

Example of essay on civil war turning points

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Election of Abraham Lincoln

In my opinion, the most important factor that led to the Civil War was the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860. At this point, there was already incredible tension existing between the North and the South surrounding their different economies and the abolitionist movement; Lincoln's election seemed to be the final nail in the coffin before secession was to occur (Chadwick, 2010). Lincoln was already known to be vehemently against slavery, and many southerners feared he would simply work toward its extinction. Though the government tried to compromise with initiatives like the Corwin Amendment, it did nothing to stop states from seceding. His election was seen to be a further strengthening of the North's power, both politically and economically, in the Union, and as a result seven states already seceded before he took office (Chadwick, 2010). While many of the other factors contributed to this eventual split, it was Lincoln's status as Commander in Chief that heralded the Civil War to begin with.

Fugitive Slave Act

The next important move was the Fugitive Slave Act, which I feel was an important step in the South seceding - it was here that they most clearly noticed the North's opposition to slavery, and in their opinion the suppression of states' rights. Passed by Congress in 1850, it dictated that all runaway slaves had to be returned to their masters (Stampf, 1990). It was a uniquely Draconian law that sought to light Northern fears of the South's rise to power through slave labor, and the further suppression of slave rights. As a result, they opposed it fiercely, which the South took as suppression of

their own rights to act as independent states (Stamp, p. 84). The debate over this legislation was fierce, and highlighted the significant divides in opinion regarding the importance of abolition and the sovereignty of states. By effectively making the North also accountable for enforcing slavery, it increased Northern opposition and animosity toward the South (Stamp, 1990).

Invention of the cotton gin

Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin revolutionized the Southern economy irrevocably, and created a substantial need for cotton that only slave labor, at the time, could provide. With the invention of this machine in 1793, it suddenly became very profitable to cultivate cotton, inspiring a noted increase in slave labor to keep up with the demand (Pierson, 25). Due to this easy method of making profitable product, the South soon depended nearly entirely on the cultivation of cotton through slave labor. To that end, the South became very much invested in maintaining slaves, which were the only way to keep costs reasonable while still turning a profit (Pierson, p. 25). This also cemented antiquated ideas about society and social equality in the South as a result, while the North maintained a somewhat multicultural, city-based existence. This one machine dramatically transformed the lifeblood of the South, making it dependent on slaves to survive and willing to do anything to keep that economy alive (Pierson, p. 25).

Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854

With this act in 1854, the territories of Kansas and Nebraska were created; furthermore, popular sovereignty was used to figure out which territories

would allow slavery (Morrison, 1997). However, the fight over whether these states would become slave states became fierce within the Union, creating its own microcosm for the Civil War that was to come. Anti-slavery elements opposed the decision of popular sovereignty determining their slave status, since the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which this Act overrode, had made those territories closed to slavery (Morrison, 1997). Also, since the political power of the South (due to its money made in the cotton industry) was so great, the states quickly became slave states. The rage over this decision fuelled further abolitionist sentiment in the North, which set off further tensions in the South (Morrison, 1997). This opposition created the new Republican party, which sought to curb slavery's expansion and was the party responsible for Lincoln's election.

Uncle Tom's Cabin

This book by Harriet Beecher Stowe, published in 1852, was a cultural watershed in exposing the evils of slavery, inflaming both Northern and Southern passions to a great extent, and challenging ideas of American nationalism. When the book, which details the trials and tribulations of a slave named Uncle Tom, was released, it met with substantial popularity in the North. Extolling the evils of slavery, abolitionists loved the hard-hitting look at the industry and how it affects people; Southerners hated the book and thought it an affront to their Southern nationalism (Hedrick, 1994). It was at this point that the two sides of the nation became fiercely divided culturally; it was clear that the Southern idea of the Union fiercely contrasted with the North's, and that there would be little to no way to reconcile the two sides. The book itself was perceived as an affront to the honor of the South,

and it was dubbed as a smear piece that noted the North's complete disrespect for the South (Hedrick, 1994).

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