

Motives Behind the U.S. Civil War

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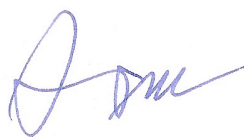
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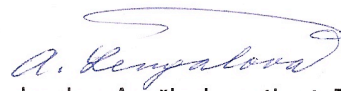
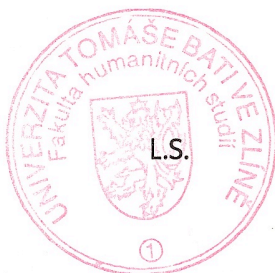
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ABSTRAKT

Historici zkoumají příčiny Americké občanské války stejně tak dlouho, jako zvažují její vyhnutelnost. Konflikt nevyhnutelnosti by měl být zvažován ze dvou úhlů pohledu, protože Sever a Jih nevedly k válce stejné motivy. Jižané si chtěli za každou cenu zachovat svůj způsob života a sociální systém nerozlučně spjatý s otroctvím. Naopak Severané odsuzovali otroctví, které nazývali přežitkem. Jejich hlavním motivem válčit byla touha ovládnout Ameriku. Kromě jejich vzájemné historie tato dvě území nic nespojovalo a tento fakt měl za následek jejich nepřátelské postoje. Odpověď na otázku, zda-li Americká občanská válka byla nebo nebyla vyhnutelná, nebude nikdy jednoznačně zodpovězena. Jistá je však jedna věc – a to, že se této válce mělo předejít.

Klíčová slova: Sever, Jih, otroctví, občanská válka, Unie, Konfederace, černoch, nevyhnutelnost, Lincoln, republikáni, demokraté

ABSTRACT

Historians have been exploring the causes of the U.S. Civil War as long as they have been contemplating the inevitability of the war. The inevitability conflict ought to be considered from two points of view, because the North and South did not have the same motives leading to the outbreak. Southerners wanted to preserve their way of life and social system inseparable from slavery at all cost. Northerners, on the other hand, condemned slavery, which they called an anachronism. Their main motive to make war was their aspiration to become hegemonic. Apart from their shared history, there was hardly anything that would connect the two regions, and this fact resulted in their antagonistic stances toward each other. The answer to the question whether the American Civil War was or was not avoidable will never be unequivocally answered but one thing is certain – that it should have been averted.

Keywords: North, South, slavery, Civil War, Union, Confederacy, Negro, inevitability, Lincoln, Republicans, Democrats

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INTRODUCTION

In history there are questions that might never get satisfactory answer. Such is the case with the origins of the U.S. Civil War, as well as the issue of its inevitability. On the other hand, this fact might be quite attractive for historians, as there is still space for exploration and further research. Since the end of the war not only historians but also amateurs have continued to rack their brains over the factors that initiated the opposing views of antebellum Southerners and Northerners, the antagonistic approach they took to each other, and their determination to sacrifice their lives in war.

Next to the origins of the war and the questions concerning its inevitability, slavery is another issue about which people have been arguing since the armed conflict. According to many historians the principal dispute dividing the nation was over this institution. The South glorified the peculiar institution of slavery, whereas the North detested it.

African slavery existed all over colonial America, but by the beginning of the nineteenth century, most Northern states found slavery unprofitable and for this reason, slavery in the North was abolished. However, in the South, the invention of the cotton gin impacted the perception of slavery as a profitable and therefore utterly justifiable institution. But what if slavery had been as rewarding in the North as it was in the South? Would Northerners have disavowed it? Apparently not, as their main goal was to become an economic hegemony, they would strive to gain such power by whatever means.

There is another vital question to ask: Had the Negroes never been brought to America, would the U.S Civil War have occurred? No one knows, but it is highly probable that the problems that antebellum society had to face at that time would most likely not have happened.

In the first half of the nineteenth century North and South developed into two utterly diverse regions. Their ways of life, political and economic points of view began to be rather incompatible. There were two possibilities how to solve such an inexorable clash: the two sides could either arrive at compromise or make war, but owing to the fact that neither of them was willing to abandon their future visions and dreams, the latter became reality.

The U.S. Civil War was a defining moment in American history. At stake was the very existence of America and its flourishing economy, its brand of democracy and future lives of millions of people that came there to start a completely new, better life. Even though the war ended 135 years ago, Americans still care about the war and what it

represents. However, to really understand what it poses, it is first necessary to identify the causes. This thesis will do so, and then will argue that the war was inevitable.

1 FUNDAMENTALISTS VS. REVISIONISTS

For many years historians have been contemplating the question of the inevitability of the American Civil War. Over the years, two main camps developed - fundamentalists and revisionists, the first camp being of the opinion that the U.S Civil War could not have been avoided, whereas the latter disagrees. The only idea these two opposing groups do agree on is the fact that in the antebellum era there were indisputable sectional differences. If it had not been for fanatic agitators, irresponsible political leaders and statesmen both in the North and in the South, revisionists contend, the war could have been averted, while fundamentalists allege that the divergences between the North and South were irreconcilable and thus led to war. The burning issue of slavery, according to fundamentalists, was the central sectional conflict, whereas revisionists totally disagree claiming that it was only a peripheral problem.

Instead of inevitable, revisionists often use the term “needless war”, an expression explaining their conviction that the causes of the war were insufficient to result in such a shattering armed conflict. However, it is necessary to consider whether the revisionists’ attitude towards the supposed causes is not a product of optimistic sentimentalism, an escape from reality. What if revisionist historians only try to make the history better and more bearable? It is generally more facile to judge a situation with the benefit of hindsight.

2 IRREPRESSIBLE CONFLICT

Henry Seward enounced in his oration that ‘it is an irrepressible conflict between opposing and enduring forces, and it means that the United States must and will, sooner or later, become either entirely a slaveholding nation, or entirely a free-labor nation.’ The American nation was able to face all kinds of diversity, nonetheless, there was one exception: the definition of property rights. The bipolar American nation was not compliant to make compromises concerning dramatically differing views on controlling these rights.¹

The U.S. Civil War might have been forestalled had the South had a change of heart and realized that slavery was an immoral anachronism that should be promptly eradicated, not extended. The North, on the other hand, could have prevented the war had it acquiesced on slavery and deemed Negroes as common property, just like cattle.

The situation in the middle of the nineteenth century appeared to be no more sustainable. Just as the North, so the South knew that “a house divided against itself cannot stand.” Both parties would not stop until their enemy was eradicated.²

2.1 Antithetical Southern and Northern views on inevitability

The inevitable conflict idea belongs to a northern school of interpretation while the avoidable conflict idea belongs to a southern school. This conclusion is based on the fact that the South would have been content to secede and avoid an armed conflict, whereas the North viewed secession as unacceptable. Instead, the North wanted to preserve the Union and to abolish slavery. Moreover, the North proposed to seize the federal government to gain control and deciding power over states’ rights. President Abraham Lincoln’s opinion about the antebellum situation was following:

I believe this government cannot endure; permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved – I do not expect the house to fall – but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery, will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in course of ultimate extinction, or its advocates will push it forward, till it shall become alike lawful in all the states, old as well as new – North as well as South.³

¹ James L. Huston, “Property Rights in Slavery and the Coming of the Civil War,” *The Journal of Southern History*, (May, 1999), 272.

² Stephen A. Douglas, “A Statesman of Compromise,” July 16, 1858, Reprinted in *Stampp, Kenneth M. The Causes of the Civil War (New York: Touchstone, 1992)*, 108.

³ Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Causes of the Civil War* (New York: Touchstone, 1992), 139.

