

A Confederate Perspective on the Causes of the War Between the States

(How False history is taught through selective presentation and omission of information)

What You're Taught about the "Civil War"

- The Union government and armies invaded the South to put an end to slavery
- The Southern states and Indian tribes that seceded from the union did so to protect and defend the institution of slavery (for this to be true the union would have had to pose an significant threat to slavery)
- Abraham Lincoln was an abolitionists and civil rights leader who was constrained by the politics of his day
- Regardless of the motive, secession was an unconstitutional act or treason
- "States Rights" was simply a diversionary argument to mask the true intent of secession which was slavery

Why War? Did the North Invade to End Slavery ?

- Abolitionism and Racism in the North
 - Less than 2% of Northern adult population were active abolitionists
 - Generally of a social class that doesn't fight wars
 - Frequently favored expulsion / removal as opposed to equality
 - Northern States generally had oppressive “Black Codes” denying Black citizens of virtually all civil rights
 - Underground Railroad ended in Canada not northern states for this reason
 - See Illinois Black Code for details – forerunner to Jim Crow laws
 - Several large slave states remained in the union
 - Fugitive Slave Act vigorously enforced through out the war
- North offered Constitutional Guarantee to protect Slavery everywhere it already existed
 - Corwin Amendment (original version of 13th amendment) passed with no southern states giving indefinite constitutional protection to slavery
 - At Hampton Rhoades peace conference shortly before the end of the war the union vaguely offered to resend final version of 13th Amendment and emancipation Proclamation

Why War? Did the North Invade to End Slavery (cont.)

- The Union Army
 - Those who documented the reason for their involvement overwhelmingly cited preservation of the union
 - Most believe the Union Army to be over 90% volunteer
 - Abolitionist percentage wouldn't exceed that of population (2% max - probably much less)
 - Some abolitionists joined from religious colleges most notably Hillsdale.
 - 20% to 25% were northern European immigrants (mainly German) offered land and citizenship for service
- Other Motives
 - 75% to 95% of federal tax revenues came from tariffs paid primarily by the South
 - the South only represented about 33% of the nation's population
 - Federal government spending principally benefitted the northeast industrial interests
 - Morrill tariff was major 1860 campaign issue
 - The need for tariff revenue was openly acknowledged at the time
 - "There will be no invasion except to collect taxes." A. Lincoln 1st inaugural
 - When asked "Why not let the South go", Lincoln responded "I can't let them go. Who would pay for the government?"
 - Two weeks after Sumter Lincoln ordered a blockade of the South claiming tariff collection as his only motive.
 - So the case stands, and under all the passion of the parties and the cries of battle lie the two chief moving causes of the struggle. Union means so many millions a year lost to the South; secession means the loss of the same millions to the North. The love of money is the root of this as of many other evils ... the quarrel between North and South is, as it stands, solely a fiscal quarrel.
Charles Dickens, as editor of All the Year Round, British periodical in 1862

Why War? Did the North Invade to End Slavery (cont.)

- Northern Newspaper Editorials initially strongly favored and even assumed the secessionist states would simply be allowed to leave
 - In December of 1860 and January of 1861, many newspapers across the North and Midwest simply wanted to “let the South go in peace.” But the bankers, railroads and shippers soon informed the press of the financial implications of Southern independence.
 - “The day before Sumter was surrendered two-thirds of the newspapers in the North opposed coercion in any shape or form, and sympathized with the South. These papers were the South's allies and champions. Three-fifths of the entire American people sympathized with the South. Over 200,000 voters opposed coercion, and believed the South had the right to secede. Think of this, men of America! Think how easy it is for an American President elected to serve and carry out the will of the people; how easy it is to make himself the master of the people, and force them to do his will, contrary to their own.” Greeley’s New York Tribune April 15, 1861
 - The editorial tune changed dramatically in February and March of 1861 to “No, we must NOT let the South go,” and “what about our shipping?” and “what about our revenue?” As the New York Times noted on March 30th, “We were divided and confused until our pockets were touched.” [See Northern Editorials on Secession, Howard C. Perkins, ed., 1965]
 - Note: When Habeas Corpus some news paper editors were jailed which was also a factor.
 - The Chicago Daily Times expressed the prevailing sentiment of the north in an editorial dated March 2nd 1861 and titled “WHAT SHALL WE DO FOR REVENUE.”
 - “That either the revenue from duties must be collected in the ports of the rebel states or the port must be closed to importations from abroad is generally admitted. If NEITHER of these things be done, our revenue laws are substantially repealed; THE SOURCES WHICH SUPPLY OUR TREASURY WILL BE DRIED UP; there shall be no money to carry on the government; the nation will become bankrupt before the next crop of corn is ripe. There will be nothing to furnish means of subsistence to the army; nothing to keep our Navy afloat; nothing to pay the salaries of the public officers; the present order of things must come to a dead stop.”
 - Charles O'Connor, a New York politician, was quoted in the February 19, 1861 edition of the Union Democrat Newspaper (Manchester, New Hampshire) as saying:
 - The Southern Confederacy will not employ our ships or buy our goods. What is our shipping without it? Literally nothing... it is very clear that the South gains by this process and we lose. No...we must not let the South go.”

Why did the South Secede ?

- The Confederacy consisted of 12 states and several Indian Tribes. The reasons and timing weren't common.
 - The first seven states seceded immediately following Lincoln's election
 - The remaining states of the upper south voted to leave only after being called on to provide troops to invade the original seven states
- If the objective was simply to preserve slavery, they could have accepted the original 13th amendment and effectively won without firing a shot.
 - At Hampton Rhodes late in the war, the union indirectly offered to resend the final version of the 13th amendment ending slavery – the confederacy wasn't interested
- Slave vs. Free State Controversy was more political than philosophical
 - Several slave states economically didn't support slavery
 - In 1856 there were 55 reported slaves in Kansas and by 1860 there were only two. In the Arizona territory, which includes parts of present day Arizona and New Mexico, there were less than 20.
 - Every time a state was admitted into the Union as a "free state" it meant two more Senators and based on population a number of Congressmen for the North. With 19 Free states and only 15 Slave states, the South was in a precarious situation politically.
 - Lincoln's statements opposing the expansion of slavery to new states were entirely pragmatic and lacked any moral content
 - "The whole nation is interested that the best use shall be made of these territories. We want them for homes of free white people" A. Lincoln

Why did the South Secede ? (cont,)

- Southern states had strong economic motives to leave the union
 - Doctrine of States Rights, Jefferson Davis , published May 1890
 - “Mr. Benton, a statesman of long experience and close observation, and not particularly friendly to the South. He says Under Federal legislation the exports of the South have been the basis of the Federal revenue. He names four Southern States as contributing three-fourths of the annual expense of the Federal Government, and adds: “Of this great sum annually furnished by them, nothing, or next to nothing, is returned to them in the shape of government expenditures. That expenditure flows in an opposite direction—it flows northwardly in one uniform, uninterrupted, and perennial stream. This is the reason why wealth disappears from the South and rises up from the North. Federal legislation does all this. . . . No tariff has ever yet included Virginia, the two Carolinas, and Georgia, except to increase the burdens imposed upon them.”
 - Many in the leadership of the confederacy saw secession as the de facto end of slavery
 - Jefferson Davis said himself that, “secession would mean the end of slavery,” mechanization was on the accent; while slavery was extremely expensive and high maintenance.
- The Confederate Armies
 - Less than 2% owned slaves and app. 20% were associated with slavery through family
 - Those who documented the reasons for their involvement typically sited “states rights” or preservation of Jeffersonian anti-federalist concept of government.
 - Confederate armies were ethnically diverse relative to Union
 - App. 10K Jews (not allowed in Union Army), tens of thousands of Hispanics and American Indians (Cherokee were by far the largest tribe), mixed race Creoles from Gulf Coast, and significant number of black combat soldiers (most common estimate app. 13K)
 - Most simply fought in defense of their land and families
 - Noted Civil War historian Shelby Foote frequently referred to a story where a Union officer asked a low ranking confederate prisoner why he was fighting and he said “Sir, because you are here”. For most confederate soldiers that would largely sum things up.

