

Why Did the North : South Go to War?

READING C

Second Thoughts: Why Did North and South Go to War? 343

The Constitution provides, and all the States have accepted the provision, that "the United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a republican form of government." But if a State may lawfully go out of the Union, having done so it may also discard the republican form of government; so that to prevent its going out is an indispensable *means* to the end of maintaining the guaranty mentioned. . . .

It was with the deepest regret that the Executive found the duty of employing the war power in defense of the Government forced upon him. He could but perform this duty or surrender the existence of the Government.



Second Thoughts

Why Did North and South Go to War?

Great events in history seldom admit of easy explanation. So it is with the American Civil War. While all agree that the war started at Fort Sumter, few agree on why. Theories cite Northern aggression or Southern secession, slavery and racism, abolitionist agitation and Southern paranoia, capitalism vanquishing feudalism, the inevitable tension between incompatible cultures locked into an artificial union, bumbling political leadership, the assumption of power by a regional rather than a national party, and even an excess of democratic zeal. Some find the origin of the war in the tensions resulting from the expansion of the nation's borders. Samuel Eliot Morison viewed the struggle between North and South for control of the west as key, declaring that "with no Mexican War there would have been no Civil War, at least not in 1861." Though the Civil War remains one of the most momentous events in the history of the United States, neither those who waged it nor those who have since studied it have ever reached agreement on its causes.



27.4 Civil War

Source 7 Henry Wilson, radical Republican, speech to the United States Senate, May 1, 1862

How can any man looking over this broad land today and seeing flashing from every quarter of the heavens the crimes of human slavery against this country, labor to uphold, strengthen, and support human slavery in America? It is the cause and the whole cause of this rebellion. We talk about "Jeff" Davis, Slidell, Mason, and Toombs, and their treasonable confederates; but they are not the cause of this rebellion; they are simply the hands, the tools, the heart, the brain, the soul is slavery; the motive power is slavery. Slavery is the great rebel; Davis and his compeers are but its humble tools and instruments.

Slavery for thirty years has been hostile to and aggressive upon the free institutions of America. There is not a principle embodied in our free institutions, there is not an element of our government that elevates or blesses mankind, there is not anything in our government or our institutions worth preserving, that slavery for a generation has not warred against and upon.

It smote down thirty years ago the right of petition in these halls. It destroyed in large sections of the country the constitutional freedom of the press. It suppressed freedom of speech. It corrupted presses, churches, and political

Slavery is total cause of rebellion

cause of rebellion is not men but slavery

→ doesn't match DUP institutions

what
slavery
was
done

organizations. It plunged the nation into a war for the acquisition of slave-holding territory. It enacted a fugitive-slave law, inhuman, unchristian, disgraceful to the country and to the age. It repealed the prohibition of slavery over a half a million square miles in the central regions of the continent. It seized the ballot boxes in Kansas; it usurped the government of the Territory; it enacted inhuman and unchristian laws; it made a slave constitution and attempted to force it upon a free people; it bathed the virgin sods of that magnificent Territory with the blood of civil war. It mobbed, flogged, expelled, and sometimes murdered Christian men and women in the slave-holding States for no offence against law, humanity, or religion. It turned the hearts of large masses of men against their brethren, against the institutions of their country, against the glorious old flag, and the constitution of their fathers. It has now plunged this nation into this unholy rebellion; into this gigantic civil war that rends the country, and stains our waters and reddens our fields with fraternal blood.

Sir, I never see a loyal soldier upon a cot of sickness, sorrow, or death, without feeling that slavery has laid him there. I never gaze upon the wounds of a loyal soldier fallen in support of the flag of the republic without feeling that slavery inflicted those wounds upon him. I never see a loyal soldier wounded and maimed hobbling through your streets without feeling he was wounded and maimed by slavery. I never gaze upon the lowly grave of a loyal soldier dying for the cause of his country without feeling he was murdered by slavery. I never see a mourning wife or sorrowing children without realizing that slavery has made that mourning wife a widow and those children orphans.

Sir, all these sacrifices of property, of health, of life, all this sorrow, agony, and death, now upon us, are born of slavery. Slavery is the prolific mother of all those woes that blight our land and fill the heart of our people with sorrows.

Slavery pronounced long ago against the free elements of our popular institutions; it scoffed at the Declaration of Independence; it pronounced free society a failure; it jeered and sneered at the laboring masses as mudsills and white slaves. Scoffing at everything which tended to secure the rights and enlarge the privileges of mankind, it has pronounced against the existence of democratic institutions in America. Proud, domineering, defiant, it has pronounced against the supremacy of the government, the unity and life of the nation.

Sir, slavery is the enemy, the clearly pronounced enemy of the country. Slavery is the only enemy our country has on God's earth. There it stands. Hate is in its heart, scorn in its eye, defiance in its mien. It hates our cherished institutions, despises our people, defies our government. Slavery is the great rebel, the giant criminal, the murderer striving with dirty hands to throttle our government and destroy our country.

Source 8 Clement L. Vallandigham, Democratic congressman for Ohio, "Speech on the War and Its Conduct," January 14, 1863

Sir, I am one of that number who have opposed abolitionism, or the political development of the anti-slavery sentiment of the North and West, from the beginning. . . . Sir, it is but the development of the spirit of intermeddling, whose children are strife and murder. Cain troubled himself about the sacrifices of Abel and slew his brother. Most of the wars, contentions, litigations, and bloodshed,

from the beginning of time have been its fruits. The spirit of non-intervention is the very spirit of peace and concord.

I do not believe that if slavery had never existed here we would have had no sectional controversies. This very civil war might have happened fifty, perhaps a hundred, years later. Other and stronger causes of discontent and of disunion, it may be, have existed between other states and sections, and are now being developed into maturity. The spirit of intervention assumed the form of abolitionism because slavery was odious in name and by association to the Northern mind, and because it was that which most obviously marks the different civilizations of the two sections.

The South herself, in her early and later efforts to rid herself of it, had exposed the weak and offensive parts of slavery to the world. Abolition intermeddling taught her at last to search for and defend the assumed social, economic, and political merits and values of the institution. But there never was an hour from the beginning when it did not seem to me as clear as the sun at broad noon that the agitation in any form, in the North and West, of the slavery question must sooner or later end in disunion and civil war.

Source 9 Edward Pollard, editor of the *Richmond Examiner*, *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates*, 1866

No one can read aright the history of America, unless in the light of a North and a South; two political aliens existing in a Union imperfectly defined as a confederation of states. . . .

The slavery question is not to be taken as an independent controversy in American politics. It was not a moral dispute. It was the mere incident of a sectional animosity, the causes of which lay far beyond the domain of morals. Slavery furnished a convenient line of battle between the disputants; it was the most prominent ground of distinction between the two sections; it was, therefore, naturally seized upon as a subject of controversy, became the dominant theatre of hostilities, and was at last so conspicuous and violent, that occasion was mistaken for cause, and what was merely an incident came to be regarded as the main subject of controversy. . . .

The North naturally found or imagined in slavery the leading cause of the distinctive civilization of the South, its higher sentimentalism, and its superior refinements of scholarship and manners. It revenged itself on the cause, diverted its envy in an attack on slavery. . . . [T]he slavery question was not a moral one in the North, unless, perhaps, with a few thousand persons of disordered conscience. It was significant only of a contest for political power, and afforded nothing more than a convenient ground of dispute between two . . . opposite civilizations.

In the ante-revolutionary period, the differences between the populations of the Northern and Southern colonies had already been strongly developed. The early colonists did not bear with them from the mother-country to the shores of the New World any greater degree of congeniality than existed among them at home. They had come not only from different stocks of population, but from different feuds in religion and politics. There could be no congeniality

Root of the war is other reasons - slavery is just more obvious

the North forced the South to defend & keep slavery

Slavery an incident of a larger sectional controversy - a symptom if you will

north was envious

an easy way for the North to attack the South

sectional diff in pop during colonial period

between the Puritan exiles who established themselves upon the cold and rugged and cheerless soil of New England, and the Cavaliers who sought the brighter climate of the South. . . .

