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AP US History

The Inevitable Civil War

The Civil War was essentially inevitable. It was the result of the north and South’s stance on slavery, not state’s power over its own right versus the federal government. Ever since the invention of the cotton gin by Eli Whitney in 1793, the South had an utterly different economic and social path from the North. Although the North and the South tried to exist in harmony and reconcile their differences with political compromises in 1820 and 1850, both endeavors failed however. In the 1850’s, social and political activities and developments such as the political effects of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, The Fugitive Slave Act, “Bleeding Kansas”, John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry, and the Dred Scott court case started to further drive the two regions apart.

The Southern colonies were based on an agrarian culture, whereas the Northern colonies were mainly industrial. Agrarian is relating to agriculture and cultivating of crops, and industrial relating to machinery and factories. This was partly due to the different climates, population, and the type of land of which they had to farm. The warm climates in the southern colonies allowed its inhabitants to farm year round, while the Northern colonies only could farm in the summer. The north was not particularly reliable on farming and crops in their area due to the poor, rocky soil of which they lived on. They turned to other alternatives, such as fish, animals, and other natural resources which could be traded for the missing crops that they failed to farm on their own land. Since the Southern colonies had nutritious, fertile soil that also contributed to their ability to farm year-long. The South blossomed in the farming economic aspect by farming crops such as cotton, tobacco, indigo and selling them to the north or trades them in exchange for the manufacturing the North was doing at that particular time. The North was known for its manufacturing power, and they use that power to trade with the southern colonies, along with Great Britain.

The invention of the cotton gin was the leading cause of what led the Southern colonies to grow only cotton on their farms. Plantation owners practically abandoned all other crops to grow only cotton, in favor of the high profit that was gained by it. Due to the increase of the growing of cotton, which meant there would be an increase of labor. Where else would one get cheap, efficient laborers than the slaves which were brought in from Africa and the West Indies? The slave population grew significantly to tend the cotton fields, and the small plots of farmland soon grew into large plantations with as many as several hundred slaves. Since the entire Southern economy was beginning to become dependent on the cultivation of cotton, they also became more dependent on the slaves for labor. Northern colonies didn’t necessarily benefit from the slaves directly per se, they weren’t as tied to it in their economy as the southern colonies were.

At the start of the civil war, there were 34 states, 15 of which were slave states and 11 of which were slave states were the ones who seceded from the Union. The four that remained in the Union were the Border States Maryland, Missouri, Delaware, and Kentucky. Attempting to prevent the inevitable, the Union enacted a couple of compromises, which are referred to commonly as the Compromise of 1820 (Missouri Compromise) and the Compromise of 1850. The Missouri Compromise came to be when Missouri tried to come into the Union as a state and worried the north as it tip the equilibrium between the amounts of slave versus free states. Henry Clay, a leader in the house of representatives, presented a list of compromises which should be included agreement: admit Missouri as a slave state; admit Maine as a free state; prohibit slavery in the rest of the Louisiana Territory north of latitude 36 degrees 30’. Although it ended the sectional feelings on the slavery issue after 1820, it sparked feelings in Americans of nationalism on one hand and feelings of sectionalism on the other. The Compromise of 1850 came to as a result of the gold rush in California in 1849 and the influx of nearly 100,000 settlers into the land. Both California and New Mexico had issued constitutions as slave-free states in the United States, which was immediately allowed by President Taylor. This led to talk among Southern extremists that were planning to secede from the Union. By the time these radicals met up, Henry Clay once again had proposed yet another compromise for solving this political issue: Admit California as a free state; Divide the Mexican Cession into two territories and for them to be ruled by popular sovereignty; ban the slave trade in the District of Columbia but permit whites to hold slaves; adopt a new Fugitive Slave Law and enforce it rigorously. The compromise bought the Northerners some time and political power to keep the Union from secession. However, policies to be enacted from the compromise were leading sources of controversy throughout the two regions.

The Fugitive Slave Law was yet to bring anguish in both sides of the region’s societies. The law’s principal purpose was to track runaway slaves that had gone to the Northern free states, get them in captivity, and return them to their Southern owners. The enforcement of the new law in the North was reluctantly and sometimes forcibly resisted by those who were anti-slavery. The lack of the law being fully enforced also caused the Southerners anger that they were not getting their part of the compromise. The enhancement of this new law drove an ever-increasing void between the North and South.

Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois had developed a plan to build a railroad and to promote western settlement but needed Southern approval seeing as how it cut across central United States instead of a more southerly route. He created a bill that separated the Nebraska territory to two parts: Nebraska and Kansas and allowed each state to decide to be slave or free by popular sovereignty. Both of these territories were north of the 36 30 line that prohibited slavery past it in the Missouri Compromise. Northern Democrats had had cursed the bill as they viewed it as an appeal to Southern interests to expanding slavery. As a result of the two states to be decided by popular sovereignty, both sides of the slavery question quickly settled into the territory. Abolitionists viewed this as an important cause, so they created the New England Emigrant Aid Company in 1855. This Company paid for the traveling expenses of antislavery settlers to move to Kansas in an attempt to make the state free by majority. Killings and the desolation of buildings in Kansas led to the name “Bleeding Kansas” . As “bleeding Kansas” was getting bloodier and bloodier, the democratic was beginning to appear divided between its Southern and Northern factions.

As the blood and violence started spilling over to the U.S, Congress, Senator Charles Sumner verbally attacked the Democratic Association in a speech titled “The Crime Against Kansas,” with remarks against Senator Andrew Butler from South Carolina. Butler’s nephew, Preston Brooks, defended his uncle’s honor by beating Sumner over the head with his cane. Brooks had stated that Sumner was not worthy of a duel, but the cane was fit for the dog he was considered. The Sumner-Brooks event was yet another sign of growing passions for each beliefs and division of each other.

Increasing tension between the North and South over the slavery question was further increased by books called *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and *Impending Crisis of the South. Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was about the problem between an enslaved man named Tom and the slave owner Simon Legree. The Northerners and few Europeans who read it allowed them to view how cruel and inhuman they are to the slaves. The Southerners condemned the book and viewed it as just another attempt by the Northerners prejudice against the Southern way of life. The *Impending Crisis of the South* had attempted to attack slavery from a different point. The author, Hinton R. Helper, used statistics and charts to illustrate to other Southerners and to the rest of the Union that slavery in reality weakened the South’s economy. A growing number of Southerners were becoming convinced that through the use of antislavery literature that the North’s goal was to eradicate the institution of slavery and their way of life based on it.

In addition to the tension between the two regions, the case *Dred Scott v. Sandford* in 1857 worsened the matters. Scott had been a slave in Missouri who was then taken the free territory of Wisconsin where he had lived for a couple of years before moving back to Missouri. He had argued that since he was on free soil that he should be a free citizen and so therefore sued for his freedom in Missouri in 1846. It eventually reached the Supreme Court in 1857 and the Court had decided against Scott for the reasons: he had no right to sue in a federal court because the original framers of the constitution never intended for an African American to be a citizen; Congress didn’t have the power to take away the property of a person without the process of law so if slaves were a form of property, then Congress couldn’t exclude slavery from the territory; that the Missouri Compromise was unconstitutional because it excluded slavery from Wisconsin and other Northern Territories. The Supreme Court’s ruling had brought joy to Southern Democrats but infuriated the Northern Republicans. The result of this decision caused many Republicans to believe that the newly inaugurated president Buchanan and Democratic majority had planned the Dred Scott case decision to try and settle the slavery question after all. This also caused former Democrats to vote over to Republican. The prejudice of the two regions against each other would continue to keep growing.

John Brown, was the man who was provided money by Northern radicals to help the cause of making the South slave-free. In October 1859, he had led a band of his followers which included his four children and former slaves, and attacked the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry; hence the event commonly referred to as “*John Brown’s Raid at Harpers Ferry*”. His plan involved to take the weapons which he seized at the arsenal and arm Virginia's slaves to revolt against their oppressors. After only a two-day siege, Brown was captured by federal troops under the command of Robert E. Lee who were convicted of treason, convicted and then was hanged by the state of Virginia. Some moderates in the north had denied any such involvement in the raid against the South but the Southerners were still not convinced that by their words and event as far as to call blame to Abraham Lincoln for supporting Brown’s plan. Southerners saw the raid as the final proof of the North’s true intention, to use slave insurgencies to destroy the South. While Brown’s raid was viewed as partly what a madman would do, there was widespread admiration for his action. Some northerners admired his zeal and courage, he was turned into an instant martyr. Many newspapers in the north denounced Brown’s raid, however that is not what the south saw. Their newspapers had labeled all Northerners “John Brown sympathizers”.

There were attempts at keeping the Union from secession such as the Compromises of 1820 and 1850, but more pressing events/matters had happened such as “Bleeding Kansas,” *Uncle Tom’s Cabin, Dred Scott v. Stanton,* and the Fugitive Slave Act had continuously brought tension between the two regions and resentment. After John Brown’s raid, an increasing amount of Americans were beginning to understand their nation was at the brink of secession. The presidential election of 1860 would be a test if the Union could survive; the presidential chair won by Abraham Lincoln was the straw that broke the camel’s back. Soon after, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, and South Carolina decided to secede from the Union. Thus marking the creation of the Confederate States of America which other states would soon join and inevitably leading to the first battle between the Union and the Confederates at Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861.

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