Confederate Soldier's Last Letter Home from Gettysburg

“My lovely wife. I do miss you and the life we have there on the small plot of land God has given us. More and more it seems that my thoughts are drifting back there to reside with you. Yet as badly as I desire to be back home, it is for home for which I deem it best for my presence here with the other men. The proclamation by the Lincoln administration six months prior may appear noble. Were I here in these conditions, simply to keep another man in bondage, I would most certainly walk away into the night and return to you. God knows my heart and the hearts of others here amongst me. We know what is at stake here, and the true reason for this contest that requires the spilling of the blood of fellow citizens. Our collective fear is nearly universal. This war, if it is lost, will see ripples carry forward for five, six, seven, or more generations. I scruple not to believe, as do others, that the very nature of this country will be forever dispirited. That one day, our great grandchildren will be bridled with a federal bit, that will deem how and if they may apply the gospel of Christ to themselves, their families, and their communities. Whether or not the land of their forefathers may be deceitfully taken from them through taxation and coercion. A day where only the interests of the northern wealthy will be shouldered by the broken and destitute bodies of the southern poor. This my darling wife, is what keeps me here in the arena of destruction and death.

Published in Charlottesville newspaper provided by his grandson Jefferson Smith

The writer died four days later

This also reflects a concern in writings of confederate soldiers and officers starting in about 1863 that future generations would be taught they fought in defense of slavery should the union prevail

Lincoln's attitudes towards Slavery and Race

- Lincoln is generally portrayed as an abolitionist and even a civil rights figure
- His commentary on slavery is ambiguous depending frequently on who he was speaking to.
 - From text of Lincoln/Douglas debates it's hard to differentiate the two candidates
 - Many cited quotes favorable to the President were written well after he was dead by people who didn't have any first or second hand contact with him
- Lincoln's views on Black colonization are most problematic to his legacy
 - American Colonization Society
 - Founded in the 1830's to advocate relocating Blacks (free and slave) to Africa (generally Liberia)
 - Lincoln mentor Henry Clay was a prominent leader of this group
 - Initial motives of the group are questionable but as it evolved the intent was in no way charitable and was highly bigoted
 - Lincoln was the leader of this group in the state of Illinois
 - During his presidency, Lincoln was the chief advocate of these views
 - Directly addressed in numerous policy speeches
 - He attempted to create a colony in central America that failed
 - Was included in drafts of the emancipation proclamation
 - Reaffirmed his position three days prior to his death (idea that his views evolved is wrong)

Secession and the Constitution

- In the early 1800's New England states threatened to secede and largely didn't participate in the War of 1812.
- Mass. threatened to secede when Texas was admitted to the Union in 1845
 - The terms under which Texas was admitted were very favorable because not admitting Texas would have effectively collapsed the tariff based revenue system.
- When the first seven states seceded after Lincoln's election an amendment was proposed to ban secession (why would it be needed?)
- Prior to the war no documented legal opinion every contested secession
 - "Any people, anywhere, being inclined and having the power, have the right to rise up and shake off the existing government, and form a new one that suits them better. This is a most valuable, a most sacred right, a right which we hope and believe is to liberate the world?" Abraham Lincoln – U.S. Congress, 1847
- After the failed war of secession, Jefferson Davis and other confederate figures wanted to be tried
 - Legal opinions uniformly indicated they would be acquitted and vindicated
 - This would establish they were legally right in the first place
 - None were ever tried and all were released

Is State's Rights an Honest Argument

- From the outset of the country there were two distinct views on role of the federal government.
 - Federalists led by Hamilton wanted strong central government and tended to favor a larger role for government in society
 - Anti-Federalists led by Jefferson saw the federal government as a voluntary coalition of sovereign states and sought to specifically limit the role of a federal government
 - Bill of Rights represented anti-federalist concerns and made US representative government distinctly different from other western democracies
- Nullification vs. Supremacy
 - Nullification holds that state's can determine constitutionality of federal laws
 - Supremacy holds that federal government ultimately determines constitutionality of federal laws related federal authority (i.e. federal agency reach)
 - Courts have generally upheld supremacy but precedents are relatively few
 - Closest case to Civil War was Wisconsin's resolution not to uphold Fugitive Slave Act which was held unconstitutional based on doctrine of Federal Supremacy
 - Debate is still very relevant today
 - State Defense of Religion acts
 - State resolutions not to enforce Gun control measures deemed to violate the constitution by the states
 - Nullification and Secession and very closely linked concepts