[T]he intolerance of the Puritans, the painful thrift of the Northern colonists, their external forms of piety, their jaundiced legislation, their convenient morals, their lack of sentimentalism . . . , and their unremitting hunt after selfish aggrandizement are traits of character which are yet visible in their descendents. On the other hand, the colonists of Virginia and the Carolinas were from the first distinguished by their polite manners, their fine sentiments, their attachment to a sort of feudal life, their landed gentry, their love of field-sports and dangerous adventure, and the prodigal and improvident aristocracy that dispensed its stores in constant rounds of hospitality and gaiety.

Slavery established in the South a peculiar and noble type of civilization. . . . The South had an element in its society—a landed gentry—which the North envied, and for which its substitute was a coarse ostentatious aristocracy that smelt of trade, and that, however it cleansed itself and aped the elegance of the South, and packed its houses with fine furniture, could never entirely subdue a sneaking sense of its inferiority. There is a singular bitter hate which is inseparable from a sense of inferiority.

Diff b/w N's
South
people

N
jealousy
hate

Source 10 Alexander H. Stephens, former vice president of the Confederacy, *A Constitutional View of the Late War between the States*, 1868

Slavery only
a superficial
cause

It is a postulate, with many writers of this day, that the late war was the result of two opposing ideas, or principles, upon the subject of African Slavery. Between these, according to their theory, sprung the "irrepressible conflict," in principle, which ended in the terrible conflict of arms. Those who assume this postulate, and so theorize upon it, are but superficial observers.

cause: opposing
principles
on the structure
of govt
-S: federal
N: Centralist

That the War had its origin in *opposing principles* . . . may be assumed as an unquestionable fact. But the opposing principles which produced these results in physical action were of a very different character from those assumed in the postulate. They lay in the organic Structure of the Government of the States. The conflict in principle arose from different and opposing ideas as to the nature of what is known as the General Government. The contest was between those who held it to be strictly Federal in its character, and those who maintained that it was thoroughly National. It was a strife between the principles of Federalism, on the one hand, and Centralism, or Consolidation, on the other.

Source 11 Vice President Henry Wilson, *The History of the Rise and Fall of Slavepower in America*, 1877

Designs of a
few southern
leaders ->
inspired poor
whites to fight
for a system
that oppressed them

By means illegitimate and indefensible, reckless of principle and of consequences, a comparatively few men succeeded in dragooning whole States into the support of a policy the majority condemned, to following leaders the majority distrusted and most cordially disliked. . . . [A] class of men who despised the colored man because he was colored, and the poor whites because they were poor, inspire[d] the latter with a willingness, an enthusiasm even, to take up arms, subject

themselves to all the hardships and hazards of war, for the express purpose of perpetuating and making more despotic a system which had already despoiled them of so much, and was designed to make still more abject their degradation.

Source 12 James Ford Rhodes, *Lectures on the American Civil War*, 1913

[O]f the American Civil War it may be safely asserted that there was but a single cause, slavery. . . . The question may be isolated by the incontrovertible statement that if the Negro had never been brought to America, our Civil War would never have occurred.

w/o blacks =
Slavery →
civil war
doesn't happen

Source 13. Charles and Mary Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization*, 1933

The Civil War . . . , called in these pages the "Second American Revolution," was merely the culmination of the deep-running transformation that shifted the center of gravity in American society between the inauguration of Jackson and the election of Lincoln. . . .

"shifted the
center of gravity"

[T]he so-called Civil War, or the War between the States, . . . 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, in the course of industrial development, and in the Constitution inherited from the Fathers.) Merely by the accidents of climate, soil, and geography was it a sectional struggle. If the planting interest had been scattered evenly throughout the industrial region, had there been a horizontal rather than a perpendicular cleavage, the irrepressible conflict would have been resolved by other methods. . . .

Social war

* if climate for
planting had
spread into N →
conflict wouldn't
have happened

In any event neither accident nor rhetoric should be allowed to obscure the intrinsic character of the struggle. If the operations by which the middle classes of England broke the power of the king and the aristocracy are to be known collectively as the Puritan Revolution, if the series of acts by which the bourgeois and peasants of France overthrew the king, nobility, and clergy is to be called the French Revolution, then accuracy compels us to characterize by the same term the social cataclysm in which the capitalists, laborers, and farmers of the North and West drove from power in the national government the planting aristocracy of the South. Viewed in the light of universal history, the fighting was a fleeting incident; the social revolution was the essential, portentous outcome.

