

Was the civil war inevitable



Was the Civil War an inevitable conflict? The Civil War was an inevitable conflict that was bound to explode due to the differences between the North and South societies, slavery, and politics. After Independence, the complexity of the American society grew. The three components that contributed to this complexity was the shift away from small-scale, largely subsistence farming by substantial numbers of northerners; the migration of thousands of white Americans and black slaves, and the renewal of slavery as a viable economic system. Together, these triggered a sharpening conflict between economic interests, social classes and regions that were frequently manifested in party politics.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, economic differences between the regions of the North and South increased. By 1830, cotton was the chief crop of the South, and it represented just over half of all U. S. exports. It continued to expand and by 1836, it represented nearly two thirds of all American exports (Enduring Visions, 244). The profitability of 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 (Class Notes). Immigration was vital. Five million people migrated from Europe to the United States between 1790 and 1860, most of them to pursue economic opportunity. The immigrants worked in factories and built railroads of the north (Enduring Visions, 250-253). 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 (Enduring Vision, 251). These economical and social issues increased hostility between the regions of the North and South.

As Northern and Southern patterns of living diverged, their political ideas also developed marked differences. The North needed a central government to build an infrastructure of roads and railways, protect its complex trading and financial interests, and control the national currency. They favored a loose interpretation of the United States Constitution and they wanted to grant the federal government increased powers. The South, on the other hand, wanted to reserve all undefined powers to the individual states. They were not in favor of the internal improvements such as more roads, railroads, and canals sponsored by the government as the North was. The South depended much less on the federal government than did other regions, and Southerners therefore felt no need to strengthen it (Notes). In addition, Southern patriots feared that a strong central government might interfere with slavery. These quandaries set the pace for the inevitable conflict that was bound to come.

Questions relating to territorial expansion intensified sectional conflict between 1846 and 1848. When the war ended in 1848, the United States contained an equal number of free and slave states, but the land that was acquired by the war threatened to upset this balance. Any solution to the question of slavery ensured a controversy. The right of the federal government to prohibit slavery in the Western territories was a big upset to the South. Such legislation would severely limit the number of slave states in

the Union. At the same time, the number of free states would keep multiplying. Many Southerners feared that a government increasingly dominated by free states might eventually endanger existing slaveholdings. Thus, the South strongly opposed all efforts to block the expansion of slavery. If the federal government did succeed in exercising this power many Southern political leaders threatened secession as a means of protecting states' rights. The idea of extending the Missouri Compromise line of 36 30 angered many free-soilers because it would allow slavery in New Mexico and southern California. The third solution, which was popular sovereignty, which allowed each territory to decide the question for itself pleased neither group. This situation escalated and plunged the nation into crisis. The American Civil War was inevitable due to the divergent social, economic, and political points of view, dating from the colonial times, which gradually drove the two sections farther and farther apart. Because of each regions intense attempt to impose its views on one another, it was often hard to come to a compromise. Compromises were what kept the Union together as a whole, and when they were unable to compromise, the situation became explosive.

Bibliography: