

# Civil war: repressible or irrepressible? essay sample

[Sociology](#), [Slavery](#)



It is often said that hindsight is 20/20 vision, but some major historical events are surrounded by controversy, one of which is the Civil War: was it repressible or irrepressible? It was irrepressible because the north and south were too culturally different for a compromise to work. The south believed slavery was an essential part of their economy and often advocated for strong state's rights. The north was steadily industrializing with the increasing textile mills and growing urban population as well as beginning to see the horrors of slavery. The limits of the fragilely strung together Union were tested in the expansion westward and eventually some southern states began to secede. Compromises such as the Compromise of 1850 and the Kansas Nebraska Act only held off the conflict, and many believe the final straw that broke the back of the Union was Lincoln's election and the dealings of Fort Sumter. Once tensions built up between the north and the south enough to where fighting broke out there was no going back to a peaceful time. Before then, however, the conflict could have possibly been kept completely political.

In 1833, Britain emancipated 800 thousand black slaves from the West Indies and effectively ended slavery in that section of the British Empire. Although not everyone was happy, the act accomplished its job without a single shot being fired. The fact that Britain, the "motherland", was able to achieve the same goal without any of its own blood being shed is a sobering lesson to America. Perhaps the democratic essence of the country isn't always superior in practice to the government of Great Britain. The only way following in the footsteps of our distant partner could have repressed the Civil War, however, was if our country had given up its sacred democratic

regime and the federal government had ruled with an iron fist over the American people. The unhappiness between the regions eventually comes down to the cultural differences between the north and south. Agriculture in the south is as industry is to the north. Neither understands the other in terms of economic importance.

Northern industries boomed; the Market Revolution, wage labor, improved transportation, social reforms, and a growing middle class all clashed with the social hierarchies of the South. One of the reasons this conflict was so unavoidable was the fact that secession was rooted in the tradition of southern honor and the heart of the planter. This class of agricultural men was instilled with a set of values that defined their society. These values include social rank, lineage, blood, and one's willingness to defend their honor: they believed these values were being threatened by the north as well as the stronger federal government, so they saw secession as the only option to preserve the southern planter lifestyle which included the "peculiar institution". After the Mexican American War, tensions grew even higher because of the new land gained in the west. Southerners believed they had the right to bring their property, slaves, with them westward, but northern free-soilers opposed the expansion outside the south. The Compromise of 1850 entered California as a free state but left all other territory from the Mexican cession open to popular sovereignty, which threw the slavery issue into the laps of the people.

This unsuccessful compromise gave the power in the Senate to the north with the entrance of California, and the south, unable to gain back political

equality in the Senate, leaned toward secession. The Compromise also set up the new Fugitive Slave Act. This was one of the most controversial acts in the Compromise and it heightened the northerner's fears of a slave powered southern conspiracy. In response to the old weakening law, the new Slave Law made any Federal marshal or other official who did not arrest an alleged runaway slave pay a fine. Suspected slaves were not allowed a jury trial or even a testimony, and officers who captured a slave were entitled to a bonus. This persuaded men to find any black, turn them in as a runaway, and return them to the brutality of the south. This part of the Compromise of 1850 caused resentment in the north as it made anti-slavery citizens and their institutions responsible for enforcing the very act they despised. The compromises and the idea of popular sovereignty continued to fail as the Kansas Nebraska Act came around in 1854.

The two new territories were to use popular sovereignty to settle the slavery issue. However, this only brought a series of violent confrontations between the anti slavery Free-Staters and the pro slavery Border Ruffians that was known as " Bleeding Kansas". The violence caused by people beginning to pour into the area in order to vote slavery in their way continued to grow worse as anti slavery northern radicals such as John Brown moved into Kansas. John Brown's slaughter at Pottawatomie and raid on Harpers Ferry embodied what every northern abolitionist and free-soiler wanted to do at the time. A pre Civil War " other war" had broken out in Kansas and nothing could have been done to stop the inevitable bloodshed that was to come. Every compromise made was just a small step in holding off the war as the north continued to grow stronger over the south. Lincoln's election in 1860 is

often viewed as the beginning of events that ultimately erupted into the Civil War.

By the time the election came around, the nation was on the brink of disunion, and secession began immediately after the results of the election were announced: southerners believed that Lincoln becoming president was unconstitutional because he only received the plurality of votes but not the overall majority. As secession continued, the Union held few forts in the territory claimed by the Confederate States of America, and the most important of these forts was Fort Sumter. Lincoln had received a letter stating that provisions would run out in this fort within six weeks, and either action or abandonment would have to be pursued. He then proceeded to inform South Carolina that provisions were being sent to Fort Sumter but not reinforcements. The people of Carolina saw anything being sent as reinforcing the fort and the demand of surrender and attack on the fort was initiated. However, the relief expedition arrived too late and the fort was forced to surrender. At this point in time the war had already begun.

Many believe Lincoln had forced the hand of the south to fire first therefore initiating the war himself. Another reason the Civil War was deemed irrepressible is the political aspect in the south. As the federal government grew stronger, many southerners believed their rights as a state were being undermined. Many states rights advocates continued to feel that the constitution ignored the rights of the states to act independently, especially in the aspect of slavery. States believed they had the right of nullification

and when they were denied this right they no longer felt respected and moved to secession as a solution.

A war was inevitable between the north and south ultimately because the southern values of pride and social hierarchy clashed violently with the northern goals of social reform and the growing middle class. New land in the west tightened the tensions between north and south as people living in nonslave societies began to see the horrors of slavery and denied the right of its expansion. Compromises only showcased that the slavery issue would never be settled without bloodshed, and a Civil War was necessary to reach the ultimate goal of preserving a united states.