Character of
struggle - in
long term

Source 14 Allan Nevins, *The Emergence of Lincoln*, 1950

The main root of the conflict (and there were minor roots) was the problem of slavery with its complementary problem of race-adjustment; the main source of the tragedy was the refusal of either section to face these conjoined problems squarely and pay the heavy costs of a peaceful settlement. Had it not been for the difference in race, the slavery issue would have presented no great difficulties. But as the racial gulf existed, the South inarticulately but clearly perceived that elimination of this issue would still leave it the terrible problem of the Negro.

if slaves hadn't
been black - slavery
wouldn't have
been a big
deal

- southerners felt if slavery was
abolished they would have
to "deal" w/ the Negro

Those historians who write that if slavery had simply been left alone it would soon have withered overlook this heavy impediment.

Source 15 David Donald, *Lincoln Reconsidered*, 1961

The Civil War, I believe, can best be understood neither as the result of accident nor as the product of conflicting sectional interests, but as the outgrowth of social processes which affected the entire United States during the first half of the nineteenth century. . . .

In the early nineteenth century all sections of the United States were being transformed with such rapidity that stability and security were everywhere vanishing values; nowhere could a father predict what kind of world his son would grow up in. . . .

In a nation so new that, as President James K. Polk observed, its history was in the future, in a land of such abundance, men felt under no obligation to respect the lessons of the past. . . . Every aspect of American life witnessed this desire to throw off precedent and to rebel from authority. Every institution which laid claim to prescriptive right was challenged and overthrown. The Church . . . was first disestablished . . . and then strange new sects . . . appeared to fragment the Christian community. The squirearchy, once a powerful conservative influence in the Middle States and the South, was undermined by the abolition of primogeniture and entails. . . . All centralizing economic institutions came under attack. The Second Bank of the United States, which exercised a healthy restraint upon financial chaos, was abolished during the Jackson period. . . .

Nowhere was the American rejection of authority more complete than in the political sphere. . . . By the 1850's the authority of all government in America was at a low point; government to the American was, at most, merely an institution with a negative role, a guardian of fair play.

Declining power of government was paralleled by increased popular participation in it. The extension of the franchise in America has rarely been the result of a concerted reform drive, . . . rather it has been part of the gradual erosion of all authority, of the feeling that restraints and differentials are necessarily anti-democratic, and of the practical fact that such restrictions are difficult to enforce. . . .

Possibly in time this disorganized society might have evolved a genuinely conservative solution for its problems, but time ran against it. At a stage when the United States was least capable of enduring shock, the nation was obliged to undergo a series of crises, largely triggered by the physical expansion of the country. . . .

These crises . . . were not in themselves calamitous experiences. Revisionist historians have correctly pointed out how little was actually at stake: slavery did not go into New Mexico or Arizona; Kansas, after having been opened to the peculiar institution for six years, had only two Negro slaves; the Dred Scott decision declared an already repealed law unconstitutional; John Brown's raid had no significant support in the North and certainly aroused no visible enthusiasm among Southern Negroes. When compared to crises which other nations

Thesis 1 ☺

Country Changing

perception of govt in 1850's

Weaker govt yet more people participating

Crises of the 1850's really not that impactful

have resolved without great discomfort, the true proportions of these exaggerated disturbances appear.

But American society in the 1850's was singularly ill-equipped to meet any shocks, however weak. It was a society so new and so disorganized that its nerves were rawly exposed. It was . . . a land which had . . . no resistance to strain. The very similarity of the social processes which affected all sections of the country—the expansion of the frontier, the rise of the city, the exploitation of great natural wealth—produced not cohesion but individualism. The structure of the American political system impeded the appearance of conservative statesmanship, and the rapidity of the crises in the 1850's prevented conservatism from crystallizing. The crises themselves were not world-shaking, nor did they inevitably produce war. They were, however, the chisel strokes which revealed the fundamental flaws in the block of marble, flaws which stemmed from an excess of democracy.