Lincoln could not permit the latter to become reality. He was the president, and therefore he resolved that the war truly was inevitable. The Union was endangered; he had to do his duty as a president and a commander-in-chief.

2.2 Union sentiment

When taking into account the hundreds of thousand fallen soldiers, precisely 360,000 in the North and 260,000 in the South, mourning wives and children, let alone economic damage and destruction of resources, the question is obvious: would not have been a peaceful separation viable? Regrettably, the answer is no. The overriding concern in the middle of the nineteenth century, as well as throughout the whole existence of the United States, was the preservation of the God blessed Union. According to historian Pieter Geyl, “Union sentiment was no doubt strong in the North and once the conflict had broken out it created the sense of sacred obligation.”⁴

Ultimately, one wonders whether the Union was such an admirable thing that it needed to be preserved by means of a civil war and whether too much was not paid for the victory. Naturally, people tend to forget distress and hardship, resulting in the fact that what was gained is appreciated and what was lost and wasted fell into oblivion. In the post-bellum United States, particularly in the South, several generations had to contend with poverty, which unavoidably affected the economic as well as social development.

Even so, today the United States is a great world power. It would probably not be so powerful a nation if the Union had not been saved, but was the reward worth the cost? Another question that deserves attention is: Is any war worth it? War is the last possible solution, when all compromises fail. Generally, for American citizens the U.S. Civil War indeed was justifiable, since they have always so greatly cherished their state and detested so much their neighboring enemy.

This is the extract from *The New York Courier and Enquirer* from December 1860 that explicitly describes northerners’ admiration for the Union:

We love the Union, because ... in another half century, will make us the greatest, richest, and most powerful people on the face of the earth. We love the Union, because already in commerce, wealth and resources of every kind, we are the equals of the greatest; and because, while it secures us peace, happiness and

⁴ Pieter Geyl, “The American Civil War and the Problem of Inevitability,” *The New England Quarterly*, (Jun., 1951), 164-165.

prosperity at home, like the Roman of old we have only to exclaim I am an American citizen; to insure us respect and security abroad. And so loving this great and glorious Union, we are ready if need be, to shed our blood in its preservation, and in transmitting it in all its greatness, to our latest posterity.⁵

This statement elucidates Northerners' intense determination and demonstrates that hardly anything could have been accomplished to change their minds. Not a few Yankees espoused the belief that the preservation of the United States "was indeed the last, best hope for the survival of republican liberties in the Western world." Some soldiers were convinced that they fought not only for the Union but even for the whole world to secure its liberty. They were of the opinion that if they lost the war against tyranny then all the people in the world fighting against internal enemies and tyrants will most probably not succeed in beating them.⁶

Also, many Northerners along with President Lincoln viewed secession "as a deadly challenge to the foundation of law and order on which all societies must rest if they are not to degenerate into anarchy." They wanted to prevent despotism, dissolution and ruin.⁷

2.3 Priority of the North

Did the North make war to preserve their institutions or to diminish the peculiar institution of the South? This is rather ambiguous. As historian Gerald Gunderson notes: "...if preserving the Union is the North's objective it probably must destroy slavery to achieve the former. If, on the other hand, the North's objective is the elimination of slavery it must compel the South to remain in the Union to enforce that preference."⁸

Another scholar says: "Northern preferences to eliminate slavery were more than twenty times as strong as those to preserve the Union." However, it is unthinkable that Union soldiers would have fought so vigorously if they had known that they had sacrificed themselves for Negroes.⁹

On the one hand, although there was love for the Union, not all Northerners were united in what was their main objective. Various groups of people differed in what was

⁵ *The New York Courier and Enquirer*, "Why We Love The Union," December 1, 1860, Reprinted in *Stampp, Kenneth M. The Causes of the Civil War (New York: Touchstone, 1992)*, 75-76.

⁶ James M. McPherson, *What They Fought For 1861-1865* (New York: Anchor, 1995), 30.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁸ Gerald. Gunderson, "The Origin of the American Civil War," *The Journal of Economic History*, (Dec., 1974), 941.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 944.

more significant for them. Some groups were more concerned about the potential Southern expansion, since it would directly hurt them. Another group of people craved for aggrandizement and therefore wanted to preserve the Union. Another option is that “preserving the Union was merely a superficial “cover story” for the slave-free nation they desired.” For supporters of this idea, it is evident that for the populace it was crafty to assert that the Unionist preservation was the main and the only intent of the prospective assault on the South. Then the war was, according to public verdict, justifiable, which is exactly what the clever politicians needed – public support. Or, finally, there might have been people who did not attach weight to either of these two main objectives. They simply wanted both; neither predominated. Overall, it is undeniable that slavery was directly or indirectly linked to the motive for the outbreak of the U.S. Civil War. However, the exact relationship between the Union and slavery is profoundly complex and difficult to ascertain.¹⁰

2.3.1 Lincoln’s goal

Preservation of the Union as quickly as possible – that was the paramount aim Lincoln determined to achieve. He intended to restore the Union at all costs, not to save or abolish slavery. He claimed: “If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it; and if I could do it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that.”¹¹

Lincoln deplored slavery, and “the destruction of slavery was a personal wish of Lincoln's and one he would gladly implement if it would help to restore the Union.” However, if abolition did not help preservation, Lincoln, despite his personal conviction, would not advocate slavery’s eradication. He was willing to suppress his beliefs, just to keep the Union.¹²

2.4 Hegemony

Hegemony was the key idea northern politicians constantly bore in their minds, the objective they wanted to achieve at all costs. It was the main motive leading them to start war and fight tooth and nail for. According to historian Thomas N. Bonner, antislavery

¹⁰ Gerald. Gunderson, “The Origin of the American Civil War,” *The Journal of Economic History*, (Dec., 1974), 944.

¹¹ George Cassutto, "Lincoln: Saving the Union," Welcome to Cyberlearning World by George Cassutto, <http://www.cyberlearning-world.com/nhhs/html/greely1.htm> (accessed January 20, 2010).

parties “were not opposed to slavery for moral reasons but to gain political ascendancy in order to fasten the economic stranglehold of northern capitalism upon the South.” This statement emphasizes economic determinism as the cause of the war.¹³

2.5 Irresponsible politicians and agitators

Revisionist historians were the most zealous supporters of the belief that pre-Civil War politicians were abnormally incompetent and that their agenda was grotesque. According to these historians, the aim of the politicians was to exaggerate and make things look worse than they effectively were with the only goal – to confound and manipulate the populace.

In historian Kenneth M. Stampp’s opinion, the fact remains that “politicians in both sections kept the country in constant turmoil and whipped up popular emotions for the selfish purpose of winning elections.” It was expedient for agitators to create anger and hatred, which as a result generated a fertile soil for irrational and tense judgments concerning sectional differences.¹⁴

Imprudent politicians and their irresponsible resolutions, adamant agitators, insufficient statesmanship but also constant editorial lambasting had inestimable an impact on ordinary citizens and their points of view. After perpetual propaganda lasting several years, there is no doubt that both Southerners and Northerners believed the worst of each other. Stampp explains, “The most successful tactic had been to pose as a champion of republican values and to portray the opponent as anti-republican, as unlawful, tyrannical, or aristocratic. Republican politicians quite consciously seized on the slavery and sectional issue in order to build a new party.” They considered themselves to be the necessary agents that would stem slavery extension and foil the Slave Power conspiracy members’ plan to conquer the North. For instance, slavery was rather an insignificant issue and a source of contrast until pursued by over-zealous politicians for the purpose of rousing heated arguments.¹⁵

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Thomas N. Bonner, “Civil War Historians and the “Needless War” Doctrine,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, (Apr., 1956), 196.

