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| Causes of the Civil War - A Northern Perspective It is true that the single, simple answer to the question "What caused the Civil War?" is slavery, but the causes of [The Civil War](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/The_Civil_War) are by no means simple, and saying slavery caused the Civil War is somewhat akin to saying the invention of the printing press caused the Enlightenment. While the two are inextricably tied together, and one probably would not have happened without the other, the invention of the printing press was not the only element that contributed to The Enlightenment. The same can be said about the Civil War. Without slavery, the divisions that split our nation probably would not have occurred, but slavery was not the only cause of the war. Lincoln himself distanced the country from the slavery issue, proclaiming "A House Divided..." in 1858. It was a theme he would repeat throughout his Presidency. Ultimately, these divisions began as our Nation was being created. The U. S. Constitution was a document hammered out by compromise - sometimes over slavery, sometimes over the right to bear arms, sometimes over the establishment of a state-sanctioned religion. Compromise, however, did not seem to be completely effective. Each interest group came away winning something and losing something. By 1820, Southerners had long ago given up on maintaining a majority in the House of Representatives. The growth of the industrialized North meant the distribution of seats in the House was in their favor. When the [Compromise of 1820](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Missouri_Compromise_%28Compromise_of_1820%29) was worked out [Missouri](http://blueandgraytrail.com/state/Missouri) entered the Union as a slave state and [Maine](http://blueandgraytrail.com/state/Maine) entered the Union as a free state preserving the balance of slave states to free states in the Senate. The preservation of the Union came at a price for Southerners. They were tacitly agreeing that the Senate had the right to make laws regarding slavery. As population in the North swelled, population in the South it remained stagnant. The Northern economy manufactured goods it wanted to sell abroad, but more importantly, at home. The South was a good market for these manufacturers. Flush with cash from the sale of cotton, the South represented a prime, albeit small market. Northern manufacturers wanted tariffs imposed on imported foreign goods that could be made in the United States to ensure that the South bought northern goods. The agrarian South demanded almost a "status quo" government which left them alone while dealing with other problems. Northerners looked to the government for help with immigration, population and competition. Frequently the two goals of the regions were at direct odds with each other. In 1824 the regionalism developing in the country finally struck Presidential politics. [John Quincy Adams](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/John_Quincy_Adams), [Andrew Jackson](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Andrew_Jackson), [Henry Clay](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Henry_Clay) and [George Crawford](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/George_Crawford) ran for President that year, the first time in 12 years that a Presidential candidate had serious opposition. Adams represented the North, Crawford the Deep South, Clay the mid-West and Jackson the developing region known as the West. In the [Election of 1824](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Election_of_1824) the regional rift was so deep that the the election ended up in the House of Representatives, where Adams won, at least according to Jackson's supporters, by making a "Corrupt Bargain" to gain the Presidency (Adams actually won because a major target of the Jackson campaign were the party regulars, who tipped the House of Representatives in Adams' favor). Four years later Jackson defeated Adams, starting the only two-term Presidency between the Compromise of 1820 and the Civil War. During Jackson's first term, the [Nullification Crisis](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Nullification_Crisis) began the first talk of secession in the South. Believing it had the right to "nullify" an act of Congress, [South Carolina](http://blueandgraytrail.com/state/South_Carolina) overturned the Tariff of 1832. Jackson warned the errant state that it had no such right and sent troops to Charleston to make certain the Tariff was collected. A crisis was averted when a compromise was reached in the Senate, courtesy of Henry Clay. Replacing Calhoun as Vice-President on the 1832 ballot was [Martin Van Buren](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Martin_Van_Buren). Elected President in 1836, by the time the [Election of 1840](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Election_of_1840) came around Democrat Van Buren had alienated large portions of the electorate. The [Panic of 1837](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Panic_of_1837) spawned