Bad timing

Lincoln didn't
cause war →
exposed weakness
of gov't from
excess dem

Source 16 Eugene Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery*, 1967

I do say that the struggle between North and South was irrepressible. From the moment that slavery passed from being one of several labor systems into being the basis of the Southern social order, material and ideological conflict with the North came into being and had to grow worse. If this much is granted, the question of inevitability becomes a question of whether or not the slaveholders would give up their world, which they identified properly with slavery itself, without armed resistance. The slaveholders' pride, sense of honor, and commitment to their way of life made a final struggle so probable that we may safely call it inevitable without implying a mechanistic determinism against which man cannot avail.

Slavery

Source 17 Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, 1980

Behind the secession of the South from the Union . . . was a long series of policy clashes between South and North. The clash was not over slavery as a moral institution—most northerners did not care enough about slavery to make sacrifices for it, certainly not the sacrifice of war. It was not a clash of peoples (most northern whites were not economically favored, not politically powerful; most southern whites were poor farmers, not decisionmakers) but of elites. The northern elite wanted economic expansion—free land, free labor, a free market, a high protective tariff for manufacturers, a bank of the United States. The slave interests opposed all that; they saw Lincoln and the Republicans as making continuation of their pleasant and prosperous way of life impossible in the future.

We read
this last time

Clash of elites

So, when Lincoln was elected, seven states seceded from the Union. Lincoln initiated hostilities by trying to repossess the federal base at Fort Sumter, South Carolina, and four more states seceded. The Confederacy was formed; the Civil War was on.



Questioning the Past

1. Did Lincoln intentionally provoke the incident at Fort Sumter? Was South Carolina at fault for firing on the fort? Which side was responsible for the firing on Fort Sumter? With the benefit of hindsight, should either Lincoln or South Carolina have handled the incident any differently?
2. Present the various theories offered to explain why North and South went to war. What theory, or theories, seem most valid?
3. What role did slavery play in producing the tensions that led to war?
4. Historian Samuel Eliot Morison wrote that "with no Mexican War there would have been no Civil War, at least not in 1861." What rationale could be offered in support of this thesis?
5. Suppose Lincoln had not resisted the effort of the southern states to secede, and the Confederacy had been allowed to establish itself as a sovereign nation. In what ways might the history of America since 1860 have been different? What would North America be like today?

states rights
slavery
abolitionism
economics - labor

Reading 

The Causes of the Civil War

In his second inaugural address in March 1865, Abraham Lincoln looked back at the beginning of the Civil War four years earlier. "All knew," he said, that slavery "was somehow the cause of the war." Few historians in the decades since Lincoln spoke have doubted the basic truth of Lincoln's statement; no credible explanation of the causes of the Civil War can ignore slavery. But historians have, nevertheless, disagreed sharply about many things. Was the Civil War inevitable, or could it have been avoided? Was slavery the only, or even the principal, cause of the war? Were other factors equally or more important?

This debate began even before the war itself. In 1858, Senator William H. Seward of New York took note of two competing explanations of the sectional tensions that were then inflaming the nation. On one side, he claimed, stood those who believed the sectional hostility to be "accidental, unnecessary, the work of interested or fanatical agitators." Opposing them stood those (like Seward himself) who believed there to be "an irrepressible conflict between opposing and enduring forces." For at least a century, the division Seward described remained at the heart of scholarly debate.

The "irrepressible conflict" argument was the first to dominate historical discussion. In the first decades after the fighting, histories of the Civil War generally reflected the views of Northerners who had themselves participated in the conflict. To them, the war appeared to be a stark moral conflict in which the South was clearly to blame, a conflict that arose inevitably as a result of the militant immorality of slave society. Henry Wilson's *History of the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power* (1872-1877) was a particularly vivid version of this moral interpretation of the war, which argued that Northerners had fought to preserve the Union and a system of free labor against the aggressive designs of the South.

