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Civil War, American, a military conflict between the United States of America (the Union) and the Confederate States of America (the Confederacy) from 1861 to 1865. The American Civil War is sometimes called the War Between the States, the War of Rebellion, or the War for Southern Independence. It began on April 12, 1861, when Confederate General P. G. T. Beauregard opened fire on Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina, and lasted until May 26, 1865, when the last Confederate army surrendered. The war took more than 600, 000 lives, destroyed property valued at \$5 billion, brought freedom to 4 million black slaves, and opened wounds that have not yet completely healed more than 125 years later.

## **Causes of the Civil War**

The chief and immediate cause of the war was slavery. Southern states, including the 11 states that formed the Confederacy, depended on slavery to support their economy. Southerners used slave labor to produce crops, especially cotton. Although slavery was illegal in the Northern states, only a small proportion of Northerners actively opposed it. The main debate between the North and the South on the eve of the war was whether slavery should be permitted in the Western territories recently acquired during the Mexican War (1846-1848), including New Mexico, part of California, and Utah. Opponents of slavery were concerned about its expansion, in part because they did not want to compete against slave labor.

## **Economic and Social Factors**

During the first half of the 19th century, economic differences between the regions also increased. By 1860 cotton was the chief crop of the South, and it represented 57 percent of all U. S. exports. The profitability of cotton, known as King Cotton, completed the South's dependence on the plantation system and its essential component, slavery.

The North was by then firmly established as an industrial society. Labor was needed, but not slave labor. Immigration was encouraged. Immigrants from Europe worked in factories, built the railroads of the North, and settled the West. Very few settled in the South.

The South, resisting industrialization, manufactured little. Almost all manufactured goods had to be imported. Southerners therefore opposed high tariffs, or taxes that were placed on imported goods and increased the price of manufactured articles. The manufacturing economy of the North, on the other hand, demanded high tariffs to protect its own products from cheap foreign competition.

Before the Civil War, the federal government's chief source of revenue was the tariff. There were few other sources of revenue, for example, neither personal nor corporate income taxes existed. The tariff paid for most improvements made by the federal government, such as roads, turnpikes, and canals. To keep tariffs low, the South preferred to do without these improvements.

The expanding Northwest Territory, which was made up of the present-day states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and part of Minnesota, was far from the markets for its grain and cattle. It needed such internal

improvements for survival, and so supported the Northeast's demands for high tariffs. In return, the Northeast supported most federally financed improvements in the Northwest Territory.

As a result, although both the South and the West were agricultural, the West allied itself with the Northern, rather than the Southern, point of view.

Economic needs sharpened sectional differences, adding to the interregional hostility.