

Part I:
The Slide into Disunity; 1776 – 1859
The Slippery Slope to War

By Arley McCormick

Building a democracy is hard.

A significant event at a specific date satisfies to define when war starts. The challenge is accurately defining the reason. Reasonable people didn't wake up one morning and decide to start the "War Between the States." As the historian Stephen E. Ambrose once wrote, "if it weren't for the African, we would not have had a Civil War." Or words to that effect. Let's begin there.

Slavery is an institution that preceded the colonization of North America by centuries. Every continent, save Antarctica perhaps, embraced an aspect of slavery. In North America, Native American tribes were known to enslave members of other tribes and in 1619 Africans were introduced to the colonies. Initially, they worked as domestic servants and laborers and were recognizable and a part of the Colonial culture in both the northern and southern colonies.

Hector St. Jean de Crèvecoeur, a French writer that migrated to Colonial North America and married a local woman, recorded his perspective on North America's colonies. His thoughts would be considered utopian today. He minimized the divide between the rich and the poor, paid tribute to mild government, respect for the law, uniformity in living conditions, peaceful cohabitation among all the nationalities originating from Europe, and cheered the opportunity to prosper through your own labor. He spoke nothing regarding the Africans' condition.

Society is a description of how human relationships are formed, maintained and survive in a group. Its place in the academic world evolved as a discipline in the 18th Century when a combination of seemingly disconnected events occurred; the philosophy of Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and industrialization.

North American society was an amalgamation of European cultures that developed through a combination of shared experience, belief in a common set of unobtrusive laws, and a need for collective defense, initially against the Native Americans but also the French, English, and Spanish. An identity evolved based upon living independent of unwanted authority, earning your own way, and helping your neighbor. An individual's worth was based upon character, skill, and work ethic, not a rank or an economic station in life.

The noble character of the American society described by Hector St. Jean de Crèvecoeur reads well for a liberal experiment but the new society also incorporated all of the aspects of human behavior considered normal at the time. It propelled those with a higher economic station toward governing in some capacity or at least influencing those around them and the African slave was not considered; he had no voice, no vote, and could only be counted as present.

The generations that experienced the American life style found less and less comfort or faith in the King, any King, until politically it became us, the Americans, against them, the King, his agents and American born supporters of

the King; Tories. The American political perspective was divided into two basic categories; one perspective believing in a strong central government and the other believed each colony/state needed minimal interference from a central government (supports the argument regarding “states’ rights”). Organized political parties did not exist and the first government was a Confederation of the willing harboring little interest in paying for a strong central government.

The authors of the Constitution accommodate slavery to achieve the objective of forming a government.

The constitution was adopted by authors that accommodated and/or agreed to disagree without influence from an organized political entity. They were fearful of such factions i.e., political parties, believing they would wield too much influence over governance. But, as the limitations of a Confederation of States began to materialize, political organizations formed and their influence grew. Men gravitated toward a Federalist camp, supporting a strong central government, or a Jeffersonian camp of Democratic-Republicans, delegating governance, as a right, to each state.

The American perspective was influenced by a number of factors. Religion was one and the Enlightenment Age (age of reason) another. The Great Awakening (religious revitalization

The contrasting political perspectives respected and valued the rights of each state.

of the 1730’s and 40’s) was well established at the start of the Revolution. The largest denominations were Congregationalists, Anglicans (after the Revolution were known as Episcopalians), and Quakers. But by 1800, Evangelical Methodism and Baptists grew more quickly. And, the core ideas associated with the Enlightenment Age including reason, knowledge, and freedom were equally swaying the thought of many Americans. Enlightenment shaped their minds and the Great Awakening shaped their hearts. These concepts were well established in the thought of educated men by the time of the revolution and grew more passionate as the industrial revolution offered more free time to wage earners.

It wasn’t till 1820 that American music began to gain an identity. European composers continued to draw listeners but in the remote communities’ almost from the day the first colonist landed, unique dialects were developing and over several generations the style of music would too.

Home school dominated the agricultural areas and formal education grew in larger communities that could support a school. Universities began to emerge on the East Coast, in West Kentucky, and in growing successful river towns after 1800. Many languages were spoken, but English was dominate and other nationalities often anglicized their names to fit in and forced their children to learn and speak English.

Along with the Age of Enlightenment came abolitionism. The movement began in Europe, migrated to the colonial America and began to influence states to act. Portugal abolished the slave trade in 1761 but the slave traders moved their operations to other countries. France abolished slavery in 1794. Each northern state, over time, abolished slavery by 1805 yet, some adopted laws that allowed Africans to move through the state but not reside in the state.

Anti-slavery laws did not impede the Boston and New York bankers or Northern industrialists to stop loaning money to the Southern plantation owners

or invest in ships that supported the slave trade, even after the British abolished the slave trade in 1807 and finally slavery in her colonies in 1833.

The industrial revolution, particularly the cotton gin, propelled cotton from a crop for domestic use to a commodity demanded by the textile mills of the world, in particular, the Northeast, England, and France. The demand spawned Alabama fever (the great land migration to the area south to the Mississippi river referred to as the Southwest Territory) and the creation of several southern states.

While the cotton industry was creating wealth for the South, the north and west, i.e., Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and on the great lakes and St. Lawrence River were creating a demand for labor to support industrialization. Emigrants from Europe flowed, particularly into the north. The Germans wanted to farm in the west. Boston almost became an Irish city and the Irish brought a perspective on liberalism that made Bostonian bankers cringe.

Boston may be the one Northern city that reflects, more than any other, the conflicts abolitionism would bring to the country. Boston was rich and a portion of that wealth was based upon the slave trade and financing the Southern slave holders. They didn't want to give up that profit stream. Yet the population was shouting against slavery and also their own labor condition, wages, and living conditions.

The slavery related issues occupied the attention of more and more. The congressmen of the North and South, feeling the pressure building, began debating the issues and passing legislation that they thought found middle ground yet created unanticipated issues that would challenge their ability to sustain a middle ground.

The national political debate from the creation of the Union until the 1820's was noted, but did not disrupt the daily life of a resident, north or south. However, during this decade, the ground for compromise began to resemble a path to the edge of hell. It is arguably the period, more than any other, the discord on the South's "peculiar institution" began to register in the hearth room of most citizens. But, as the citizens of the North and South began the decade they were not discouraged. Perhaps, partially because the South and the Western states had an unofficial coalition that often blocked the East and Northeastern states from passing legislation, placing unnecessary export and import taxes on the South and West that only benefited the infrastructure needs of the North and East. President James Monroe, the same president that signed the legislation accepting Alabama into the union, may have initiated the ever-increasing spiral to Civil War by signing the Missouri Compromise. The Compromise was intended to preserve a balance of power in the Senate (twelve free states and twelve slave states) by admitting Maine as a free state in return for admitting Missouri as a slave state, but there were unintended consequences.

Another event occurred in 1828 that impacted the South more than anywhere else. The Democratic - Republican Party organized by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison before the turn of the century broke apart leaving a dominant Democratic Party in the South. The republican portion of the party faded for a time with many aligning with the Whigs, also not a competitive political party.

The result was no competing voice representing alternative views to the people of the South, with the exception of the Reconstruction period, for over 100 years. Non-slave holding property owners and others often opposed the positions of the Democratic Party, but cotton dictated most decisions.

There are social events that bring people together for fun and comradery that can often bridge gaps of political misunderstandings. Sports, books, music, plays, and parlor games are a few. In the south, horse racing was a big draw. Bare knuckles boxing was a huge draw both north and south. Cock fighting was too. Turkey shoots were popular sport, but there was nothing on a national level. Since the population throughout the country was semi-literate, books didn't pull people in different circles together, but rather pushed them apart.

In May of 1828, the nation's congress passed the Tariff of Abomination. The tariff was intended to support the industrialization of the North at the expense of the South. The tariff of 1831, designed to minimize the impact of the 1828 tariff, didn't satisfy the South. The tariff legislation punctuated the argument supporting economy as a reason for the Civil War.

Not necessarily the first but certainly the most notable legislation that links an economic incentive and argument for Southern Independence. "The Tariff of Abomination"

The average citizen in the south recognized a change after the Nat Turner Rebellion in 1831. Previously, each township had formed a volunteer force to patrol their community. Upon catching an offending citizen, they were authorized to impose corporal punishment, i.e., whipping or placing people in stocks on the town square. Escaped slaves could be punished and then returned to their owners. After the Rebellion patrols became larger, more frequent and operated with less discretion. Fear drove the change.

News of an Underground Railroad that supported the escape of slaves placed increased pressure on communities. The Underground Railroad was a clandestine organization without membership or a leader. Its ad hoc structure was only known through word of mouth by those brave enough to trust the information. History has given credit to the Underground Railroad for aiding the escape of thousands of slaves.

Westward expansion increased the number of newspapers in the country. Vicksburg the "Gibraltar of the South" had three newspapers supported by a population of less than 5,000 people. In the earliest days of the republic, newspapers reported the local news and national issues with each choosing a perspective that their readers supported. As slavery and abolitionism collided, newspaper publishers chose their side and not surprisingly publishers in the South defended states' rights, the cotton industry, and predatory excise fees, justified slavery and the North promoted abolitionism, condemned the Southern institution of slavery, promoted a variety of alternatives including the Society for the Colonization of Free People of Color of America, (an organization that supported sending free blacks back to Africa).

Yet, even as the debate consumed the newspaper columns, most citizens both North and South worked and did not become passionately involved in the debate. As they worked to feed and clothe their family, went to church on Sunday, and

visited with neighbors. At local establishments they noted the topics of the day, developed opinions and positions but, in general, left it to the politicians to decide. Even as the zealots both North and South became more aggressive, Southern Fire eaters became known widely. However, as the national debate raged, Southern states were excited and dedicated to the principles of the constitution. They proudly waved the national flag, and celebrated when they earned statehood, such as in 1845 when the last two Southern states joined the union; Florida and Texas.

Books in the North shaped opinions with narratives that challenged the southern rhetoric that exploited the inhumanity related to the institution. *American Slavery As It Is*, published in 1839 by Theodore Weld, challenged the arguments that a slaves life was a better alternative to their homeland because they were clothed, fed, and generally lived without the fear of torment and suffering. Harriet Beecher Stowe published *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852 and had never visited the South but she listened to the stories told by run-away slaves. Her fictional account of Uncle Tom further galvanized the abolitionists and sympathy for the slave in the North.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act was passed in 1854. It allowed people in the territories of Kansas and Nebraska to decide for themselves whether or not to allow slavery within their borders. It was intended as a compromise between advocates against the expansion of slavery and those seeking to end slavery, but it led to a bitter struggle to create a slave state in Kansas that would be sensationalized by the press and further fuel outrageous acts by the opposing sides. One major impact; it influenced the abolitionist John Brown and made him a household name. In the South, children would be threatened that John Brown would get them if they didn't mind their parents.

In 1857 it would appear no compromise could be made and a southerner inadvertently added fuel to the debate. *The Impending Crisis of the South*, 1857, was written by Hinton Rowan Helper of North Carolina. He was an opponent of slavery and wrote the book that argued the white slave holding southerner was holding back industrialization because of slavery and it was in the best interest of the white population to stop it.

Any time the economy downturns became a panic in 1800 terms, the national, state, and local debates became more real as residents, North and South, were affected or afraid of being affected. The panics (economic depressions) of 1819, the first boom to bust depression in American history and again in 1837 effected the citizens.

With all the political animosity that had leached into the minds of citizens over the previous 57 years more Americans began to believe a conflict was not avoidable.

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