the worst economic depression in United States history. Van Buren then used the panic/depression to institute banking changes that many viewed as ill-advised. Van Buren was blamed for the Panic of 1837 and faced stiff competition in the election of 1840 from William Henry Harrison, a Whig war hero. Harrison won the election of 1840, which also featured abolitionist [James Birney](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/James_Birney) running on the Liberty Party ticket. Since the Compromise of 1820 the abolitionist movement had been slowly gaining momentum and Birney managed to gather more than 6,000 votes. Still, abolitionist speakers frequently faced pro-slavery crowds at Northern engagements because people did not understand the plight of the slave. Many, especially the poor, viewed abolition in a negative light because freed slaves would be in competition for what few jobs were available to them. The first pro-abolition weekly publication, *Genius of Universal Emancipation* appeared shortly after the Compromise of 1820. David Walker's *Appeal*, probably the most radical of all abolitionist documents, was published in September, 1829. Walker was a free black who had been a slave. Other papers followed including Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator* and *North Star* by another former slave, [Frederick Douglass](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Frederick_Douglass). By the [Election of 1844](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Election_of_1844) Birney had expanded his pro-abolition vote to more than 80,000, in spite of his failure to campaign. Some scholars attribute this growth to the Second Great Awakening. John Tyler, who replaced Harrison after his untimely death a month after his inauguration, was kicked out of the Whig party for vetoing a national bank bill shortly after becoming president. Unable to lead a Whig ticket, the President without a party tried to form a third-party. Although unsuccessful, Tyler created the issue that defined this election: the Annexation of Texas as a slave state. Martin Van Buren, the leading Democratic candidate, was so out of step with the party that they turned to [James Polk](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/James_Polk), who wasn't officially running, on the ninth ballot. Polk won the general election, defeating perennial Whig loser Henry Clay. Over the next four years there would be a dramatic change in America. The entry of Texas as a slave state set off a string of protests throughout the North. Soon, Northern representatives united behind the [Wilmot Proviso](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Wilmot_Proviso), which outlawed slavery in any territory acquired from Mexico in the [Mexican American War](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Mexican_American_War). Suddenly, Democrats and Whigs were disregarding party lines and voting based on their region on questions regarding slavery. In the [Election of 1848](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Election_of_1848) Birney's abolitionist votes went to Martin Van Buren and the new Freesoil Party. Van Buren racked up more 10% of the national vote, which is astonishing since he wasn't on the ballot in the South. Slavery divided the two major parties along pro-slavery and "popular sovereignty" lines. Once again, the balance of power in the Senate became an issue with the proposed admittance of California as a free state in 1850. With the House of Representatives crossing party lines to vote pro-abolition, Southerners were deeply concerned about the balance of power in the Senate. Once again, Henry Clay, John Calhoun, Daniel Webster and others hammered out the [Compromise of 1850](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Compromise_of_1850), gaining the admittance of [California](http://blueandgraytrail.com/state/California) as a free state (for Northerners) while strengthening Fugitive Slave laws for Southerners. Although in the end the Southerners supported the compromise, 9 Deep South states held the [Nashville Convention](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Nashville_Convention_of_1850) to determine a course of action if the Compromised passed. It was the Nashville Convention that invigorated talk of secession in the South. Reaction in the North to the enhanced Fugitive Slave Laws saw the creation of the Underground Railroad, where middle and upper class white "conductors" and former slaves moved slaves north into Canada. In 1851 Harriet Beecher Stowe created a revolution with a revelation. Her novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a surprising success. First published as installments in a magazine, Stowe had done something all the abolitionist writers had failed to do -- *Uncle Tom's Cabin* brought the plight of slavery to the common man in terms they could understand. Even Abraham Lincoln understood the impact of Stowe's work: According to legend, he told her at a meeting in 1862 "So you're the little woman who wrote the book that started this Great War!" The [Election of 1852](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Election_of_1852) saw the self-destruction of the Whig Party with the election of Franklin Pierce to the White House. The party had failed to come up with a national platform that could attract both Northerners and Southerners and large-scale defections of its members into smaller, more well-defined parties such as the Constitution-Union, Freesoil, and American (Know-Nothings) Parties rang the death knell for the Whigs. The Democrats continued to wield their "popular sovereignty" carrot to both the North and the South. With the breakdown of the Whigs and the reduction of power of the slave states, almost everybody thought that the expansion of the United States would reach breakneck speed. Instead, it stalled because the South actively worked to limit expansion since it would mean more free states entering the Union, minimizing the impact of the pro-slave votes. Many bureaucrats were trying to push ahead with land sales, which were an important revenue source for the government. In 1854 the Democrats' "big tent" approach to politics began to tear. [Stephen Douglas](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Stephen_Douglas), chairman of the powerful Committee on Territories, introduced the [Kansas-Nebraska Act](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Kansas-Nebraska_Act) in the Senate. Douglas, from Illinois, wanted to ensure Chicago became the lucrative hub of railroads to the West. What he did, backed by the support of President [Franklin Pierce](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Franklin_Pierce), was create a small regional war that fueled deep divisions in the country over the next 6 years. Everybody simply assumed that Nebraska would be a free state and Kansas would be a slave state when they joined the Union. To ensure Kansas would be admitted as a slave state, slaveholders and "border ruffians" from Missouri moved across the border to "help" form a government. Anti-slavery societies in New England also moved in and American newspapers carried stories about "[Bleeding Kansas](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Bleeding_Kansas)." One of the immediate outcomes of Bleeding Kansas was the formation of the Republican Party. Although it would be correct to say that the Republican Party represented an amalgam of ex-Whigs and Freesoilers, the party incorporated many of the smaller groups that had sprung up over the years including the Liberty Party. A number of Republicans were disenchanted Democrats, unhappy with the concept of popular sovereignty. A key Republican plank was the abolition of slavery, but much of the campaign of 1856 centered on the conflict in Kansas, where popular sovereignty was proving to be a disaster. One reason Kansas was on everybody's tongue was the vicious attack on Charles Sumner following his "Crime Against Kansas" speech. One party whose supporters didn't join the Republicans, at least immediately, was the "Know-Nothings." In 1856 this anti-immigrant party, known as the American Party on the ballot, ran former Whig president [Millard Fillmore](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Millard_Fillmore) for President. He did surprisingly well in the South, drawing much of his support from pro-slavery Whigs who could not support the Republicans. John C. Fremont, the Republican candidate, did not run in the South but did well in the North as a vocal opponent of slavery. [James Buchanan](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/James_Buchanan) won the Democratic nomination for President in 1856. The balloting had not been as divisive as it had been in 1852-it only took 17 tries to select Buchanan, who benefited from a outsider image, won the nomination in spite of the fact that a sitting President was running (Pierce, from New Hampshire, had alienated many Northerners with a pro-Slavery stance and he had supported Douglas's disastrous Kansas-Nebraska Act). Opposing him was the strongest abolitionist to date, [John C. Fremont](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/John_C._Fremont). Buchanan won all but the northern tier of states, but was a minority President, garnering less than 50% of the popular vote. With little appreciation for the crisis that was developing in his midst, Buchanan sought to balance his cabinet between pro-slave and abolitionist politicians, which had become a "litmus test" of the era. One interesting selection was [Howell Cobb](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Howell_Cobb), a pro-Union and pro-slavery former Governor of Georgia as Secretary of Treasury. By the time of his resignation in [1861](http://blueandgraytrail.com/year/1861), Cobb had become a strident secessionist, a change being reflected throughout the South. The bitterness of the dispute over Kansas reached the floor of the Senate in 1856. Following his Crime Against Kansas speech, Massachusetts Senator [Charles Sumner](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Charles_Sumner) was attacked by South Carolina House of Representatives member [Preston Brooks](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Preston_Brooks) on the floor of the Senate. Using a light cane, Brooks brutally whipped Sumner. It would take three years for Sumner to recover. Pro-slavery "[fireeaters](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Fire-eaters)" antagonized abolitionist Northern Senators with talk of "disunion" and pretty soon the idea of compromise was on no one's mind. The effect of Bloody Kansas continued to infiltrated everyday society. Americans awoke to a society redefined by the Supreme Court on [March 7](http://blueandgraytrail.com/date/March_7), [1857](http://blueandgraytrail.com/year/1857). The day before the court ruled that [Dred Scott](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Dred_Scott_decision), a slave who had travelled extensively in the North) had no standing to sue John Sanford (his current owner) for his freedom. The impact of the decision was far-reaching. It stated that a black man who had lived in the North where slavery had been abolished was still a slave and not a person. The South triumphed the decision while the growing abolition movement in the North was repulsed. Many in the North now realized only the Republicans could effectively deal with question of slavery. Adding to the sectionalism, the [Panic of 1857](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Panic_of_1857) had a much wider effect on the industrialized North and the railroad-oriented West. In the North, warehouses began to pile up with unsold merchandise forcing across-the-board layoffs. Demands for an increase in protective tariffs continued to feed the sectionalism in Congress. In the West, over-expansion of the railroads caused many to collapse, taking with them tens of thousands of land speculators. The West wanted the government to support the failing railroads and banks. [Kansas](http://blueandgraytrail.com/state/Kansas)' problems continued to boil over as free-staters and pro-slave forces repeatedly battled over the question of popular sovereignty. At the start of 1858, Douglas and Buchanan began the rift that would ultimately split the Democratic Party when Buchanan accepted the pro-slavery Lecompton Constitution for Kansas statehood over the objections of Douglas. Buchanan yanked all of Douglas's patron jobs and Douglas Democrats sided with Republicans to block Buchanan's legislative agenda. During the [Lincoln-Douglas debates](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Lincoln-Douglas_debates) Douglas alienated many Southerners with remarks about slavery in territories (Freeport Doctrine). Although Douglas would win the Senatorial election, he would pay dearly for the remarks in 1860. Then in late 1859, the Kansas-Nebraska situation boiled over in the Eastern United States when [John Brown](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/John_Brown) and 21 men (5 black, 16 white) took over the federal arsenal at [Harper's Ferry](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Harper%27s_Ferry) in an attempt to forment a slave uprising. Those very words sent shivers up every slaveholder's spine. With 40% of the South now black, and with black/white ratios on larger plantations exceeding 10 to 1, the fear of a slave revolt was a serious concern. Now John Brown, who had attacked pro-slavery towns in Kansas, was holding an arsenal waiting for slaves to join him. Colonel [Robert E. Lee](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Robert_E._Lee) was chosen to put down the revolt. Brown would be tried and executed before the end of the year. [Election of 1860](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/The_Election_of_1860) saw Abraham Lincoln get elected when Northern and Southern Democrats splintered into three parties. Dating back to 1856, the chasm that had formed over slavery broke the Democratic Convention apart in 1860. The division was over Douglas's "popular sovereignty" that had failed so miserably in Kansas. The South refused to back Douglas, walking out of Democratic conventions in Charleston and Baltimore, and nominated Vice President John Breckenridge for President. Breckenridge sought to preserve slavery in the states (not just the South), ensure slavery as an option in the territories, and threatened secession if Lincoln was elected. He even called the Southern Democrats the Disunion Party. Breckenridge won most of the South. John Bell was a major slaveholder who was also pro-Union. Drawing from pro-slavery Whigs who could not join the Republicans and pro-Union Southern Democrats, Bell did well throughout the South but managed to win only in Tennessee and Kentucky. Douglas seemed to be oblivious that most people had dismissed his "popular sovereignty" concept. Majorities in the North and the South resented the idea because of the problems it had caused in Kansas. Abraham Lincoln touched the subject of slavery only briefly in his speeches and was always certain to point out that he did not intend to abolish slavery where it already existed. He pushed his Homestead Act and transcontinental everything to his constituents. With Lincoln's election, the Deep South seceded.  |  |

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| Causes of the War Between the States - A Southern Perspective For more than 40 years Southerners spoke of "disunion" over a variety of issues. By the time [Abraham Lincoln](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Abraham_Lincoln) was elected president a single issue, the rise of the abolitionists, became the focal point of Southerners. **Tariffs** Tariffs were permitted in the Constitution to allow the United States to generate revenue. The first act, the Tariff Act of 1789, did just that, fairly raising revenue through tariffs on imported goods. In the Tariff of 1816, however, the United States tariff structure changed from revenue producing to protectionist. These protectionist tariffs had been proposed by Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton back in 1789 but the concept was pretty much ignored. Hamilton's original reason was promote the industrialization of the North. Tariffs levied in 1816 were aimed at lucrative Southern markets. Many Northern politicians were looking at wealthy plantation owners and wanting to share that wealth with their constituents and tariffs were the means by which to accomplish this goal. Protectionist fervor, fanned by pre-1816 success creating industrial growth through the Embargo Act was somewhat muted by shippers and merchants who opposed tariffs, but in 1820 and 1824 the United States once again was trying to increase tariffs. The Tariff of 1828 precipitated the first secessionist crisis, in South Carolina in 1832. The battle pitted Vice-President [John C. Calhoun](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/John_C._Calhoun) against President Andy Jackson, ending with the [Nullification Crisis](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Nullification_Crisis). Luckily, another compromise was reached, courtesy of [Henry Clay](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Henry_Clay), and the crisis was avoided. Part of the compromise included a roll-back of tariffs to the 1816 levels over a 10-year period. When the period was up, however, the pro-Tariff Whigs decided to reapply them to pay for their "internal improvements." The only problem was these internal improvements benefited Northern shipping interests and Western land speculators and not the South. For example, lighthouses had always been state-owned and run. The Northern shipping magnates wanted more lighthouses in the South and when state governments said no, they simply nationalized existing lighthouses and began increasing the number with the tariffs. Tariffs are generally considered to be a "Lost Cause" of the Civil War, but the cited example is directly out of the Georgia Causes of Secession document. **Expansion of government powers** Thomas Jefferson knew as President he did not have the power within the Constitution to agree to buy Louisiana from the French, but he did it anyway. This single act set the stage for a major shift in the political power in the United States, away from the states and to the President and Congress. The South felt that the President and Congress only had powers specifically granted them in the Constitution, but northern and western interests wanted a government who would do more for them and favored expansion of these powers. Even the federal judiciary got in the act, extending its authority over the province of state courts, again reducing the power of the states (*Martin v. Hunter's Lessee* (1816) and *Cohens v. Virginia* (1821). Politicians, Northern and Southern, were generally labelled "strict constructionist" or "loose constructionist" based on their concept of how closely the Constitution should be followed in determining the power of the federal government. **State's Rights** "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" is directly from the Bill of Rights. Considered to be a "Lost Cause" advanced after the War Between the States, state's rights involved the decreasing power of the states and rights not granted the federal government being usurped. It is not a southern concept by any means. After the Embargo Act of 1807 and other legislation designed to reduce trade with England, the Northeast attacked the expansion of federal power. In the 1830's the western states wanted a central bank to control speculation and tried a state's rights argument to support their stand. In 1832 Georgia simply ignored the federal government when it stole the Cherokee Nation in spite of federal rulings preventing them from doing so (*Worcestor v. Georgia*). Andrew Jackson did nothing to force Georgia to obey the ruling of the court, granting Georgia state's rights. Of course, South Carolina used this argument in the early 1830's to justify nullification, which Jackson did oppose with federal troops. When state's rights arguments were proposed in the late 1840's in support of disunion, Congress responded with the Compromise of 1850. In the early 1850's states rights arguments faded, but by the end of the decade Southerners talking disunion were talking states rights, hardly the "Lost Cause" some want to make it out to be. The South got support from some unusual places: Wisconsin defended the sovereignty of the state in 1859, albeit