

***Causes of the U.S. Civil War Master Sheet***

**What Caused the American Civil War?**

A number of circumstances, tracing back to political issues and disagreements that began soon after the American Revolution, ultimately led the United States into Civil War. Between the years 1800 and 1860, arguments between the North and South grew more intense, slavery being the central issue of the conflicts, although not the only one.

Another point of major contention between North and South involved taxes paid on goods brought into this country from foreign countries. This tax was called a **tariff**. Southerners felt these tariffs were unfair and aimed primarily toward them because they imported a wider variety of goods than most Northerners. **Taxes** were also placed on many Southern goods that were shipped to foreign countries, an expense not always applied to Northern exports of equal value.

In the years before the Civil War, political power in the Federal government, centered in Washington, D.C., was changing. Northern and mid-western states were becoming more and more influential as their populations increased. Southern states lost political power because their populations did not increase as rapidly. As one portion of the nation grew larger than another, people began to perceive the nation as divided into sections, distinguished by different economies, cultures, and even values. This was called **sectionalism**.

Just as the original thirteen colonies fought for their independence almost 100 years earlier, the Southern states felt a growing need for freedom from the central Federal authority in Washington. Southerners believed that state laws carried more weight than Federal laws, and where there was a conflict, they should abide by state regulations first. This issue was called **State's Rights** and became a hot topic in congress.

However, the main quarrel between the North and South, and the most emotional one, was over the issue of **slavery**. America was an agricultural nation and crops such as cotton were in demand around the world. Cotton grew well in the southern climate, but it was a difficult plant to gather and process. Labor in the form of slaves was used on large plantations to plant and harvest cotton as well as sugar, rice, and other cash crops. The invention of the **Cotton Gin** by **Eli Whitney** in 1794 had made cotton more profitable for Southern growers. Before this invention, it took one person all day to process two pounds of cotton by hand, a slow and inefficient method. Whitney's Cotton Gin machine could process that much within a half hour. This invention revolutionized the cotton industry and Southern planters saw their profits soar as more and more of them relied on cotton as their main cash crop. Slaves were a central part of the cotton industry.

Slavery, a part of life in America since the early colonial period, had become more acceptable in the South than the North. Southern planters relied on slave labor to run larger farms or **plantations** and make them profitable. Slaves also provided labor for various household chores. The institution of slavery did not sit well with many northerners who felt that slavery was uncivilized and should be abolished. Those who held those beliefs, called **abolitionists,** thought that owning slaves for any reason was wrong. They vehemently disagreed with the South's laws and beliefs concerning slavery. Yet slavery had been a part of the Southern way of life for well over 200 years and was protected not only by state laws, but Federal law as well. The Constitution of the United States guaranteed the right to own property and protected citizens against the seizure of property. A slave was viewed as property in the South and was important to the economics of the Southern cotton industry. The people of the Southern states did not appreciate Northerners, especially the abolitionists, telling them that slave ownership was a great wrong. This created a great amount of debate, mistrust, and misunderstanding.

The first confrontation over slavery occurred in the West in 1819. Missouri applied for admission to the Union as a slave state. The admission of Missouri would upset the balance of power in the Senate where at the time there were 11 free states and 11 slave states. Senator Henry Clay proposed what became known as the **Missouri Compromise**. In 1820, he suggested that Missouri enter as a slave state and Maine as a free state to keep the balance of power. The **Compromise of 1850** also addressed balance of power, admitting California as a free state, but allowing voters in the Utah and New Mexico territories to decide if they wanted slavery.

The **Fugitive Slave Law of 1850** proved very controversial. It required that all citizens were obligated to return runaway slaves. People who helped slaves escape would

be jailed and fined. The law enraged Northerners because it made them feel as if they were being forced to perpetuate the slave system they opposed. **Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass** and many others involved with the **Underground Railroad** worked to subvert the law.

In 1852, **Harriet Beecher Stowe** wrote ***Uncle Tom’s Cabin***. This novel told of the story of Uncle Tom, an enslaved African American, and his cruel master, Simon Legree. In the novel, Stowe wrote of the evils and cruelty of slavery. It helped change the way many Northerners felt about slavery. Slavery was not only a political problem, but also a moral problem in the eyes of many Northerners.

Many Americans felt that slavery should be allowed in the new territories such as Kansas and Missouri, while others were set against it. The **Kansas-Nebraska Act** in 1854 led to **“bleeding Kansas”**, a bitter sectional war that pitted neighbor against neighbor.

In 1857, the United States Supreme Court made a landmark ruling in the **Dred Scott Decision**. Dred Scott was a slave who applied for freedom. He claimed that because his master had taken him to the free territories of Illinois and Wisconsin, he should be free. The court ruled that because Dred Scott was not considered a citizen, but property, he could not file a lawsuit. The Court also ruled that Congress had no power to decide the issue of slavery in the territories. This meant that slavery was legal in all the territories and the Missouri Compromise was unconstitutional.

