

The invention of the cotton gin in 1793 history essay



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The civil war was inevitable, only however, after one key event; the cotton gin made the civil war inevitable. The invention of the cotton gin in 1793 was the key element which enabled the south to have sufficient vested interest in their traditional lifestyle in order to feel the need to defend it at all costs even from their Northern countrymen. The core argument of this essay centers around the evidence which clearly defines their being in existence two 'nations' within America constantly in opposition to each other.

Therefore the growth of sectionalism and the events which led up to the conflict made war an inevitable outcome of the hostilities which had arisen from the to ideologically different factions which grew in the United States. Firstly this essay will identify the economic factors which made the civil war an inevitable event with reference to the singular factor that could have averted the need for the conflict. Second it will identify the political measures which were dictated by the sectional economic interests. The third section of this essay will introduce the ideological incompatibility between north and south which added fuel to the fire of sectionalism. The fourth section will discuss the underlining social conflict which made inevitable not only the civil war but also a "second American revolution". The final section will deal with the counter arguments which advocate the alleged 'repressible' nature of the War Between the States.

Economic Victory was thought to have been in the hands of the modern north that saw with the end of the slave trade and the unproductive problems of slavery, the decline of the southern economy. If the economy had continued to decline then the slave labour would have surely died out and the north would have a bloodless victory on their hands. However with

the invention of Eli Whitney's cotton gin in {date} slavery was born again and with ruthless further the south clung on to their tradition, for it had become profitable again. So profitable in fact that the south would defend it militarily if needed.

James M. McPherson (1988) terms the South's move to leave the union as a "counterrevolution" which they undertook in order to preserve their economic system, which they feared would be destroyed by a "revolution" signalled by the election of Lincoln. It is the opinion of this essay that the southern secession was an inevitable step for the south to take in response to what they saw as the ultimate threat to their way of life. However due to the North's core belief that the union was eternal it necessitated the very revolution which the south sought to avoid in the shape of the civil war. Lincoln had made it clear in his debates with Douglas that although he did not like slavery he would not tamper with it, however he had used the antislavery issue to his advantage in gaining support from abolitionists.

"I say that we must not interfere with the institution of slavery in the states where it exists, because the constitution forbids it, and the general welfare does not require us to do so" Abram Lincoln, giving a Speech at Cincinnati, Ohio

September 17, 1859

In 1854 Douglas' economic proposal of a trans-continental rail road set the stage for a conflict which signalled the end of political compromise. The Kansas Nebraska act which was a direct result of the economic conflict overturned the Missouri compromise. The following 'bleeding Kansas' <https://assignbuster.com/the-invention-of-the-cotton-gin-in-1793-history-essay/>

incident heightened tensions on both sides and provides further evidence that the inherent economic conflicts could not be contained within the bounds of politics. The sections had all ready resorted to arms to solve their differences it was merely a matter of time before their representatives made the violence official under the banner of the War Between the States. The different economic structures of north and south were a fundamental division which made the conflict inevitable. The south was staunchly anti tariff and therefore was incompatible with the north that needed tariffs to protect their new industries. Failure to compromise over the issue of protectionism was a primary factor in the growth of sectionalism which necessitated war.

The underlying conflicts between North and South were finally fully exposed as a result of failure of compromise in the political arena. The failure of American leadership in 1846-1861 was epitomised by key events such as; Douglas's Kansas Nebraska act of 1854 and the dread Scott case pronouncement of 1857. Both of these events overturned the previous Missouri compromise and thus once again brought the two opposing nations head to head. The Wilmot proviso bill which proposed to eliminate slavery in the territories was a clear signal to the South that the North was plotting against her way of life. Thus the southern mind set became increasingly locked in a persecution complex which they justified by evidence of a 'Northern conspiracy' to destroy their economic institution, the Wilmot proviso was one such piece of evidence even though it was not passed. The election of Lincoln was the final straw with which the south believed the northern conspirators would gain the upper hand and bring about the destruction of the Southern institutions. " Most irresponsible, wanton, and

disastrous of all was the decision of those southern leaders who in 1858-1860 turned to the provocative demand for Congressional protection of slavery in all the territories of the Republic." Allan Nevins. Nevins in the previous quote demonstrates the reckless extent to which compromise was completely ignored politically by the two opposing sections. Had compromise been utilised more frequently the war may have been postponed but not all together avoided. Moreover the South's right to bring their slave property into new territories was guaranteed by the constitution in amendment 5. Hence the United States constitution its self can be held responsible for disuniting the states it sought to bind together. The opposing Nations of north and south had an uneasy balance of power in the House of Representatives due originally too Andrew Jackson's Indian removal policy. Tensions from then until the onset of war, arose over whether the new territories would become free or slave. However the uneasy balance had been preserved by compromise, thus as Charles and marry Beard put it " the balance of power might have been maintained indefinitely by repeating the compensatory tactics of 1787, 1820, and 1850; keeping in this manner the inherent antagonisms within the bounds of diplomacy." However as these historians take into consideration the " inherent antagonisms" with in the system and therefore one side would inevitably have to declare its side victorious one way or another.