A more temperate interpretation, but one that reached generally the same conclusions, emerged in the

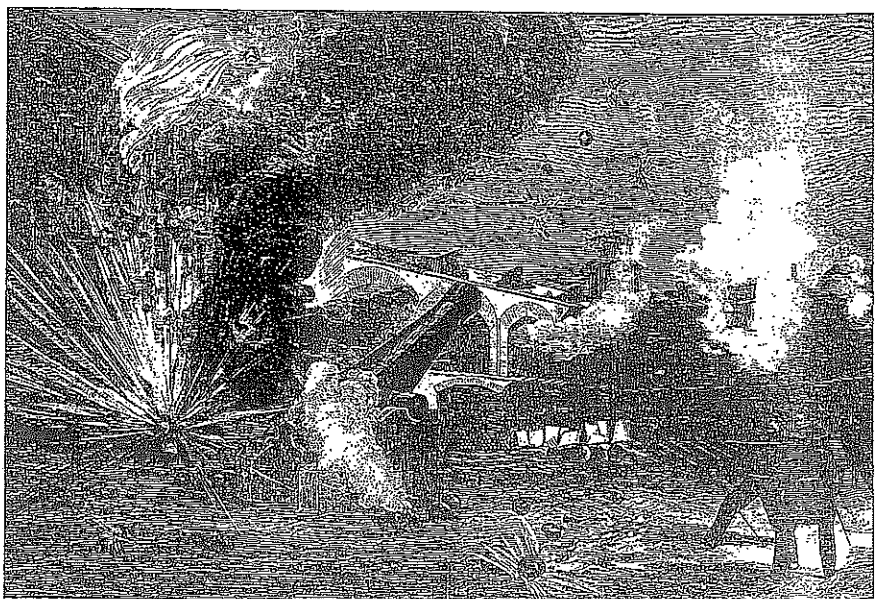
1890s, when the first serious histories of the war began to appear. Preeminent among them was the seven-volume *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850 . . .* (1893-1900) by James Ford Rhodes. Like Wilson and others, Rhodes identified slavery as the central, indeed virtually the only, cause of the war. "If the Negro had not been brought to America," he wrote, "the Civil War could not have occurred." And because the North and South had reached positions on the issue of slavery that were both irreconcilable and unalterable, the conflict had become "inevitable."

Although Rhodes placed his greatest emphasis on the moral conflict over slavery, he suggested that the struggle also reflected fundamental differences between the Northern and Southern economic systems. In the 1920s, the idea of the war as an irrepressible economic, rather than moral, conflict received fuller expression from Charles and Mary Beard in *The Rise of American Civilization* (2 vols., 1927). Slavery, the Beards claimed, was not so much a social or cultural institution as an economic one, a labor system. There were, they insisted, "inherent antagonisms" between

Northern industrialists and Southern planters. Each group sought to control the federal government so as to protect its own economic interests. Both groups used arguments over slavery and states' rights largely as smoke screens.

The economic determinism of the Beards influenced a generation of historians in important ways, but ultimately most of those who believed the Civil War to have been "irrepressible" returned to an emphasis on social and cultural factors. Allan Nevins argued as much in his great work, *The Ordeal of the Union* (8 vols., 1947-1971). The North and the South, he wrote, "were rapidly becoming separate peoples." At the root of these cultural differences was the "problem of slavery," but the "fundamental assumptions, tastes, and cultural aims" of the two regions were diverging in other ways as well.

More recent proponents of the "irrepressible conflict" argument have taken different views of the Northern and Southern positions on the conflict but have been equally insistent on the role of culture and ideology in creating them. Eric Foner, in *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men* (1970) and other writings, emphasized the importance



(National Geographic Society)

? historians have debated

Irrepressible conflict

Irrepressible

"Moral conflict"