Anti-slavery leaders in the North cited the controversial Supreme Court decision as evidence that Southerners wanted to extend slavery throughout the nation. Southerners approved the Dred Scott decision, believing Congress had no right to prohibit slavery in the territories. **Abraham Lincoln** reacted with disgust to the ruling and was spurred into political action, publicly speaking out against it.

In 1859, a radical abolitionist from Kansas named **John Brown** raided the Federal Armory at **Harpers Ferry, Virginia**, in the hopes of supplying weapons to an army of slaves who would revolt against their southern masters. A number of people were taken hostage and several killed, among them the mayor of Harpers Ferry. Brown was cornered with several of his followers in a fire engine house, first by Virginia militia and then by Federal troops sent to arrest him and his raiders. These troops, commanded by Union Colonel Robert E. Lee (who later became the leading Confederate general), stormed the building and captured Brown and several of his men. Brown was tried for his crimes, found guilty, and hanged in Charlestown, WV. Though **John Brown's raid** had failed, it fueled the passions of northern abolitionists, who made him a **martyr**. It was reported that bells tolled in sympathy to John Brown in Northern cities on the day he was executed.

This incident inflamed passions in the South, where Southern leaders saw this as another reminder how little their region’s interests were represented in Federal law, which they considered sympathetic to runaways and anti-slavery organizations. The debate became very bitter. Southern politicians outwardly charged that their voices were not being heard in Congress. Some Southern states wanted to **secede**, or break away from the United States of America and govern themselves. Emotions reached a fever pitch when **Abraham Lincoln** was elected President of the United States in 1860. A member of the anti-slavery Republican Party, he vowed to keep the country united and the new western territories free from slavery. Many Southerners, who were Democrats, were afraid that Lincoln was not sympathetic to their way of life and would not treat them fairly. The growing strength of the Republican Party, viewed by many as the party friendly to abolitionists and northern businessmen, and the election of that party's candidate was the last straw.

The **Crittenden Compromise** was one of several last-ditch efforts to resolve the secession crisis of 1860-1861 by political negotiation. Authored by Kentucky Senator John Crittenden (whose two sons would become generals on opposite sides of the Civil War) it was an attempt to resolve the crisis by addressing the concerns that led the states of the Lower South to contemplate secession. It failed by one vote. Southern governors and political leaders called for state referendums to consider articles of secession. South Carolina was the first state to officially secede from the United States on December 20, 1860 followed by six other Southern states in January and February 1861. These seven states established a **constitution** and formed a new nation, which they named the **Confederate States of America**. They elected **Jefferson Davis**, a Democratic senator and champion of states rights from Mississippi, as the first president.

After South Carolina seceded, Major Robert Anderson transferred his small garrison from the coastal Fort Moultrie to Fort Sumter, located on an island in Charleston Harbor, to secure that important bastion for the Union. In 1861, the newly established Confederate government demanded Anderson's withdrawal. Despite dwindling supplies, Anderson’s reply was: “I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your communication, demanding the evacuation of this fort, and to say, in reply thereto, that it is a demand with which I regret that my sense of honor and my obligations to my Government prevent my compliance.” On **April 12, 1861** the Confederate States of America attacked **Fort Sumter**, South Carolina. The bombardment lasted 34 hours and the fort was heavily damaged. Anderson surrendered the fort and its garrison to the Confederate commanders. **The Civil War had begun.**

President Lincoln responded with a call for 75,000 volunteers from 23 states still loyal to the Union, to enlist and put down what he argued was a treacherous act of rebellion (four border slave states remained in the Union and two Union states were added during the Civil War). Four more states seceded making eleven Confederate states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. The war that President Lincoln had tried to avoid began anyway. War talk was on everyone's lips and sharp divisions took place, even among families and neighbors.

At first, no one believed the war would last very long. Some people said it would take only a few months and the fellows who volunteered to fight would come home heroes within a few weeks. No one realized how determined the South was to be independent, nor did the South realize how determined the North was to end the rebellion. Armies had to be raised in the North and the South, and every state was asked to raise **regiments of volunteers** to be sent for service in the field. Many young men chose to enlist and volunteered for military service. In the South, men readily went to war to protect their homes and save the Southern way of life. Most did not believe that the government in Washington was looking out for the South's interests and they were better off as a new nation where the states would make up their own laws. Many were happy to be called **rebels** because they thought they were fighting against a tyrant like their forefathers did against the British during the American Revolution. Northern men volunteered to put down the rebellion of southern states and bind the nation back together. Most felt that the Southerners had rebelled without good cause and had to be taught a lesson. Some also felt that slavery was an evil and the war was a way to abolish it.

Prior to the war few people realized how terrible war really was and how hard life as a soldier could be. The armies were raised and marched off to war. It was only after many battles and many lives were lost that the American people recognized the horror of war. The soldiers communicated with their families and loved ones and told them of the hardships they endured and terrible scenes they had witnessed. The fighting of the American Civil War would last four long years at a cost of 620,000 lives. In the end the Northern states prevailed, our country remained united, the Federal government was changed forever, and slavery came to an end.