

# Causes of the american civil war

[War](#), [Civil War](#)



A common assumption to explain the cause of the American Civil War was that the North was no longer willing to tolerate slavery as being part of the fabric of US society. Also, that the political power brokers in Washington were planning to abolish slavery throughout the Union. Therefore for many people slavery is the key issue to explain the causes of the American Civil War. However, it is not as simple as this and slavery, while a major issue, was not the only issue that pushed America into the Great American Tragedy.

By April 1861, slavery had become hopelessly entangled and complex with state rights, the power of the federal government over the states and the South's way of life – all of which made a major contribution to the causes of the American Civil War. By 1860, America could not be seen as being a standardized society. Clearly defined areas could be identified that had different outlooks and different values. This was later to be seen in the North versus South divide that created the two sides in the war. The South was an agricultural region where cotton and tobacco were the main backbone to the region's economic strength.

The area relied on exports to markets in Western Europe and the class structure that could be found in the UK, for example, was mimicked in the southern states. In the South, the local plantation owner was a 'king' within his own area and locals would be respectful toward such men. The whole structure was represented as a strictly Christian society that had men at the top while those underneath were expected and required to accept their social status. Social advancement was possible, but consistently it was done

within the senior families of a state, who were the economic, political and legal brokers of their state.

Within this structure was the wealth that these families had built up. It cannot be denied that a huge part of this wealth came from the fact that the plantation owners oriented the work on their plantations around slave labor. As repugnant as it may be to those in the 21st Century, slavery was simply seen as part of the southern way of life. Without slavery, the economic influence of these leading families would have been seriously dented and those they employed and paid – local people who would have recognized how important the local plantation owner was to their own well-being – simply accepted this as how it is.

When the dark clouds of war gathered in 1860-61, many in the South saw their way of life being threatened. Part of that was slavery but it was not the only part. The North was almost in complete contrast to the South. In the lead up to April 1861, the North was industrializing at a very fast rate. Entrepreneurs were accepted and, in fact, were seen as being vital to furthering industrial development of America. You did not have to stay in your social place and social mobility was common. It was always possible but most of America's best entrepreneurs based themselves in the North where the backbone of social class was weaker.

The North was also a sophisticated mixture of nationalities and religions – far more so than the South. There can be little doubt that there were important groups in the North that were anti-slavery and wanted its abolition throughout the Union. However, there were also groups that were undecided and those who knew that the North's economic development was based not

<https://assignbuster.com/causes-of-the-american-civil-war/>

only on entrepreneurial skills, but also on the input of poorly paid workers who were not slaves but lived lives not totally removed from those in the South.

While they had their freedom and were paid, their lifestyle was at best very harsh. While the two sides that made up the American Civil War were apart in many areas, it became worse when the view in the South was that the North would try to force its values on the South. In 1832, South Carolina passed an act that declared that Federal tariff legislation of 1828 and 1832 could not be enforced onto states and that after February 1, 1833 the tariffs would not be recognized in the state. This brought South Carolina into direct conflict with the Federal government in Washington, DC.

Congress pushed through the Force Bill that made it possible for the President to use military force to bring any state into line with regards to realize Federal law. On this occasion, the threat of military force worked. People in South Carolina vowed, however, it would be the last time. It was now that slavery became mixed up with state rights - just how much power a state had compared to federal authority. State rights became combined with slavery. The key issue was whether slavery would be allowed in the newly created states that were joining the Union.

This disagreement further developed with the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 whereby Kansas, among others, was purchased by the federal government. Kansas was officially opened to settlement in 1854 and there was a rush to settle in the state between those who supported slavery and those who opposed it. The state became a place of violence between the two groups and Kansas got the nickname ' Bleeding Kansas' in acknowledgment of what was

going on there. However on January 29, 1861, Kansas was admitted to the Union as a slave-free state.

Many in the traditional slave states saw this as the first step towards abolishing slavery throughout the Union and thus the destruction of the southern way of life. When South Carolina seceded from the Union on December 20, 1860, the first state to do so, it was a sign that the state no longer felt part of the United States of America and that America as a nation was being conquered by a federal government comfortable in the views of the North. Whether this is true or not, is not relevant as it was felt to be true by many South Carolinians. The secession of South Carolina pushed other southern states into doing the same.

With such a background of distrust between most southern states and the government in Washington, it only needed one incident to set off a civil war and that occurred at Fort Sumter in April 1861. The Civil War was one of the most tragic wars in American history. More Americans died than in all other wars combined. Brother fought against brother and the nation was torn apart. In the end, we must look at the important consequences of the conflict. The nation was reunited and the southern states were not allowed to secede. The South was placed under military rule and divided into military districts.

Southern states then had to apply for readmission to the Union. The Federal government proved itself supreme over the states. Basically this was a war over states rights and federalism and the victor was the power of the national government. Slavery was in fact ended. While slavery was not officially outlawed until the passage of the 13th Amendment, the slaves were

<https://assignbuster.com/causes-of-the-american-civil-war/>

set free upon the end of the war. Reconstruction, the plan to rebuild America after the war, began. Industrialism began as a result of the increase in wartime production and the development of new technologies.