over sentences imposed under the fugitive slave law. **Sectional differences** Sectional differences divided the North and South from the time the Constitution was signed. As America expanded a third section developed, the West, with their own needs from the federal government. It would take ten years of fear and hatred (1850-1860) for the Southern sectionalism to expand into Southern nationalism. **Finance** One of the first needs of the West was a strong central bank, so it seems unusual that [Andy Jackson](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Andrew_Jackson), the first President from the West killed the idea in 1832. The West wanted expansion and associated growth and they viewed the central bank as being important to controlling inflation brought on by growth, curtailing speculation, and creating available funds for loans. Andrew Jackson, whose legendary speculation included the sale of Cherokee and Creek lands to settlers, was strongly against a central bank. The death of the bank in 1832 and subsequent actions by Jackson and the government created the [Panic of 1837](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Panic_of_1837) and the associated depression. The Whig Party rode the depression to National prominence, gaining the White House from [Martin Van Buren](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Martin_Van_Buren), Jackson's hand-picked successor. As the depression ended, the South's sale of cotton began an unbelievable growth spurt that continued to the Civil War. Even the [Panic of 1857](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Panic_of_1857) did not slow the growth in cotton markets. The disparity of wealth between the North/West and the South caused further backlash and fueled the rise of the abolitionists. **Issue Alliances** When it came to questions revolving around abolition, the South would normally vote as a bloc, joined by some northern Senators and Congressmen. By 1850, though, the abolition movement had become so powerful in the northeast that they, too, began to vote as a bloc, ignoring party lines. In the 1850's the abolition movement gained strength, continuing to fracture the United States. In addition to voting as a bloc against abolitionist issues, the South began voting together on issues regarding the expansion of federal powers. They saw the expanding government as problematic while both the North and the West supported a larger government, especially one that could be paid for by tariffs on the South. **Westward Expansion** The concept of expanding the United States from "sea to shining sea" divided the South in the 1840's. Mississippi's Henry Foote and Louisiana's Solomon Downs strongly supported the concept while Whigs led by Alexander Stephens opposed adding territory, especially that taken in the Mexican-American War. With the admission of California in the Compromise of 1850, the issue of territorial expansion had become moot. It was replaced by the bitter argument over whether the states would be added as slave states or free states. **Presidential Turmoil** Under James Monroe the country functioned as a single political unit known as the Democratic-Republican Party. The political turmoil began to arise following the end of Monroe's second term. Four contenders, Jackson (West), John Quincy Adams (North), George Crawford (Deep South) and Henry Clay (sometimes portrayed as an Upper South candidate, Clay was closely aligned with the West) vied to become President. Jackson pulled the highest vote total and the largest number of electoral votes, but not a majority. The election was thrown to the House where Adams made a "Corrupt Bargain" with Clay to gain control of the White House. The next election saw Jackson combine the West and the South to be elected. The Presidential turmoil really began in 1836, with the ascension of Martin Van Buren to the Presidency. Because of the Panic of 1837 and the resulting depression, Van Buren was unelectable in 1840. Whig war hero William Henry Harrison won the election, but died after catching pneumonia a month after his inauguration. His Ohio background was offset by statements that he did not like anti-slavery agitation and by the presence of pro-slavery Virginian John Tyler as Vice-president. When Tyler assumed the Presidency it was just that, an assumption. The Constitution did not spell out what would happen if the President died, so Tyler merely had himself inaugurated. Tyler drew the wrath of the Whig Party when he vetoed the act creating a national bank. James Polk, drafted by the Democrats in 1844 was not a candidate but accepted the Presidential nomination. In 1848 he refused to seek a second term. Just like Harrison, Zachery Taylor had been aggressively pursuing the Presidency. [Millard Fillmore](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Millard_Fillmore), his Vice-president, rose to the Presidency in 1850 and signed the [Compromise of 1850](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Compromise_of_1850), something Taylor refused to do. Like Tyler, Fillmore was rebuked when he ran for President. [Franklin Pierce](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Franklin_Pierce) easily defeated Whig [Winfield Scott](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Winfield_Scott) and sent the fading Whig Party into a tailspin. Pierce was viewed as unelectable in 1856 because of his support of the [Kansas-Nebraska Act](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Kansas-Nebraska_Act), the ongoing war in Kansas, and his support of the pro-slavery Lecompton Constitution, so the Democrats elected [James Buchanan](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/James_Buchanan), a minority President. With Abraham Lincoln's election in 1860 the South had seen 9 presidents in 24 years with no second terms for any man. As each term came to an end the voting public was more unhappy than it was four years before and candidates were forced to sidestep the divisive issues dividing the country. **Political Turmoil** In addition to turmoil over the presidential campaigns there was significant turmoil in the political landscape. James Monroe's "Era of Good Feelings" ended with the Election of 1824 and the election of John Quincy Adams as President. In response to the anti-Jackson feelings of 1828 the Whig Party formed, opposing both Jackson and the modern Democratic Party. As the Whigs faded from power in the early 1850's they splintered into factional groups, mostly single issue parties. One, the Freesoil Party, was based on a strong belief in abolition. Another, the "Know-Nothings," believed the problems of America were in her acceptance of foreigners. By combining the Northern Whigs with the Freesoilers, the Republican Party blossomed from a single-issue party into a full-fledged movement, a key plank of which was abolition. **Regional conflicts** **The Mexican-American War** Mr. Polk's War with Mexico was a thinly disguised land-grab. Democrats were interested in expanding the nation under the recently proposed concept of Manifest Destiny. In and of itself, little happened during the war that could be considered a cause of the American Civil War, however, two things that happened in the United States because of this war are causes of the Civil War. The United States gained California and it entered the U. S. as a free state in The Compromise of 1850. The first of many attempts to restrict slavery in territories grew out of the Mexican-American War. The Wilmot Proviso was introduced (and passed) by the U. S. House of Representatives, but defeated in the U. S. Senate. **Texas boundary dispute with New Mexico** Texas claimed a significant part of the New Mexico territory in 1850. When a constitutional convention in New Mexico drew up an document that excluded slavery from the territory in May, 1850, the Texans had a serious problem with it. They began pushing its claim to the eastern third of the territory. President [Zachary Taylor](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Zachary_Taylor) received a delegation of Southern Whigs who had rallied around the Texas. When Alexander Stephens raised the question of impeachment, Taylor responded with a threat to hang rebels as he had hung "spies and deserter in Mexico." Washington remained concerned that this conflict could be the start of a bigger war until the Compromise of 1850 was passed. Although this conflict decreased following the [Compromise of 1850](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Compromise_of_1850), early in [The Civil War](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/The_Civil_War) Texas Rebels tried to take back some of New Mexico until being turned back at the battle of Glorietta. **Bleeding Kansas** Some historians view the Civil War as a war created by the "boiling over" of the fighting in Kansas. Created as a territory in the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, this was the test of the Democrats "popular sovereignty" platform and was a dismal failure. Proposed by Stephen Douglas, this gave the territory the power to choose whether it entered the United States as a slave or free state. Pro-slave voters, mostly from Missouri, poured into the state but were offset by freesoilers from New England. The result was total confusion, four different constitutions, one of which fractured the relationship between Buchanan and Douglas in 1858. This division was a portent of the divisive [Democrat Convention of 1860](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Democrat_Convention_of_1860). In 1859, [Bleeding Kansas](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Bleeding_Kansas) was carried east by abolitionist John Brown when he took the federal arsenal at [Harper's Ferry](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Harper%27s_Ferry), then in Virginia. Word spread quickly not just of the raid, but of his hoped for slave revolt and his desire to arm the slaves. [**Utah War**](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Utah_War) Mormons had tried to settle in a number of western states but eventually gave and moved to land nobody wanted - Utah. Brigham Young used an intriguing argument combining religious freedom and his own views on the power of the federal government to