¹⁴ Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Causes of the Civil War* (New York: Touchstone, 1992), 107.

¹⁵ Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Causes of the Civil War* (New York: Touchstone, 1992), 134.

2.6 Constitution and secession

“The powers not delegated to the United States by the constitution nor prohibited by it to the States are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people...” says the Tenth Amendment in the Bill of Rights. This is the law according to which southern politicians originated the state sovereignty doctrine from which they deduced the right of secession.¹⁶

Kevin Eisert observed that: “It is safe to say that there was not a man in the country, from Washington and Hamilton to Clinton and Mason, who did not regard the new system as an experiment from which each and every State had a right to peaceably withdraw.”¹⁷

Northerners believed Southerners to be traitors who did not have the right to secede, but after the war, why were not any Confederate leaders brought to trial for treason? The trial verdict would determine whether the secession was or was not constitutional. The answer to this question might be either that they were satisfied enough with the war result and therefore did not want to inquire into the secession right anymore or that it would be extremely testing to prove that the Constitution does not allow any state to secede.

Dr. David Alan Black contends that:

After the war, Jefferson Davis, the President of the Confederacy, was arrested and placed in prison prior to a trial. The trial was never held, because the chief justice of the Supreme Court, Mr. Salmon Portland Chase, informed President Andrew Johnson that if Davis were placed on trial for treason the United States would lose the case because nothing in the Constitution forbids secession. That is why no trial of Jefferson Davis was held, despite the fact that he wanted one.¹⁸

This is sufficient evidence to believe that the North was the aggressor that started war in spite of the fact that it could not establish that the Southern secession was unconstitutional.

2.7 An overstatement?

Many historians have proposed a theory that the source of contention over slavery in the territories was false. They supported this belief with statements that the climate was not favorable for commercial agriculture and also that by 1860 the number of Negroes in the West was insignificant. Revisionists, in particular, have alleged that not much was at stake.

¹⁶ David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1977), 482.

¹⁷ Kevin Eisert, "U.S. Constitution," *The War For State's Rights*, <http://civilwar.bluegrass.net/secessioncrisis/890304.html> (accessed January 22, 2010).

¹⁸ David Alan Black, "Was Secession Treason," *Welcome to DBO*, http://www.daveblackonline.com/was_secession_treason.htm (accessed December 12, 2009).

Historian David Donald in his “An Excess of Democracy” theses clarifies:

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 roused no visible enthusiasm among Southern Negroes.¹⁹

Despite these facts, one was not certain about the other party’s intentions and secret plans. The populace was so confused that they could not suspect whether their existing way of life and their future prospects were in danger or whether the whole antebellum situation was not only an empty threat.

2.8 Defender vs. Aggressor

North or South? Who is to blame? Both Northerners and Southerners suspected that their behavior was defensive in response to the other region’s aggressive acting. It is not easy, therefore, to give an unequivocal reply as to which party is responsible for the bloodshed and thus deserves blame. Nevertheless, a great number of scholarly articles indicate that the North was the originator of the inexorable clash. Professor Avery O. Craven believes that the South was perpetually on the defensive and that it became a victim of abolitionists and political agitators “who had transformed local resentments of New England and the Northwest into a burning hostility to the southern planter.”²⁰

The aggravating circumstance for the North is that it sought, despite the prejudicial southern interests, to hold the South forcibly in the Union. Compared to the North, the only thing the South wanted was not to be in the North’s spotlight and enjoy their property rights, which were guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution.

The New Orleans Daily Crescent stated in 1860:

From the beginning, we have only asked to be left alone in the enjoyment of our plain, inalienable rights, as explicitly guaranteed in our common organic law. We have never aggressed upon the North, nor sought to aggress upon the North... They have robbed us of our property, they have murdered our citizens while endeavoring to reclaim that property by lawful means, they have set at naught the

¹⁹ Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Causes of the Civil War* (New York: Touchstone, 1992), 132.

²⁰ Thomas N. Bonner, “Civil War Historians and the “Needless War” Doctrine,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, (Apr., 1956), 198.

decrees of the Supreme Court, they have invaded our States and killed our citizens...²¹

This extract explicitly describes the atmosphere that prevailed in most southern households before the outbreak. Southerners felt like victims of northern tyrants who did not want to leave them alone to live their southern way of life they were so much accustomed to.

2.8.1 What was conducive to soldiers' firm determination to fight?

It is not so difficult a task to infer what Confederates fought for. Among the main motives are: independence, liberty, property rights, southern way of life closely related to slavery, but also white supremacy and defense of homeland, which is according to military analysts "one of the most powerful combat motivations." These were the watchwords Southern soldiers kept in mind while fighting. These issues were later in the war transformed into the desire for revenge.²²

But what did the Unionists fight for? Why were so many men in the North disposed and without restraint determined to fight and if need be to sacrifice their lives? There is a belief that the Unionists fought to uphold the heritage of the American Revolution, they fought to avert dismemberment and devastation of the sacred Union. Southerners were seen as "traitors who sought to tear down and break into fragments the glorious temple that our forefathers reared with blood and tears." For Yankees the punishment for treason was motivation, since Northern soldiers were convinced that they were not responsible for starting the war.²³

It was paradoxical that South saw the North as tyrants who wanted to steal their liberty and also that Southerners were "fighting for liberty while holding other people in slavery." But the most blatant fact is that Confederate soldiers professed to be fighting against slavery, by which they meant their own enslavement to the North.²⁴

One wonders if the soldiers really knew what they were fighting for? Neither the North nor South were united in their views and goals. Not all Southerners were against abolition and not all Northerners had anti-slavery feelings, since they were convinced racists. Therefore it is crucial to become aware that despite the fact that it was the North

²¹ Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Causes of the Civil War* (New York: Touchstone, 1992), 46.

²² James M. McPherson, *What They Fought For 1861-1865* (New York: Anchor, 1995), 18-19.

²³ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

against South in the war, the soldiers of both regions did not have exactly the same attitudes and motives for fighting.

3 SLAVERY

It was pointless and also late, in the nineteenth century, to deal with the question concerning the reasons why so many Negroes were imported, under what circumstances and conditions, although probably not many Southerners would do so. How is it possible that such incredible atrocities were committed? This question was at that time pointless to even consider, much less to answer. Once so many of them were there, one had to invent a way to treat them, live with them and more importantly contemplate how to make use of the opportunity of their presence. For the sake of the prejudiced and racist inhabitants of ante-bellum America, it is not startling that the Negroes ended up as exploited servants. Since there were more Negroes in the South than in the North, the decision was more radical there. In the course of time it emerged that the land in the South was more fertile, therefore the need of hardy workers was more urgent.

James Ford Rhodes, a Northern historian observed that:

At the time of the formation of the Constitution the two sections were not greatly at variance. A large number of Southern men, among them their ablest and best leaders, thought slavery was a moral and political evil to be got rid of gradually. In due time, the foreign slave trade was prohibited, but the Yankee invention of the cotton-gin made slavery apparently profitable in the culture of cotton on the virgin soil of the new States in the South and Southern opinion changed. From being regarded as an evil, slavery began to be looked upon as the only possible condition of the existence of the two races side by side and by 1850 the feeling had grown to be that slavery was 'no evil, but a great religious, social and moral blessing.'²⁵

Could antagonism have sprung and thereafter been fueled by the Northerners' jealousy and envy of the higher profitability of slavery in the South? A few generations before the Civil War, slavery was well accepted in the North, both parties despised the Negroes and the general perception of them was abhorrent. Once the economy changed their mutual hatred and disdain, the approach to each other radically altered and their relationship was no longer regarded as amicable. As a result of differences in viewing slavery, by midcentury an antislavery movement entering politics was formed and commenced to polarize the country.

²⁵ Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Causes of the Civil War* (New York: Touchstone, 1992), 157.

3.1 Proslavery reasoning

The task of slavery was not only to produce profitable labor. It was also a system of race control and social order and a means of making white society feel safe. These were the assets that were among Southerners so profoundly appreciated. For these reasons Southerners did not want to be deprived of the right to possess a slave. They were fixed in their determination to preserve and extend slavery in the United States.

After the enumeration of the benefits of the peculiar institution, it is understandable that proslavery oriented people did not see or perhaps did not want to see any seamy side, any moral sense. A Southern man was convinced that slavery was a social good, and he was ready to support it by many rational arguments. Nothing could change his mind, as slavery was a blessing that elevated the Negroes from “brutal savages into docile, intelligent and civilized agricultural laborers and supplied them not only with bodily comforts but with careful religious instruction.”²⁶

George Fitzhugh was in 1854 full of praise for the southern way of life:

At the slaveholding South all is peace, quiet, plenty and contentment. We have no mobs, no trades unions, no strikes for higher wages, no armed resistance to the law, but little jealousy of the rich by the poor. We have but few in our jails, and fewer in our poor houses... Population increases slowly, wealth rapidly. Wealth is more equally distributed than at the North, where a few millionaires own most of the property of the country.²⁷

In an attack upon the Northern free society, Southerners stated that it failed badly. According to them, this type of society produced starvation, disarray, atheism and depravity unlike the peace and white supremacy guaranteed by slavery. They were certain that slavery was there for a common good. According to Whitney Gleaves “12 presidents owned slaves at some point in their lives. Significantly, 8 presidents owned slaves while living in the Executive Mansion,” which most probably led to the question about why Southerners should worry about the morality of the institution when even the most respectable persons, the most recognized authorities – the presidents – practiced it?²⁸

²⁶ Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Causes of the Civil War* (New York: Touchstone, 1992), 154.

²⁷ Thomas G. Paterson, *Major Problems in Civil War & Reconstruction (Major Problems in American History Series)* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 8.

²⁸ Whitney Gleaves, "Slaveholding Presidents - The Hauenstein Center for Presidential Studies - Grand Valley State University," Grand Valley State University,

Slaves were, according to their masters, indisputably profitable investments. Wealth estimates of the U.S. in 1860 say that: "Slaveholding comprised far more national wealth than railroads and manufacturing enterprise combined," and therefore it is manifest why Southerners adhered to it so greatly. The more the northern disapproval of the immoral institution grew, the more southerners justified, defended it and also strove to impede its restriction or even abolition.²⁹

3.2 Cotton, the king!

Cotton in the colonial period was not so profitable a crop, but at the end of the eighteenth century, precisely in 1793 when the cotton gin had been invented, the situation rapidly changed - an immense boom came. "As early as the 1830s the United States produced more cotton than all other countries combined, and the value of cotton exports exceeded the value of all other American exports put together."³⁰

"By the 1850s, slaves made up about 50 percent of the population of the four main cotton states." Thus, slaves consequently became the most significant asset in cotton farming, and due to the considerable demand coming particularly from Britain, as well as the ban on slave importation, the price of slaves dramatically rose.³¹

The economic depression of 1857 did not, surprisingly, affect the cotton-producing regions in the South, and "demand for the staple in 1859 and 1860 exceeded even the most optimistic expectations of southern planters and their agents. The appearance of prosperity in the South and hard times in the North did not escape influential southern observers." Due to such economic success Southerners started to view themselves as the most affluent people on Earth.³²

3.3 Biblical defense of slavery

Since the cotton industry was so profitable, southern proslavery clerics would cite Biblical references sanctioning slavery to avoid any moralizing from antislavery Northerners. The principal citation was Genesis 9:25-27, in which Noah cursed all the descendants of his

<http://www.gvsu.edu/hauenstein/?id=5547C04D-CDE2-8CD2-10B8DB7A7AD79E0A&CFID=9282716&CFTOKEN=68294622%3E> (accessed February 18, 2010).

²⁹ James L. Huston, "Property Rights in Slavery and the Coming of the Civil War," *The Journal of Southern History*, (May, 1999), 254.

³⁰ Knut Oyangen, "Agricultural History," Department of History, <http://www.history.iastate.edu/agprimer/Page28.html> (accessed February 28, 2010).

³¹ Ibid.

grandson Canaan. They were to be slaves eternally. The descendants were said to have populated Africa “and the clergy had only to point to history to demonstrate that the prophecy had been fulfilled.”³³

On the basis of this story, it was the divine decree of God that “gave the black people the liability of being enslaved by white people and justified the degradation of the entire race.” Slavery was rationalized to be salutary to the black race, since whites gave them food, clothes but more importantly religion.³⁴

Another Biblical reference also confirmed that the Bible sanctioned slavery. Ephesians 6:5 states, “Slaves, obey your earthly masters with deep respect and fear. Serve them sincerely as you would serve Christ.”

According to Rev. Alexander Campbell “There is not one verse in the Bible inhibiting slavery, but many regulating it. It is not then, we conclude, immoral.”

These citations are sufficient evidence to claim that the Bible is not against slavery. Due to this fact it was very difficult for antislavery people to prove the contrary. A counterargument used by abolitionists was that slavery in the Bible was not based on race and that in the times when the Bible was written slavery as a word had a different meaning than in the nineteenth century. Even so, neither the abolitionists nor the defenders of slavery could prove that the Bible and all its interpretations were in absolute accordance with their beliefs and convictions. Still, during the war, both North and South had the certitude that God was on their side. Thus the outcome of the war, it was expected, would send a message as to whose side God really supported, which could have been one of the prime reasons for the decision to go to war.³⁵

3.4 Slave Power conspiracy

During the antebellum era that is synonymous with a harsh sectional clash, abolitionists and later Republicans repeatedly purported that not only the South but nay the whole country was ruled by a merciless Slave Power. Historian Kenneth M. Stampp explained

³² John Niven, *The Coming of the Civil War, 1837-1861* (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, 1990), 116.

³³ Kevin Eisert, "Biblical Defense Of Slavery," *The War For State's Rights*, <http://civilwar.bluegrass.net/SlaveryAndEmancipation/biblicaldefenseofslavery.html> (accessed January 23, 2010).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ B.A. Robinson, "What the Bible Says about Slavery," *ReligiousTolerance.org* by the Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance, http://www.religioustolerance.org/sla_bibl.htm (accessed April 23, 2010).

this treacherous group of people as follows: “This Slave Power, well organized, and conspirational in its methods, consisted of the Southern slaveholding planters and political leaders who were determined to convert the whole United States into a nation of masters and slaves.” The main target of these conspirators was to peril the rights of liberties of all freemen. Allegedly, they formed national policy to meet their own rapacious needs and ends. In defense against the menacing South, the North started to rebel and Abraham Lincoln was elected to the presidency. However, the Slave Power was reluctant to yield peacefully and consequently attempted to destroy the Union with the intent to establish a proslavery confederacy.³⁶

On the other hand, was not the alarm of the reputed Slave Power feigned? Was there in the South such a perilous conspiracy considering the fact that the South had never been integrated behind a political program? Apparently not. Southerners were only united by the dread that slavery would be abolished; further, they were united by the great determination to prevent abolition and also by the force to convince the Yankees to recognize their inalienable rights. The South wanted political strength chiefly and merely as a means to cease the aggressions of their Northern enemies. Undeniably, there were serious concerns about Lincoln being elected president, but the fear was not only about the ensuing abolition of slavery. Another prospect that made southerners lose sleep was the vision that Negroes would become socially equal with whites. It was an unimaginable state of affairs.

3.5 Disunited South

Most people in the antebellum South were not wealthy slaveholders, but yeomen, poor white farmers who farmed land very often of inferior quality. Paradoxically, slaves farmed better land than they did. Approximately a fourth of the total southern population was slaveholding. Virtually, the superior and thus ruling planter aristocracy holding at least fifty slaves comprised an almost insignificant percentage of the overall society structure. It is therefore not difficult to comprehend that the objectives and prospects in the antebellum period varied considerably.

Pro-Union southerners formed not a small group that concurred neither with secession nor with the war. When, eventually, the South implemented the former, John

³⁶ Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Causes of the Civil War* (New York: Touchstone, 1992), 19.

Niven explains: “It is probable that a majority of the white southern population opposed secession, but the ultras outmaneuvered them, and then in convention that they controlled outvoted their more conservative opponents.” Still, not all states urged the secession. Only half of all Southern states joined South Carolina right away. The other states delayed their decision since they waited to see how the situation would develop after Lincoln had assumed his presidency. Surprisingly, the votes were sometimes greatly close to Union sentiment.³⁷

Secondly, some Southerners as well perceived slavery as an anachronism that should be finally removed. Thirdly, another testimony to a disunited South is apparent from the Civil War itself, as the desertion rate was substantially higher in the Upper-South than in the Lower South. James M. McPherson noted that: “The slaveholding aristocracy also managed to convince most non-slaveholding whites in the South (two-thirds of the white population there) that emancipation would produce economic ruin, social chaos, and racial war.” Clearly, within the antebellum South there were extensive regional and class differences that might have led to defeat.³⁸

3.6 Southern criticism of slavery vs. Northern admiration of the South

Even in the South, several people were discontented as the economic prospects were seen as propitious or even devastating. Here follows the enumeration of the seamy sides of slavery, which undeniably harmed the Southern populace, although they might have not been fully aware of it, or perhaps did not want to.

Abolitionist Lydia Maria Child maintained:

The slave is bought, sometimes at a very high price; in free labor there is no such investment of capital. When the slave is ill, a physician must be paid by the owner, the free laborer defrays his own expenses. The children of the slave must be supported by his master; the free man maintains his own. The slave is to be taken care of in his old age, which his previous habits render peculiarly helpless; the slave does not care how slowly or carelessly he works’ The slave is indifferent how many tools he spoils. The slave’s clothing is indeed very cheap, but it is of no consequence to him how fat it is destroyed... Finally, where slaves are

³⁷ John Niven, *The Coming of the Civil War, 1837-1861* (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, 1990), 131.

³⁸ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2003), 8.

employed, manual industry is a degradation to white people, and indolence becomes the prevailing characteristic.³⁹

On the other hand, in the antebellum North there were also people who admired the Southern way of life. Such persons were agitated by the increasing Northern egotism, materialism but also capitalism, which resulted in the preference of what they viewed as southern harmony and gentility. “There is no question that some Republicans, particularly upper-class conservatives, looked favorably upon the southern character.”⁴⁰

3.7 Wage vs. Chattel slavery

After the establishment of the abolitionist movement and after its successful political moves, an overwhelming majority of white Northerners pitied the Southern slaves, but hardly anyone concerned themselves with the plight of northern Negroes. Their situation could not have been easy. Scholar Edward Pessen proclaimed that: “The fact remains that the economic gap between enslaved black and free white workers in antebellum South and North was narrower than historians once thought.”⁴¹

Abolitionists maintained that the Northern Negroes and Southern slaves shared a similar plight. In fact, a Northern Negro was disfranchised, depreciated by the white community and doomed to do only menial employment, or in the worst case, be out of work. Statesman William Grayson claimed that: “Fed, clothed, protected the slave, was far better off than the Northern operative whose employer had no interest in his health or even his survival. Free but in name, northern laborers had liberty to starve,” this was the stance of Southerners who struggled to defend and justify their peculiar institution at any cost. This begs the question whether these were just slander with the intention to divert attention from the far more desperate situation in the South. However exaggerated this issue was, there must have been some truth in it, too. Slavery existed in the North as well in the South, but the difference was undoubtedly significant.⁴²

³⁹ Thomas G. Paterson, *Major Problems in Civil War & Reconstruction* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 2.

⁴⁰ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1995), 67.

⁴¹ Edward Pessen, “How Different from Each Other Were the Antebellum North and South?” *The American Historical Review*, (Dec., 1980), 1124.

⁴² Drew Gilpin Faust, “A Southern Stewardship: The Intellectual and the Proslavery Argument,” *American Quarterly*, (Spring, 1979), 73.

4 CONTROVERSIAL ABOLITIONISTS

“Abolitionists played a direct role in converting the Northern conscience to antislavery,” Dwight Dumond contended. It was them who in the 1830s initiated a discussion on the moral decline called slavery, despite the fact that first members of this movement had to face violent persecution.⁴³

The issue of Negroes was such a delicate problem that at the outset of attempts to face and try to resolve it, it had to be treated very carefully and wisely. Almost certainly, the first members of this movement genuinely were concerned with the atrocious conditions of southern slaves and wanted to find a solution of how to help them in their desperate situation. But there is a question whether all the members affiliated with this influential organization throughout the second half of the nineteenth century were of the same persuasion. Many abolitionists were simultaneously racists who refused to come into contact with Negroes, which is unquestionably a self-contradictory stance. “One member threatened to resign if ‘true abolitionism’ required social intercourse between Negroes and whites.”⁴⁴

Another agitated member explained himself that “we ought never to have permitted our colored brethren to unite with us in our associations.” Nefarious prejudices about colored Negroes even hindered one to become a member in the women’s antislavery society in New York. On the one hand there was an effort to emancipate slaves but on the other hand, there was an omnipresent disdain of Negroes. Under such disconcerting circumstances, it is a wonder that such an inconsistent movement could have pursued its aims.⁴⁵

Historian Pieter Geyl stated:

As a matter of fact, some Abolitionists had on occasion shouted for a separation from the immoral South, and there were moderates, too, who were prepared to say, with the old commander of the Union army, “depart in peace!” Yet it was an idea completely divorced from reality to think that the North would allow the

⁴³ Richard Ellis and Aaron Wildavsky, “A Cultural Analysis of the Role of Abolitionists in the Coming of the Civil War,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, (Jan., 1990), 103.

⁴⁴ Leon F. Litwack, “The Abolitionist Dilemma: The Antislavery Movement and the Northern Negro,” *The New England Quarterly*, (Mar., 1961), 53.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

Union to be broken up without resistance... But in the entire North, Union sentiment, quite apart from the feelings about slavery, was strong.⁴⁶

Before long the unstable situation among abolitionists began to change. Historian Leon F. Litwack observed: “Regardless of public opposition and personal doubts, some abolitionists considered social intercourse with Negroes a demonstration of true devotion to the cause.” When abolitionists indeed mixed with the Negroes, surprisingly, it became somewhat fashionable. Talking about this unheard of experience was treated as a personal triumph over the long felt evil.⁴⁷

4.1 Immediate Emancipation

Scholar Lawrence J. Friedman stated: “An abolitionist is distinguished by the belief that emancipation of slaves should be immediate, unconditional, and without compensation to the owner.” However, few abolitionists took into account what Southern society would look like after emancipation. How would approximately four million slaves assimilate into society? Did the abolitionists think about potential slaves’ revenge? It would not be surprising after so many years of suffering if the freed Negroes attacked not only their masters and their families, but all the whites who were the embodiment of their affliction, humiliation and exploitation. Certainly, free Negroes would not hesitate to head for the North. Did the abolitionists expect that? What would be their attitude towards Negroes if they poured into their land? Probably the same as in the South, which means very disrespectful.⁴⁸

Some abolitionists asked: “How can we have the effrontery to expect the white slaveholders of the South to live on terms of civil equality with his colored slave, if we, the white abolitionists of the North, will not admit colored freemen as members of our Anti-slavery Societies?” In this regard, abolition seemed an ill-considered and shortsighted plan; since hardly any abolitionist considered the consequences that such a revolutionary change would bring.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Pieter Geyl, “The American Civil War and the Problem of Inevitability,” *The New England Quarterly*, (Jun., 1951), 152

⁴⁷ Leon F. Litwack, “The Abolitionist Dilemma: The Antislavery Movement and the Northern Negro,” *The New England Quarterly*, (Mar., 1961), 58.

⁴⁸ Richard Ellis and Aaron Wildavsky, “A Cultural Analysis of the Role of Abolitionists in the Coming of the Civil War,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, (Jan., 1990), 96.

⁴⁹ Leon F. Litwack, “The Abolitionist Dilemma: The Antislavery Movement and the Northern Negro,” *The New England Quarterly*, (Mar., 1961), 53.

4.2 Provocative Abolitionists

The U.S. Constitution does not give Congress power to interfere with slavery in the states since it was recognized by all parties as well as by the court. However, abolitionists needed to appeal to a law higher than the Constitution in order to provide a rationale for their aggressions aimed at southern slavery when according to them, slaveholders were egregious sinners. Nevertheless, Southerners were confident of their morality and contended that it was abolitionists who acted incorrectly and called them dissemblers. James Buchanan proclaimed that the abolitionists aroused Southerners to establish a party “as fanatical in advocating slavery as were the abolitionists in denouncing it.”⁵⁰

Historian Russel B. Nye noted:

Putting together all the evidence, the abolitionists came to the conclusion that there existed a secret agreement, a conspiracy among Southern slaveholders, to foist slavery upon the nation, destroy civil liberty, extend slavery into the territories, reopen the slave trade, control the policies of the Federal government, and complete the formation of an aristocracy founded upon and fostered by a slave economy...⁵¹

One of the main aims of abolitionists was to prompt the slaveholders to defend their social system as much as possible. They tried to keep the southerners' defense at the forefront of the Northern whites' attention, which was a cunning move, because the abolitionists were aware of the fact that the South defense represented the best offense for them. At last, when the war came, abolitionists along with many northerners justified it by the final defense against the Slave Power.

Before the war, abolitionists did not hesitate to educate the Northern public about the southern malignity. Churches, but even schoolbooks were full of slandering the southern way of life. Children at a tender age were taught that slavery was a social evil that should be remorselessly extirpated. Even though the number of abolitionists was in the beginning small, it had a profound effect upon northern minds that were talked into believing that southerners were monsters; and so a well thought-out action was fertile soil for war.

⁵⁰ Richard Ellis and Aaron Wildavsky, “A Cultural Analysis of the Role of Abolitionists in the Coming of the Civil War,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, (Jan., 1990), 107.

⁵¹ Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Causes of the Civil War* (New York: Touchstone, 1992), 20.

5 ABOLITIONISTS VS. REPUBLICANS

There is an undeniable difference between these two movements, although despite their varying attitudes and convictions, there was one thing they had in common and that was the condemnation of slavery. Both of these parties were unanimous in denying the Southerners' view on slavery as a positive good. The reason these two movements cannot be regarded as one identical society is the fact that members of the first group called for immediate emancipation and propagated a doctrine stating that people cannot be seen property; whereas Republicans dealt more with the free white labor question along with the threat of the Southern desire for the further expansion of slavery.

5.1 Slavery in the eyes of Republicans

The Radical Republicans were aware of the fact that slavery was more than “Negroes-held-in-bondage,” that it was the foundation stone of a socio-economic system that fostered values, morals, and patterns of behavior which they believed to be not only different from their own, but evil.⁵²

Republicans regarded slavery as morally inequitable, politically injudicious, and socially pernicious. The last mentioned reason was next to the feared expansion of slavery the second biggest concern and source of opposition. In their book, the most worshiped values of Northern free labor, namely social mobility and economic development, were constantly violated in the South. They persisted in maintaining that the peculiar institution had a harmful impact not only on slaves themselves, but more importantly, on white laborers both of the South and North.

The majority of them was appalled by the degradation and affliction of the bulk of Southern non-slaveholders. Due to the fact that in reality there were only two classes, the very poor and the mighty aristocracy, it was almost impossible for the poor people to rise in the social scale, to get out of their plight – the impoverished and degraded way of life. Eric Foner proclaimed that: “The attack on slavery for degrading the white laborer and stunting the economic development of the South was perhaps the major contribution of the political branch of the anti-slavery movement.” On the other hand, focusing on the destitute conditions of whites drew the attention of many Northerners, which was a good way to gain support among the general public. Owing to strong racism felt towards blacks,

⁵² Daniel J. Elazar, “Civil War and the Preservation of American Federalism,” *Publius*, (1971), 43.

most Northerners did not feel the need to better their conditions in the slaveholding South but were more inclined to address themselves with the economic and educational issues that poor whites faced.⁵³

Furthermore, Republican newspapers occupied themselves with statistical comparisons between South and North, which became commonplace in speeches by Republican politicians. According to the surveys, the Southern economy was stagnant and the causes of this backward state were ascribed to what else than slavery. Thanks to elaborate research, Republicans had many cogent arguments to moralize about slavery. Frederick Law Olmsted came to the conclusion that “without slavery the wealth of the South would be vastly increased.”⁵⁴

5.1.1 Lincoln on slavery

“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.” This statement by Lincoln proves that he could hardly fraternize with abolitionists, as he was sometimes accused of such relationship; however, he also made several statements in which he revealed his deep-rooted abominable feelings toward slavery. He loathed slavery, but he perceived abolitionism as an unconstitutional movement.

James M. McPherson described Lincoln’s stance as follows: “He was plainly against slavery, but he was just as plainly not for its immediate and total abolition,” which implies that the relationship between antislavery oriented societies very often clashed.⁵⁵

Lincoln describing his perception of slavery in August, 1858:

...if all earthly power were given me, I should not know what to do, as to the existing institution. My first impulse would be to free all the slaves, and send them to Liberia,- to their own native land. But ...(this) is impossible... What next? Free them, and make politically and socially, our equals? My own feelings will not admit of this; and if mine would, we well know that those of the great mass of white people will not.⁵⁶

⁵³ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1995), 59.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁵ James M. McPherson, *The Struggle For Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 11.

⁵⁶ Zachary M. Schrag, "Lincoln, Speech at Ottawa," Mason academic research system (mason.gmu.edu), http://mason.gmu.edu/~zschrag/hist120spring05/lincoln_ottawa.htm (accessed February 15, 2010).