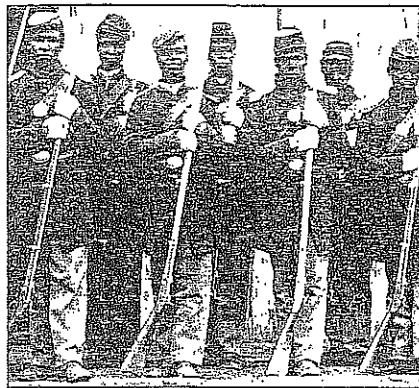
South to blame

Economic conflict

Social and cultural factors

of the "free-labor ideology" to Northern opponents of slavery. The moral concerns of the abolitionists were not the dominant sentiments in the North, he claimed. Instead, most Northerners (including Abraham Lincoln) opposed slavery largely because they feared it might spread to the North and threaten the position of free white laborers. Convinced that Northern society was superior to that of the South, and increasingly persuaded of the South's intentions to extend the "slave power" beyond its existing borders, Northerners were embracing a viewpoint that made conflict almost inevitable. Eugene Genovese, writing of Southern slaveholders in *The Political Economy of Slavery* (1965), emphasized their conviction that the slave system provided a far more humane society than industrial labor, that the South had constructed "a special civilization built on the relation of master to slave." Just as Northerners were becoming convinced of a Southern threat to their economic system, so Southerners believed that the North had aggressive and hostile designs on the Southern way of life. Like Foner, therefore, Genovese saw in the cultural outlook of the section the source of an all but inevitable conflict.

Historians who argue that the conflict emerged naturally, even inevitably, out of a fundamental divergence between the sections have therefore disagreed markedly over whether moral, cultural, social, ideological, or economic issues were the primary causes of the Civil War. But they have been in general accord that the conflict between North and South was deeply embedded in the nature of the two societies, that slavery was somehow at the heart of the differences, and that the crisis that ultimately emerged was irrepressible. Other historians, however, have questioned that assumption and have argued that the Civil War might have been avoided, that the differences between North and South were not so fundamental as to have necessitated war. Like proponents of the "irrepressible conflict" school, advocates of the war as a "repressible conflict" emerged first in the nineteenth century. President James Buchanan, for example, believed that extremist agitators were to blame for the conflict,



(Library of Congress)

and many Southerners writing of the war in the late nineteenth century claimed that only the fanaticism of the Republican Party could account for the conflict. *Rep party*

The idea of the war as avoidable gained wide recognition among historians in the 1920s and 1930s, when a group known as the "revisionists" began to offer new accounts of the origins of the conflict. One of the leading revisionists was James G. Randall, who saw in the social and economic systems of the North and the South no differences so fundamental as to require a war. Slavery, he suggested, was an essentially benign institution; it was in any case already "crumbling in the presence of nineteenth century tendencies. Only the political ineptitude of a "blundering generation" of leaders could account for the Civil War, he claimed. Avery Craven, another leading revisionist, placed more emphasis on the issue of slavery than had Randall. But in *The Coming of the Civil War* (1942) he too argued that slave laborers were not much worse off than Northern industrial workers, that the institution was already on the road to "ultimate extinction," and that war could therefore have been averted had skillful and responsible leaders worked to produce compromise.

More recent students of the war have kept elements of the revisionist interpretation alive by emphasizing the role of political agitation and ethnocultural conflicts in the coming of the war. In 1960, for example, David Herbert Donald argued that the politicians of the 1850s were not unusually inept, but that they were operating in a society in which traditional restraints

ethnocultural conflicts

were being eroded in the face of the (rapid extension of democracy). Thus the sober, statesmanlike solution of differences was particularly difficult. Michael Holt, in *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (1978), emphasized the role of political parties and especially the collapse of the second party system, rather than the irreconcilable differences between sections, in explaining the conflict, although he avoided placing blame on any one group.

Holt, however, also helped introduce another element to the debate. He was, along with Paul Kleppner, Joel Silbey, and William Gienapp, one of the creators of an "ethnocultural" interpretation of the war. The Civil War began, the ethnoculturalists argue, in large part because the party system—the most effective instrument for containing and mediating sectional differences—collapsed in the 1850s and produced a new Republican party that aggravated, rather than calmed, the divisions in the nation. But unlike other scholars, who saw the debate over slavery as the central factor in the collapse of the party system, the ethnoculturalists argue for other factors. For example, William Gienapp, in *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (1987) argues that the disintegration of the party system in the early 1850s was less a result of the debate over slavery in the territories than of such ethnocultural issues as temperance and nativism. The Republican Party itself, he argues, was less a product of antislavery fervor than of a sustained competition with the Know-Nothing Party over ethnic and cultural issues. Gienapp and the other ethnoculturalists would not entirely dispute Lincoln's claim that slavery was "somehow the cause of the war." But they do challenge the arguments of Eric Foner and others that the "free labor ideal" of the North—and the challenge slavery, and its possible expansion into the territories, posed to that ideal—was the principal reason for the conflict. Slavery became important, they suggest, less because of irreconcilable differences of attitude than because of the collapse of parties and other structures that might have contained the conflict.

avoidable extremists

What was the Civil War about?

