

The US Civil War lasted from 1861 to 1865 and led to over 618,000 casualties. Its causes can be traced back to tensions that formed early in the nation's history. Following are the top five causes that led to the "War Between the States."

1. Economic and social differences between the North and the South.

With Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin in 1793, cotton became very profitable. This machine was able to reduce the time it took to separate seeds from the cotton. However, at the same time the increase in the number of plantations willing to move from other crops to cotton meant the greater need for a large amount of cheap labor, i.e. slaves. The South was based on the plantation system while the North was focused on city life. This change in the North meant that society evolved as people of different cultures and classes had to work together. On the other hand, the South continued to hold onto an antiquated social order.

2. States versus federal rights.

The Three-Fifths Compromise gave a disproportionate representation of slave states in the House of Representatives relative to the voters in Free states until the American Civil War. In 1793, for example, Southern slave states had 47 of the 105 members but would have had 33, had seats been assigned based on free populations. In 1812, slave states had 76 out of 143 instead of the 59 they would have had; in 1833, 98 out of 240 instead of 73. As a result, Southern states had disproportionate influence on the presidency, the speakership of the House, and the Supreme Court in the period prior to the Civil War.[9] Along with this must be considered the number of slave and free states, which remained mostly equal until 1850, safeguarding the Southern bloc in the Senate as well as Electoral College votes.

3. Growth of the Abolition Movement.

Increasingly, the northerners became more polarized against slavery. Sympathies began to grow for abolitionists and against slavery and slaveholders. This occurred especially after some major events including: the publishing of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, the Dred Scott Case, John Brown's Raid, and the passage of the fugitive slave act that held individuals responsible for harboring fugitive slaves even if they were located in non-slave states.

4. The election of Abraham Lincoln.

Even though things were already coming to a head, when Lincoln was elected in 1860, South Carolina issued its "Declaration of the Causes of Secession." They believed that Lincoln was anti-slavery and in favor of Northern interests. Before Lincoln was even president, seven states had seceded from the Union: South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas.