

# An idea of war in the killer angels novel

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Wars have been fought for many different reasons through the years, and that holds true for the American Civil War (1861-1865). In Michael Shaaras Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *The Killer Angels*, the reasons for fighting the war are brought about through the officers and soldiers at a famous battle site of the Civil War, Gettysburg. Gettysburg was one of the most documented battles of the whole war. It took place over a span of three days and can be viewed as a turning point from Confederate prominence to Confederate demise. As in any conflict, there are two sides to the story. The Union and the Confederacy each had their own views as to why they were fighting the war. Victors write the history so too often only the Union side is presented. In the book we are presented with some of both viewpoints.

The propaganda pitch the Union gave was they were fighting to free the slaves. This was not true! It was said Southerners were fighting to preserve slavery. This is also a false statement. Roughly less than 6% of all Southerners owned slaves. In fact, there were a substantial amount of generals in the Union army that owned slaves themselves. In addition the constitution protected slavery. If the true issue was to maintain slavery the South would not have seceded. The most obvious myth is that the good North marched into the "cruel and evil" South for the sole purpose of freeing the slaves. There are many quotes from Northern leaders that show clearly that the main purpose of the North was not the eradication of slavery, but subjugation of the southern people. Slavery was used to rally the Northern population behind Abraham Lincoln's war. It was an emotional issue, sure some Yankees joined and fought to set men free, but most were there to preserve the union. Preserving the Union meant stepping on the Southern

people and keeping them as a tax base to feed Northern industrialists. An interesting conflict of Northern morals is discovered. The North is portrayed as wanting to set black men free, but they practiced economic slavery on the Southern states. The Civil War was really more politically complex with regards to Abraham Lincoln and his Republican party's actions.

The South fought this war as the Second American Revolution. The cause of the South was equated to that of their forefathers who had fought and won their freedom from Great Britain less than 100 years earlier. If it was a war to set men free, it was the Southern farm boy that wanted his freedoms guaranteed under the original constitution. The Northern states' politicians were aggressively attempting to implement a monarchical form of government, which was precisely what the early colonists had fought against in the American Revolution. The Northern states were taking advantage of their superior numbers in the federal government and were using their advantage to implement unfair tariffs against the South. Enormous amounts of money were taken from the South and funneled into the Northern states. Most of the revenue taken from the Southern states was used to run government programs. This brought about the argument of States Rights and a weaker central government by the South.

The main cause of the war was Lincoln's rejection of the right to peaceable secession of the eleven sovereign states and subsequently the denial of self-government to the nearly 8 million people living in those states. The Federal government needed the income from the South so they were forced into fighting to save the tax coming from the South. Without consulting Congress,

Lincoln sent great armies of destruction to the South. The Southern people had no choice but to defend themselves from this invasion.

The South fought, simply, for their independence, as the United States federal government of the Northern states refused to allow the South to leave peacefully. The men of the South did not fight to win their freedom, they fought to keep it! To quote from the Declaration of Independence:

... that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

For all intents and purposes, if the North had not invaded the South, there would have been no war. The name “civil war” implies that two, or more, groups of people within a country take up arms against each other in a struggle for the government. This was not what took place in the South between 1861 and 1865. It was an invasion of one nation into another independent, sovereign nation. The struggle is properly called “The War For Southern Independence,” as that is the most correct description of the reasoning behind the war. The Southern soldier fought to protect his home, State, and Nation from the invading United States army. He fought in honor of his forefathers who had fought against British tyranny.

The soldiers of the Confederacy were not traitors. Some historians have branded any man who fought for their home state in 1861-1865 as a traitor

including General Robert E. Lee. This is a Yankee political point of view which is quite narrow. Many of the leaders, both Union and Confederate were educated at West Point. Even at West Point they were taught about sovereign states rights. Men who resigned their union commission to join the Confederacy, did so because they believe and were taught that home (state) duty, honor, loyalty came before federal issues. It is slander to call them traitors based on the education received by the Federal government of that time.

Many of the best trained and highly skilled officers decided to side with the Confederacy. Probably, the most famous was General Robert E. Lee. Lee was a well respected grandfather-figure. He seemed nearly perfect in all aspects of life. He had great morals, was extremely religious, and his men showed proper respect. Lee understood the principal of States Rights. In a conversation with Confederate General James Longstreet, Lee knew old Virginia held a large spot in his hart. There was a higher duty to Virginia. That was the first duty. There was never any doubt about that (191). The respect for Lee shined through George Pickett and his division at Gettysburg. The idea that Lee was fighting for Virginia inspired Picketts men to charge at Cemetary Ridge, while the Union troops sat behind walls. Before the heroic run at Cemetary Ridge, Pickett and his men expressed Lees idea, and let no man forget today that he is from old Virginia.

If you investigate through diaries and other first hand accounts the reasons that these men fought for their homes, farms county and state, you may find many different answers to the reason why they fought. I can not find the

answer of overthrowing the United States Federal Government. The citizen soldiers who fought for the Confederacy personified the best qualities of America. The preservation of liberty and freedom was the greatest motivating factor in the Souths decision to fight for independence. They resigned their bond to a government that they found increasingly abusing the constitution and the rights of the states for self determination. The tenacity with which Confederate soldiers fought underscored their belief in the rights guaranteed by the constitution. These attributes are the underpinning of our democratic society and represent the foundation on which this nation was originally built. They did not seek to destroy the federal government, they chose to withdraw and form their own government that was to be truer to the original constitution.

Basically Northerners fought to preserve the Union and Southerners fought for their rights as a separate nation. Those reasons were felt by the majority of Union and Confederate soldiers. The Union was victorious in the American Civil War, but feelings of the Federal Government not fulfilling its duties under the Constitution are still alive today. Wars will always be fought for different causes and that will always hold true with the wars of the future.