

# Free research paper on the american civil war

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The American Civil War, fought between 1861 and 1865, was a fervent attempt by the South to secede from the United States of America owing to political and ideological disputes, arising primarily from the latter's attachment to slavery. By and large, the United States of America and the feuding South were not entirely different with respect to other core social, political, economic and religious principles. According to Perman and Taylor (29), the only visible and relevant different between the two was the issue of slavery. This means that they both were essentially adherents of the same socio-economic and political principles of federalism and capitalism, as well as having the same religious beliefs etched on Protestant Christianity. There is a general consensus among historians (Perman and Taylor 30) on the role of slavery in escalating the feud between the North and the South to a full-blown civil war. Questions emerge as to why these largely ideological disputes and differences of opinions among the two regions could not be effectively resolved without having to resort to war. Several alternative explanations attempt to demystify this issue by showcasing the place that slavery occupied within the social, political, and economic framework of at the South.

## **Slavery in the South**

Foremost, the ruling class had a strong self-image of their high social status, which inarguably included the wealth of slaves they owned. Frederick Law Olmsted, a prolific journalist from the North during the civil war, criticized the mentality of the Southerners as largely supremacist. He stated that the Southerners were essentially attached to their hordes of slaves as they were signs of social and economic superiority (Perman and Taylor 31). He argued

that the Southerners wanted to hold on to their slaves as tokens of ostentation and luxury. This indeed highlights the radical views attributed to Southerners regarding slavery which would undoubtedly make it impossible to reconcile their differences with the North peacefully.

Slavery, as it existed in the South, also led to varied disagreements with the North with respect to the humanity of those perceived to be the lesser people: the black people. One valid argument against this skewed notion is that the white Caucasians are only brought up in an environment that essentially looks down upon the black person. This means that the Caucasians got a sense of their supremacy from their upbringing, which was markedly different than that of their black counterparts. As they were growing, the white people would find themselves in situations where they were relatively more free and affluent than the black. This early reality then must have impressed upon their minds the ideals of being the superior people. The Northerners, on the other hand, saw this ideology as entirely vacuous.

## **Opposition to Slavery and Retaliation**

Based on the above sentiments attributed to the Southerners regarding slavery, and the subsequent disapproval from the North, a conflict of ideology was imminent. The North then began lodging direct attacks on what they termed as the backward ideologies of the Southerners; they also begun receiving some support from the unlikely quarters of Southerners who also disagreed with slavery. For instance, a controversial abolitionist Southerner by the name of Hinton Rowan Helper poured vitriol on his fellow Southerners by alleging that slavery in their region had in fact made them poorer not

richer.

While all these negative statements were being hurled at the slaveholding Southerners, both by the liberal Northerners and some more sympathetic Southerners, they also began to retaliate thus escalating the confrontation further. For instance, George Fitzhugh started to highlight the hitherto unappreciated calm and peaceful side of the South. He states that the slaveholding South is a utopia of peace and harmony where there are no gangs, mobs, armed resistance, perhaps as an indirect indictment of the North. Yet other Southerners like Minister N. L. Rice turned the abolitionist arguments around on them by purporting that the inhumanity of slavery as depicted by Northerners was largely instigated by the same abolitionists (Perman and Taylor 39).

## **Domestic Slavery and Abolitionism**

As the aforementioned ideological conflict raged, other problems also began to plague slavery in the South. The first of these was domestic slavery. It was not clear that domestic slavery was a potential time bomb for the slaveholding South until the reconstitution of a formidable abolitionist movement aimed at ending the practice (Perman and Taylor 51). In the beginning, domestic slavery in the entire South, both Lower and Upper regions of the South, prided slavery as their economic trophy; the trade had grown to such an extent that prices for slaves had skyrocketed making slaveholders greatly wealthy. As such, the trade and practice grew popular among residents seeking to make a dependable investment in the lucrative asset.

Abolitionists began their systematic attack on domestic slavery by imposing

commercial and political bottlenecks so as to force the proponents of the trade to terminate it. For instance, the expansion of the slave trade in the South had led to the opening up of interstate markets serving the entire region. Abolitionists then began to call for a politically-inspired prohibition of the sale and transportation of slaves by the federal government (Perman and Taylor 59). As expected, the Southerners who had the most to lose with such unilateral trade barriers valiantly opposed them. They argued that the federal government did not have any jurisdiction to impose legally binding controls on some states of the union and not others. By and large, this dispute was the last straw that eventually saw the South form the Confederacy.

Through the newly constituted Confederacy, the South wanted to avoid the clever political and economic tactics employed by their rivals in the North as they endeavored to abolish the slave trade. The Confederacy was therefore quite useful at lobbying for the rights of the Southern slaveholders in the face of contradictory arguments from political and society leaders. For instance, the Confederacy was able to prevent the federal government from interfering with interstate trade selectively (Perman and Taylor 60).

The election of Abraham Lincoln was the start of a new chapter in the South's quest to secede from the United States. The new president and his administration approached the sensitive situation by first following closely the wishes of the Confederacy with regard to the latter's autonomy in their socio-economic affairs. In essence, the Confederacy was able to retain control over the regulation of the slave trade and thus prevented its premature abolition. This enabled the South to retain their booming

commercial activities that revolved around the slave trade. The most obvious beneficiaries of this were inarguably the cotton farmers who were able to establish what later came to be known as the Cotton Kingdom.

### **Work Cited**

Perman, Michael and Taylor, Amy Murrell. Major Problems in the Civil War and Reconstruction: Documents and Essays. Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2010. Print.