundwork to have it nullified. When a South Carolina state convention issued an ordinance to do just that, it nearly brought the nation to the brink of war. President Andrew Jackson threatened to send federal troops to the port of Charleston to enforce the tariff, and the governor of South Carolina threatened to meet them with an armed militia. At the last minute, war was averted with the Compromise Tariff of 1833 (also brokered in part by Henry Clay), which gradually reduced tariffs until 1842. As a result, the South Carolina convention voted to repeal the Ordinance of Nullification, and war was averted, at least for a while.

THE ISSUE OF SLAVERY

Without question, the issue of slavery was one of the most volatile in the smoldering enmity between the North and the South. In the decade prior to the onset of hostilities, the voice of abolition grew steadily louder in the North, forcing the South into an increasingly stoic and uncompromising defensive position. The more the North insisted that slavery was morally wrong and should be abolished, the more the South resisted. But it would take the 1860 presidential election of Abraham Lincoln—and the South's perception that his administration was going to push for the abolition of slavery nationwide—to cause 11 Southern states to eventually secede.

Though the imprisonment of another human being for forced labor is unimaginable today, the institution of slavery has a long history in this country. Slaves were used for labor in the original 13 colonies (the first shipment of Africans were brought to this country in August 1619, arriving at Jamestown, Virginia, on a Dutch ship; they were sold as indentured servants, though their plight was little different from that of outright slaves), and some of the United States' most revered figures, including George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, were slave owners. (Washington freed his slaves in his will; Jefferson, his finances shaky, had to rely on his creditors to grant his five favorite slaves their freedom.) By the time of the Revolutionary War, slavery was legal in all 13 colonies, though those in the Northern regions were beginning to realize that the institution simply wasn't profitable. The five northern colonies eventually banned slavery outright, but it continued to flourish in the South, where slaves were used to work plantations and large farms.

Between 1510 and 1870, more than nine million Africans were captured and taken from their homeland for a life of slavery around the world. Nearly half of them were bought to the United States, primarily the Southern region, where the climate encouraged agriculture on a large scale. Outlawed in all Northern states by 1846, slavery quickly became the backbone of the Southern agricultural economy. The growing global demand for cotton, in particular, gave the institution new life at a time when many people in both the



THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

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Abolitionists participating in the Underground Railroad were subject to harassment and even prison. But as the issue of slavery became increasingly important, more and more abolitionists volunteered their time and homes. Free blacks, women's antislavery societies, and various abolitionist organizations provided food, clothing, and money to runaway slaves over the course of their escape, which could take days and even weeks.



CAUSES OF THE CIVIL WAR

North and the South were starting to believe that it would disappear by itself if left alone.

Growing and harvesting cotton was hard, backbreaking labor, even with the use of Eli Whitney's cotton gin, and black slaves were commonly used to do the work that white farmers and plantation owners thought was beneath them. So important had cotton become as a cash crop that of the 2.5 million slaves engaged as agricultural workers in 1850, 75 percent worked at cotton production. So it's easy to see how the South, which had become so dependent on the labor force of slavery, was reluctant to give it up. By the time the first shots of the Civil War were fired, more than four million slaves lived in the South—approximately one-third of its population.

THE FUGITIVE SLAVE ACT *(a part of the Compromise of 1850)*

The Fugitive Slave Act required federal marshals and deputies to aid in the capture and return of escaped slaves throughout the United States. It was included in the legislation as a way of appeasing the South, but it served only to inflame the angry passions of abolitionists in the North. Antislavery and anti-Southern sentiment skyrocketed in the Northern states as a result of the Fugitive Slave Act, and moderate abolitionists joined their more militant brothers in protesting what they saw as federally subsidized kidnapping.

The Act provided for the appointment of commissioners to administer the cases of captured runaways. These commissioners were paid on a case by case basis—\$10 for each fugitive slave sent back to the South and \$5 for each accused black person who was set free. As might be expected, this bizarre bounty system quickly became rife with

corruption, and the number of convicted runaways far exceeded the number of blacks who were exonerated. In many cases, blacks were returned to the South based only on affidavits from Southern courts or the vague statements of white witnesses.

Abolitionists feared that the new law would lead to terrible abuses against Negroes living in the North, and they were right. There are reports of Southern bounty hunters arresting and sometimes kidnapping blacks who had lived in the North as free people for more than 20 years, or claiming children born in freedom to escaped slaves as “property” of their parents’ original owners. As a result, efforts on the part of abolitionists to protect blacks living in the North increased dramatically, though many blacks, believing that there were virtually no laws to protect them, fled to Canada.

THE NAT TURNER REBELLION

In the annals of slave rebellion, the story of Nat Turner is one of the most dramatic in terms of intent, violence, and bloodshed. Raised by his African-born mother on a Virginia plantation owned by Samuel Turner, Nat Turner was taught to read by his owner's son. His father escaped when Turner was young and never returned, and Turner himself managed to escape at one point, only to return four weeks later of his own volition.

Turner became extremely religious over the years and began preaching the gospel to his fellow slaves, who came to call him The Prophet. In 1825, Turner reported having visions of the Second Coming of Christ, and other visions that encouraged him to kill his enemies with their own weapons. In 1831, a solar eclipse was interpreted as a sign from God that Turner should kill his oppressors and lead his people to freedom.

In August 1831, Turner and seven other slaves killed the entire Travis family (who had acquired Turner from Samuel Turner) with hatchets and axes, fulfilling God's "command" that he slay his enemies with their own tools. Turner and his followers then began terrorizing the area, picking up recruits from other area plantations until their numbers totaled more than 60. Their goal was the county seat of

Jerusalem, Virginia, where they planned to take the armory, though they apparently hadn't thought past that.

Turner and his followers attacked area farms and plantations for two days, but the rebellion quickly became disorganized, with many members getting drunk on stolen liquor. Word of the rebellion spread rapidly through the area, and Turner's followers were met by an armed militia outside Jerusalem. Many were killed or captured in the ensuing battle. Turner and approximately 20 followers managed to escape the melee but were attacked again a short time later. Turner escaped again, this time with four followers, and hid in the woods for nearly six weeks before he was finally captured.

On November 11, 1831, Turner and 16 followers were executed by hanging for the bloody uprising, but their deaths wouldn't be the last. Slaves throughout the region were terrorized and attacked by federal troops, and more than two hundred slaves were killed as payback and as a warning to others that any attempt at insurrection would be met with harsh punishment. Another bit of fallout resulting from Nat Turner's rebellion was legislation that prevented slaves from learning to read or write. An ignorant slave, the thinking went, was a docile slave.