Lincoln was forced by his political rival Stephen A. Douglas to admit that: “while he opposed slavery he did not believe in social or political equality for blacks,” which is a similar stance as the abolitionists had. They disagreed with slavery, but at the same time were not able to propose a plan that would clearly say how should free Negroes assimilate into the society, so that all groups of people were satisfied. Even though such a proposal would be utopia, one could have at least tried to find the most applicable solution.⁵⁷

5.2 Southern expansion – Republicans’ main concern

As early as 1800 Southern westward expansion was gaining momentum. In the following decades the face of the South changed considerably. From eight original states, the South sprawled to fifteen by 1860 and the population multiplied greatly. Owing to this rapid growth, Northerners, in the meantime, became justly scared of further and further expansion, which became their nightmare, since the development of the West was a crucial issue to the future of North America.

Both the North and South correctly assumed that the sectional contest would be resolved by the new states established in the West. The North had to vigorously make first steps to prevent Southern entrance there otherwise it would be exceedingly arduous to dislodge them. Republicans saw the consequences of southern expansion ruinous enough to risk a civil war to prevent it; their motto was following: “If we do not exclude slavery from the Territories, it will exclude us.” Northerners would never migrate to a land where they would have to labor in close proximity with slaves and where labor was perceived as ignominious.⁵⁸

From these facts it is demonstrable that Republicans were not concerned about slavery due to its immorality and evilness. The main anxiety resided in the extension of slavery, which was a deadly threat not only for Republicans as a political party but also for all modernly thinking northern people. *The Trenton Gazette* maintained: “Their aim is to found a Southern Empire, which shall be composed of the Southern States, Mexico, Central America, and Cuba, of which the arch-conspirators are to be the rulers.”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ John Niven, *The Coming of the Civil War, 1837-1861* (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, 1990), 85.

⁵⁸ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1995), 57.

⁵⁹ Trenton Gazette, “The Thirty Years’ Conspiracy,” January 3, 1861, Reprinted in *Stampf, Kenneth M. The Causes of the Civil War* (New York: Touchstone, 1992), 28.

5.3 Inefficient and uneducated slaves – the expedient of slavery

Republicans did not accuse of underdevelopment the Negroes themselves, but the whole institution of slavery that deprived them of education and motivation that would make them more productive. According to Republicans, as long as slaves were uneducated, the institution itself was never able to equal them in terms of regional growth and prosperity.

Horace Greeley observed: “Enslave a man, ... and you destroy his ambition, his enterprise, his capacity. In the constitution of human nature, the desire of bettering one’s condition is the mainspring of effort.” That was the approach that most Northerners shared, but which was incompatible with southern way of thinking and therefore regarded as unattainable. On the other hand, Republicans added that even if the Negroes received proper education, they would never become as productive as free labors in the North due to the supposition that blacks were lazy and wasteful persons by nature.⁶⁰

It was believed that Southerners did not let them have education only because it might have cost a lot of money. This was not the motive at all. In fact, they left them uneducated on purpose. David M. Potter noted that southerners were convinced that “slaves should be illiterate, unskilled rural workers for tasks in which literacy would no increase their usefulness, but also because unskilled rural workers were limited in their access to unsupervised contacts with strangers, and because the illiterate could neither read seditious literature nor exchange surreptitious written communication.”⁶¹

5.4 Unequal northern approach to slavery

Before the outbreak of the Civil War the black population in the North was miniscule. Some historians say that it was only 2%. Despite this insignificant number when compared to the South, where 30% of all inhabitants counted for the Negroes, blacks were segregated. The only jobs they were offered, if they were offered any, were the lowest-paid menial ones. Moreover, they were perceived as ineligible to serve on juries, and sometimes they were even denied some civil rights. For instance, they were deprived of the right to vote. An English journalist wrote: “The truth is, the Negroes, slave and free,

⁶⁰ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1995), 46.

⁶¹ David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1977), 455.

are a race apart, in both North and South.” Most Northerners were indifferent to the plight of blacks in the North and the actual number of abolitionists was not large either.⁶²

In Kevin Eisert’s view: “If the emancipation of the Southern slaves had been stated as a Northern purpose for the war at its beginning, the Union war effort would probably never had gotten off the ground.” An overwhelming majority of Americans from the North were strongly opposed to the idea of the emancipation of 4 million Negroes migrating to their land, since it would result in competing for jobs and mixing with white society.⁶³

It is bizarre that despite the fact that in the nineteenth century slavery presented such a controversial social issue, an average Northerner had only a little interest in slaves since a large majority of Northerners hardly saw one during their lifetime. But, those Northerners who truly did occupy themselves with the question of slaves were those, namely wage workers and trade unionists who feared that if slavery had been abolished, they would have had to compete with freed blacks for jobs. On the other hand, Southerners, who did see a slave and wanted one as a possession, usually could not afford one.

Abolitionists were not united as most people now assume. Instead, were divided into three groups: religious leaders, newspaper editors and political leaders. According to this division, one is almost certain which group genuinely struggled for bettering slaves’ conditions and who, on the other hand, regarded abolitionism as a powerful means to accomplish goals not quite compatible with this antislavery movement, such as marketability or more votes in elections.

5.5 Consequence of the transportation revolution

In James L. Huston’s words, “As long as the United States was fragmented into small market areas these two regimes did not conflict, but the transportation revolution stitched market areas together, and no longer could the effects of slavery be confined to the South.” This was the dawning of a new era in which Northerners began to perceive slavery as a threat.⁶⁴

⁶² Eisert, Kevin. "Northwestern Attitude," *The War For State's Rights*, <http://civilwar.bluegrass.net/SlaveryAndEmancipation/northwesternattitude.html> (accessed January 20, 2010).

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ James L. Huston, “Property Rights in Slavery and the Coming of the Civil War,” *The Journal of Southern History*, (May, 1999), 251.

He also claimed that: “Direct economic competition between free labor and slave labor most antislavery proponents believed that slave labor would win,” and their anxiety was legitimate, because, universally, low-priced products are triumphant. At this point Northerners knew that they had to act quickly otherwise their national manufacturing market would head for disaster. Specifically, the transmission of the Southern labor system would have caused a depression of wages of free laborers, which the Northern economy could not allow to happen. That was the stern reality that they were so desperately afraid of, and consequently they felt compelled to restrain the power of slavery.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ James L. Huston, “Property Rights in Slavery and the Coming of the Civil War,” *The Journal of Southern History*, (May, 1999), 273.

6 ECONOMIC COMPARISON

Despite the Southerners' conviction of their economic superiority and indefinite profitability, evidence of wealth was lacking in comparison to the North where during a couple of decades the infrastructure improvements were many. It was not difficult to see where the profits had gone, but the South could not pride itself on such advanced infrastructure, nor on education. The towns were dilapidated; all the surroundings were becoming shabbier. Whilst stagnant how could the South have thought to preserve its power when the North grew increasingly rich and the proof of this was visible enough not to overlook? Southerners might have deluded themselves that they were happy and that they did not need all these advancements, or in contrast, they were perfectly aware of their state and therefore went all out of to expand in all cardinal points.

In order that the South enter the modern world, abolition was not the only needed step to take. Moreover, Republicans intended the South to adopt the northern way of life. The South felt more and more subordinated to the North, but Southerners also took advantage of Northern market when wearing Northern clothes, using Northern saddles, and reading Northern books. The North was unmistakably racing ahead of the South in economic development; the only bright spot the southern economy possessed was a staple, which was evidently slowly reaching its natural boundaries.