Ideological differences were a key factor in making the civil war an inevitable event. However it was not the ideological split over the belief of slavery being right or wrong which precipitated an armed conflict this is a wholly inaccurate interpretation. It is true to say that abolitionist agitation provoked

a negative southern reaction to their Northern counterpart. However abolitionists were seen as extremists not the majority opinion of the North. Within this respect the north differed very little from the south in their attitude towards white supremacy. It was however divergent economic ideology which perpetuated the fundamental difference between north and south which in turn necessitated the resort to arms. However ideological extremists on both sides widened the gulf between the North and South. Abolitionists in the north provoked the South into a defensive position the result was a redefinition of slavery in the southern ideology it was transformed from "a necessary evil" into "an ultimate good" this transformation created the magnolia myth which laid out a Southern ideology that was incompatible and defined against their Northern neighbours. Thus the two geographical localities developed distinctly different ideological values which were opposed to each other. The actions of abolitionist John Brown did the most to provoke southern paranoia about Northern intentions toward the Southern way of life. The Harpers Ferry incident had the effect of reinforcing the siege mentality of the south. As North and South moved further apart ideologically they inevitably came closer to war. Northern extremists such as John Brown were evidence to the South that the North wished their destruction and thus they felt the need to defend themselves from attack.

Charles and Mary Beard in 1927 saw the American civil war in terms of class conflict from their findings they renamed the war the "second American revolution" For the Beards "the resort to arms in 1861 precipitated by secession was merely a façade for a more deeply rooted conflict..." The civil

war “ was a social war, ending in the unquestioned establishment of a new power in the government, making vast changes in the arrangement of classes, in the accumulation and distribution of wealth,” This interpretation holds a great deal of accuracy when put in to context with the opposing forces in the civil war on one side was democracy and on the other landed aristocracy with this in mind it is easy to see to an extent the correlation between European revolutions such as the French revolution and much later the Russian revolution. However not all countries had a revolution in nineteenth century Europe and thus it by no means makes an “ American social revolution” inevitable. However the unique political landscape of America did however make unavoidable a confrontation between old aristocratic values and new liberal values. The way the country had been divided over the issue of slavery allowed the conservative ‘ Slaveocracy’ to distinctly separate its self from the modernising north and yet the two still had the constant opportunity for conflict because they were bound together by one government.

The case for the war being an avoidable conflict stresses that Americans had lived with the issues which eventually led to the outbreak of war, for generations. Thus historians who adhere to this theory claim that there was a strong possibility for a compromise to be found, using as a basis for the argument the evidence of the pre-war compromises which alleviated sectional tensions. Revisionist historians account for the breakout of the Civil War by asserting that the vital instrument of compromise was neglected by a “ blundering generation” in the events leading up to the Civil War. The theory of a “ blundering generation” holds validity to an extent. However this

very theory in itself destroys the idea that the war was a “repressible” conflict, for, it only highlights the extent to which there was serious division in the country which could not be resolved irrespective of how many compromises either side conceded. The core issues such as that of free labour contradicting slave labour still remained persisting in the affirmation of two competing nations within America, one of which had to obliterate the ideals of the other in order to finally put to rest the dividing issues. Only then could the States be truly united. “Revisionist historians examined the causes of the Civil War at a time when war as a means of solving problems was not considered to be a sound solution.” Therefore it could be argued that revisionist historians writing in the 1930s and 1940s lacked a degree of historical empathy, for, they saw war as a great evil, whereas in the 19th century war was seen as a natural occurrence and a justifiable means of solving problems. Thus in the eyes of nineteenth century politicians, armed conflict, would have been seen as an inevitable step in order to advance their political ideology once an opportunity arose. In the case of the American civil war, Southern secession was the opportunity seized upon by the North. The lack of a strong anti-violence movement in the events leading up to the civil war strongly suggests the acceptable nature of war in order to resolve issues and illustrates the extent to which sectionalism had grown and divided the country into two “separate nations”. Hence the very nature of nineteenth century politics made the civil war an inevitable event. Avery Craven and James G. Randall were two of the most prominent revisionist historians who challenge the inevitable aspect of the Civil War. However their anti-war thesis was dismissed by Arthur M. Schlesinger who proposed one key question which they had not taken into account “: if the war could

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have been avoided, what course should American leaders have followed?" , Schlesinger provided three possible alternatives: " that the South might have abolished slavery by itself if left alone; that slavery would have died because it was economically unsound; or that the North might have offered some form of emancipated compensation" Schlesinger found all three alternatives to be completely unviable.

" A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure permanently, half-slave and half-free." Abraham Lincoln, 1858 speech to the party's state convention.

In conclusion the civil war was an inevitable occurrence; too many factors leading up to the civil war had the effect of exacerbating the fundamental differences between the North and the South. Lincoln as well as many other statesmen believed that the country could not continue to exist as two nations under one government, in some form the two incompatible ideologies had to settle their differences. However because the differences were so fundamentally important to each section, political compromise would have ultimately led only to one side's economic and social ideology being wiped out and therefore both sides would not let their institutions be damaged by the other. " The cotton gin had prevented the peaceful abolition of slavery" James Ford Rhodes. It is also true to say that the civil war was a completely avoidable conflict only, however, before the invention of the cotton gin. Eli Whitney's invention changed the stakes it revived a dieing institution and set it in place as king of the southern economy with out which the south felt it could not survive. " King Cotton" ruled the south and kept industrial innovation and capitalism separated from the south. Therefore <https://assignbuster.com/the-invention-of-the-cotton-gin-in-1793-history-essay/>

north and south did not develop along similar lines. This created an inherent instability in America. Therefore at some stage the two opposing sections would inevitably come into military conflict once all compromises were exhausted or as the event unfolded, once tensions rose to boiling point over what both sections perceived as the attempts by one side to dominate the other via political manoeuvres and agitation brought on by extremists.