justify forming an independent nation and raising his own army. Afraid that southern states might intepret this as being a precedent for secession, Buchanan ordered [Sidney Johnston](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Albert_Sidney_Johnston) to the Utah Territory to quell the rebellion **Rise of Abolition** Most people believe that the South was uniform in its support of slavery. A better way to look at it would be to divide the South at the fall line (an artificial line drawn at the navigable end of major rivers, normally at a waterfall). Those above the fall line could normally be considered to be part of two groups, those who tolerated slavery and those opposed to slavery. Below the fall line the South was typically pro-slavery. The only exception was in large cities above the fall line, where coastal Southerners had migrated with their slaves. When the Civil War broke out, Abraham Lincoln tried to take advantage of this knowledge, but it was much more difficult than anticipated. The concept of abolition was introduced by the Quakers about 1760. Vermont became the first state to abolish slavery in its Constitution of 1777, then came Massachusetts and Pennsylvania in 1780, New Hampshire in 1783, Rhode Island and Connecticut in 1784, Northwest Territories in 1787, New York in 1799, and New Jersey in 1804. Gradual emancipation and colonization were the most popular plans to end slavery. In 1830 immediate abolition began a rise in popularity that would not abate until the War Between the States. Fueled by abolitionist newspapers such as William Lloyd Garrision's *The Liberator*, the concept of immediate abolition was adopted by gradual emancipationists and colonizationalists alike. Societies, first in New England, but then spreading throughout the northern tier of states, supported the views of the abolitionists. The passage of the [Wilmot Proviso](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Wilmot_Proviso) in the House was the first sign of doom for the Union. Southerners, though, still had a majority in the Senate until Whig President Zachary Taylor, under the guidance of [William Seward](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/William_Seward), an outspoken abolitionist, advocated the admittance of California as a free state in 1849. Calls came up for a secessionist conference in Nashville from Mississippi. Old southern nationalist [John C. Calhoun](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/John_C._Calhoun) had organized the convention but convinced Mississippi to call for it so his name would not be associated with the convention. During the winter of 1849-50 the Deep South agreed to send delegates to the convention to discuss options if California tipped the free state-slave state balance. It was the threat of the convention that brought [Henry Clay](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Henry_Clay) to the floor of the Senate in January, 1850 with his Compromise of 1850. By the time the convention was called into session, John C. Calhoun was dead and the [Compromise of 1850](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Compromise_of_1850) appeared to be on a somewhat shaky road to passage. Southerners appeared to be placated, at least until the Kansas Wars ("[Bleeding Kansas](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Bleeding_Kansas)"). The regional war in the mid-west strengthened the abolitionists who formed the Republican Party. During the Election of 1856, their candidate, [John C. Fremont](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/John_C._Fremont), nearly won the Presidency. If it was not clear to Southerners then, the mid-term election sweep of the Republicans proved that the abolitionists were politically strong enough to end slavery. During the Lincoln-Douglas debates, [Abraham Lincoln](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Abraham_Lincoln) had gotten [Stephen Douglas](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Stephen_Douglas) to admit that a portion of his "popular sovereignty" idea was illegal. This alienated most of the South, which walked out of the Democratic Convention when Stephen Douglas seemed to be the party's nominee. Since the Whig Party was gone, split in two by the defection of Northern Whigs to the Republican Party, Southern Democrats tried to unite behind [John Breckinridge](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/John_Breckinridge) while Constitutional-Unionists supported John Bell from Tennessee. Abraham Lincoln, an abolitionist running on a moderate platform won [The Election of 1860](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/The_Election_of_1860) with less than 40% of the popular vote. South Carolina would not wait for the other southern states to meet and seceded that December. Four months later [The Civil War](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/The_Civil_War) began when the Confederate Army fired on [Fort Sumter](http://blueandgraytrail.com/event/Fort_Sumter), claiming the federal land was theirs under the policy of eminent domain.  |  |
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