6.1 Expansion vs. natural decay

The issue of slavery is as well as the matter of inevitability viewed from two contrasting points of view. Revisionist historians insist that it would have been only a question of time until slavery disappeared since it had already reached its natural limits. However, Thomas N. Bonner proclaimed that they “never met head-on the problem of when, how, or especially why a profitable and useful institution like slavery would have begun to disappear of its own accord.”⁶⁶

Given that slavery was “as a decaying institution on the road to eventual extinction,” according to revisionists, why was not the North patient and willing to wait until this

⁶⁶ Thomas N. Bonner, “Civil War Historians and the ‘Needless War’ Doctrine,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, (Apr., 1956), 204.

prediction was fulfilled? No war would be necessary and a peaceful approach would be without doubt welcomed by both sections.⁶⁷

Southerners were convinced that slavery would have been profitable indefinitely, but no one knows whether it was a realistic idea or only an eager wish. James L. Huston maintained that: “The reign of King Cotton probably would not have lasted much beyond 1870. As the profit rate dropped, it is likely that slaveholders would have sought new uses for their depreciated property, and the likely direction was manufacturing, an area that already employed about 200,000 slaves,” which is a combination of two points of view over the fate of slavery. If the cotton industry indeed had commenced to decrease, it would not have been so complex a task of how to make use of Negroes’ presence, physical strength and inferiority. Still, the social system in pursuance of race control had to be preserved.⁶⁸

6.2 Expansion to Cuba

“Cuba must be ours in order to increase the number o slaveholding constituencies;” this decisive statement was made by President Polk. After acquiring New Mexico and California, Polk resolved to purchase Cuba and consequently make it another new state belonging to the Union. His objective was unequivocal, he wanted to expand in this island his political power and introduce slavery. It would be a powerful aide for the South and its political agenda, as Cuba would have approximately fourteen representatives in Congress.⁶⁹

However, this great plan did not have easily surmountable barriers. Firstly, it was Spain, its posture was definite: “sooner than sell Cuba, Spain ‘would prefer seeing it sunk in the ocean’.” Secondly, it was Congress that would hardly permit to purchase a territory inhabited by nearly half a million slaves. Nevertheless, the South was not ready to abandon their intention to become the leading power of the world since they had a manifest destiny to perform.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Thomas N. Bonner, “Civil War Historians and the ‘Needless War’ Doctrine,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, (Apr., 1956), 204.

⁶⁸ James L. Huston, “Property Rights in Slavery and the Coming of the Civil War,” *The Journal of Southern History*, (May, 1999), 275.

⁶⁹ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2003), 104.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

The Cuba annexation was not only President Polk's agenda, quite to the contrary, Presidents J.Q. Adams, T. Jefferson and also F. Pierce occupied themselves with this aim to the same degree; all of them expressed great interest in annexing this auspicious territory. It was not only presidents, but America in the nineteenth century had far more eminent expansionists.

In 1854, a document called Ostend Manifesto was written. Its task was to invent a rationale for the U.S. to buy Cuba from Spain and if Spain had refused, United States could have declared war to seize it. Even though it was never sanctioned by Northerners, it had a considerable effect since it manifested the boundless determination of Southern politicians to occupy this land.

The meaning of Cuban annexation was for Southerners immense. As immigration to the North led to its control of the House of Representatives, the South sought to maintain power in the Senate at all costs, but that was not the only reason for annexation. The admission would markedly strengthen the slaveholders' position, which was incessantly endangered by abolitionists in the North. As the importance of annexing Cuba was increasing, the South was set on overcoming any obstacles.

Nevertheless, the conditions for the South improved. The United States posed a substantial source of imports for Cuba and as time moved on America became its only important trading partner, which, as a result, diminished Spanish economic influence. Cubans became highly dependent on the States and their relationship and according to Louis A. Pérez "served to foster and facilitate the integration of the Cuban economy into the North American system. This presence and the growing importance of the North American connection worked powerfully to weaken Cuban political, economic, and cultural connections to Spain." If it had not been for the U.S. Civil War, the desire for Cuba might have led to a Spanish-American War and the subsequent long-desired Cuban annexation.⁷¹

6.3 Compromises

During the first half of the nineteenth century, most politicians were aware of the antagonistic differences and opinions both the North and South held, and therefore there

⁷¹ Louis A. Pérez, *Impressions of Cuba in the Nineteenth Century: The Travel Diary of Joseph J. Dimock (Latin American Silhouettes)* (Wilmington: SR Books, 1998), 13.

occurred efforts to arrive at compromise to prevent a clash. Usually, the institution of slavery – the most divisive issue - played an important part. The first significant compromise was the Missouri Compromise of 1820. A commotion concerning two new territories and their just division was the burning issue. The source of the problem in Congress was the dilemma over the request of Missouri to be recognized as a slave state. Angry Northerners wanted to forestall it, since the country would no longer be balanced in terms of representation in Congress. If Missouri had been admitted as a slave state, the South would have operated with eleven states, whereas the North would have had one fewer. What the Compromise of 1820 basically did, was, that Missouri became a slave state and keep a balance Maine was annexed as a free state. The North had a problem. It did not want Missouri to be a slave state due to the immorality of slavery, but the main concern was caused by the fear that the power in Congress would be minimized for them.

The Missouri Compromise was repealed by the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854. This remedy gave the inhabitants of these two states the right to choose whether they wanted the state to be slavery or free. But the fact of being free to choose made Northerners incensed. They were afraid that the margin in the Congress could have been big enough for slavery to perilously expand. This right to choose was introduced as Popular Sovereignty by Stephen A. Douglas. This policy, bringing slavery to the forefront of nation attention, created a stir. Ultimately, this compromise did not work either. It led to a tragic event called Bleeding Kansas, which revealed its shortcomings. Indisputably, Douglas' Popular Sovereignty was an effort to keep a balance between two utterly hostile parties, but because of the sectional animosities, but also due to South's greed, it was not going to work.

These were more attempts at conciliation, but regrettably, no policy of appeasement lasted long enough to avert the Civil War. More compromises would only have postponed a conflict, since it was an inexorable one.

CONCLUSION

The causes of the U.S. Civil War were many, including slavery and states' rights. But in particular, it was the antagonistic and irreconcilable stances taken by both the North and South that led directly to war. Each region had its own objectives, and neither of them was willing to abandon their world view.

The most divisive issue was unequivocally the peculiar institution. As such, questions concerning this institution, and its impact on the antebellum period are worth pursuing. A great number of scholarly works have been written on the subject but none are definitive. Indeed, the multicultural turn of recent decades has opened whole new avenues of research, lending credence to the postmodern viewpoint that truth is contingent and, although approachable, can never be fully reached.

In the 21st century it is really difficult to say with certainty what could have been done differently to avert the war and prevent the loss of so many lives. "Were history a laboratory science, one would design an experiment where various causes were added and subtracted to see which altered the outcome (war or peace) in a statistically significant fashion." Whatever results might emerge, however, would do so with the benefit of hindsight. Without this benefit, it is difficult to conceive of a chain of events leading to the avoidance of the war. In short, the war, although regrettable for many reasons, was probably inevitable.⁷²

War motives differed greatly. The South entered the war principally to defend slavery and its desired expansion, while the North's main motive for fighting was the creation of a powerful and slave-free Union, which could act as a global beacon of democracy.

The end of the U.S. Civil War brought about the abolition of slavery but did not markedly change the South: by the end of Reconstruction, whites were back on top of the social hierarchy and were once again in control of their own destinies, while blacks were still perceived as inferior and were most often treated without dignity. Even so, the nation remained indivisible, which was exactly for what the North had struggled, and this fact in itself allowed the American democratic experiment to continue unabated.

⁷² Gary J. Kornblith, "Rethinking the Coming of the Civil War: A Counterfactual Exercise," *The Journal of American History*, (Jun., 2003), 79.

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