IB U.S. History

Mr. Clarke

Document 1

[...] We feel that our cause is just and holy; we protest solemnly in the face of mankind that we desire peace at any sacrifice save that of honor and independence; we seek no conquest, no ^{to make a state} aggrandizement, no concession of any kind from the States with which we were lately confederated; all we ask is to be let alone; that those who never held power over us shall not now attempt our subjugation by arms. This we will, this we must, resist to the direst extremity. The moment that this pretension is abandoned the sword will drop from our grasp, and we shall be ready to enter into treaties of amity and commerce that cannot but be mutually beneficial. So long as this pretension is maintained, with a firm reliance on that Divine Power which covers with its protection the just cause, we will continue to struggle for our [inherent right to freedom, independence, and self-government.] [...]



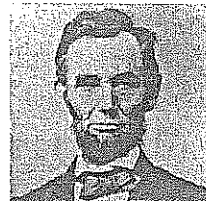
-Jefferson Davis, Confederate President

Message to the Confederate Congress, April 29, 1861

1. How does Davis explain the purpose of the war from the point of view of the Confederacy? *Right to freedom, independence, self-govt*

Document 2

Apprehension seems to exist among the people of the Southern States that by the accession of a Republican Administration their property and their peace and personal security are to be endangered. [...] I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so. [...]



I hold that in contemplation of universal law and of the Constitution the Union of these States is perpetual. [...] [N]o government proper ever had a provision [...] for its own termination. Continue to execute all the express provisions of our National Constitution, and the Union will endure forever, it being impossible to destroy it except by some action not provided for in the instrument itself. [...]

In *your* hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in *mine*, is the momentous issue of civil war. The Government will not assail *you*. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. *You* have no oath registered in heaven to destroy the Government, while I shall have the most solemn one to "preserve, protect, and defend it."

-Abraham Lincoln, First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1861

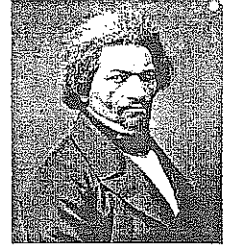
2. What is Lincoln's position on slavery? *Will not threaten where it exists "containment"*
3. How did Lincoln define the purpose of the war? *preserve, protect, defend union because*

Never ending OR changing

Document 3

The present policy of our Government is evidently to put down the slave-holding rebellion, and at the same time protect and preserve slavery. This policy hangs like a mill-stone about the neck of our people. [...] Can the friends of that policy tell us why this should not be an abolition war? Is not abolition plainly forced upon the nation as a necessity of national existence? Are not the rebels determined to make the war on their part a war for the utter destruction of liberty and the complete mastery of slavery over every other right and interest in the land? And is not an abolition war on our part the natural and logical answer to be made to the rebels? We all know it is. The fact is indisputable, that so long as slavery is respected and protected by our Government, the slaveholders can carry on the rebellion, and no longer. Slavery is the stomach of the rebellion. The bread that feeds the rebel army, the cotton that clothes them, and the money that arms them and keeps them supplied with powder and bullets, come from the slaves... [...]

heavy weight/burden



-Frederick Douglass

Douglass' Monthly, September 1861

4. What did Douglass think the war should be about?

Abolition

Other Names for the Civil War

The War Between the States	The Second American Revolution
Mr. Lincoln's War	The War of the Southern Rebellion
The War Against Slavery	The War to Suppress Yankee Arrogance
The War of Southern Freedom	The War for Southern Independence
The War for States' Rights	The Lost Cause
The War for Abolition	The War of Northern Aggression

5. How might the name given to the war reflect someone's views about its purpose?