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US Civil War

Unit 1 Contents

Slavery

- The Cotton Economy and Slavery.
- Conditions of Enslavement.
- Resistance.

Unit 1 Introduction

When reading the Units of Section 3, it will help the reader to keep in mind the overall focus of section 3 of the IBDP History syllabus. This is stated as follows:

This section focuses on the United States Civil War between the North and the South (1861-5), which is often perceived as the great watershed [dividing line] in the history of the United States. It transformed the country forever: slavery disappeared following Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and the Northern success marked a victory for the proponents of strong central power over the supporters of states' rights. It marked the beginnings of further westward expansion and transformed United States' society by accelerating industrialization and modernization in the North and largely destroying the plantation system in the South. The war left the country with a new set of problems: how would the South rebuild its society and economy and what would be the place in that society of 4 million freed African Americans? These changes were fundamental, leading some historians to see the war (and its results) as a 'second American Revolution'.¹

Units 1, 2 and 3 cover the origins (general background) of the civil war, while the causes are covered in Units 4 and 5. Units 1, 2 and 3 relate to the whole antebellum period (from independence to the civil war) covering long-term economic, social, political and ideological developments which laid the basis for the conflict. While this general background is essential to understanding the civil war, the reader is reminded that the chronological focus of Section 3, 1840-1877, begins with Unit 4.

Usually people associate slavery in the southern United States with African Americans working in cotton fields belonging to large plantations. While this image is basically correct, you need to keep in mind the fact that not all slaves worked in plantations and, indeed, not all African Americans in the South were slaves.

Unit 1

Most free African Americans in the pre-civil war period North and South owed their freedom to a wave of manumissions (the legal term for freeing a slave) during the liberty-loving era of independence. Throughout the 50 years leading up to the civil war

¹ IBDP History Guide, pp.46-7

the proportion of the total US African American population which was free remained at a little over 10 percent. By the time the civil war broke out, all the African Americans in the North were free, whereas in the South it was only 6 percent. Even so, there were actually more free blacks in the South (262 000 in 1860) than the North (226 000 in the same year) because the overall black population of the South was so much greater.² Free blacks, in both the North and the South, tended to move to cities, where it was easier to find jobs and get away from the watchful eyes of whites.

Most of the southern slave population worked on plantations, which had up to 200 or more slaves. The majority of them worked in gangs in the fields under white overseers or their black slave-drivers and rarely saw their white owner. However, about 25 percent of slaves worked on small farms, where conditions were very different. In this case, one or two slaves worked alongside the farmer and his wife, who lived in conditions not much better than them. To complicate the picture further, 5 percent of southern slaves did not work on any kind of farm at all but lived in towns and cities, working mostly as servants for their owners.³

The Cotton Economy and Slavery

In the colonial period cotton was less important than rice and tobacco. But the industrial revolution in Britain and the northeastern USA led to a huge increase in demand for cotton. Eli Whitney's cotton gin, which mechanically separated the seeds from cotton fibre, enabled cotton growers to keep up with the demand from factories.

	1790	1810	1860
Number of cotton bales produced per year ¹	3000	178 000	4 000 000

Three quarters of the cotton produced was exported to Britain, making 'King Cotton' more profitable than all the USA's other exports put together. Because the deep South's climate was best suited to cotton-growing, cotton production was concentrated in Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. In 1834, these states produced half the USA's cotton. By 1860, it was nearly 80 percent, if one included Georgia.⁴

Cotton production was the economic force behind the expansion of slavery in the South in the antebellum (pre-civil war) period. In 1810 there were 1.2 million slaves in the United States. The number reached 4 million by 1860⁵. Because importing slaves became illegal in 1808, the increase was entirely due to natural reproduction. Despite the high growth rate of the white population, slaves continued to make

2 Kolchin, P. (1993) *American Slavery* Penguin, London p.241

3 Kolchin *American Slavery* p.178

4 Kolchin, p.96

5 Kolchin, *American Slavery* p.93

up about a third of the population of the South (one half in the deep South) in the first half of the nineteenth century. Between independence and the civil war, slavery had spread to 9 new states and penetrated as far west as Texas. By the 1830s there were more slaves in the USA than in any other country in the New World, indeed more than in all the other countries of the Americas put together. While the northern states had abolished slavery in the early decades of the nineteenth century, it was reinforced in the South by laws making it easier to control both slaves and free blacks. **Manumission** was made more difficult. Far from disappearing after 1808, the South's 'peculiar institution' (as slavery was referred to) had become a way of life which was clearly different from that of the North.

Conditions of Enslavement

The cotton boom increased the demand for slaves in the deep South. High demand meant an increase in prices. Because slaves could no longer be imported (the Constitution prohibited it after 1807), slave-owners outside the cotton belt could profit from selling their slaves south. Hence a lively internal slave trade grew up between the old and the new southern states. Being 'sold down the [Mississippi] river' was the thing slaves feared most. It meant being uprooted, exchanging one's home and familiar surroundings for an unknown destination and master. Worst of all, it meant families being split up. This was the theme of Harriet Beecher Stowe's best-selling novel of 1852, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which helped make northerners aware of the evils of slavery. Stowe's novel was in part a reaction to the fugitive slave law of 1850, which strengthened the federal government's powers to return runaway slaves living in the North to their owners. Scenes of violence occurred in New England and elsewhere as outraged **abolitionists** tried to prevent federal marshals arresting fugitive (runaway) slaves.

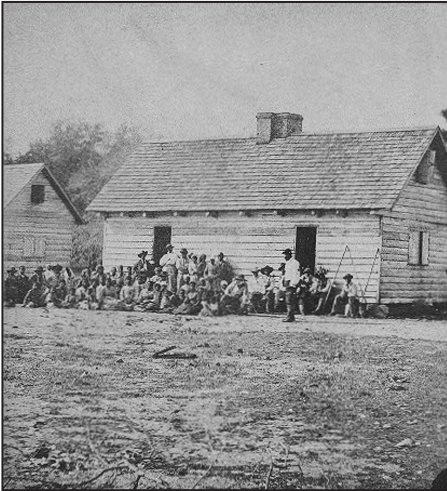


Harriet Beecher Stowe 1811-1896

Another way in which slaves were moved from non-cotton-growing areas into cotton-growing ones was by being taken with their owners when they migrated. Many planters migrating west took their slaves with them. Whether by being sold or by being taken along by one's owner, slaves moved west at the rate of about 100 000 every decade between 1810 and 1860.⁶

6 Kochin *American Slavery* p.96

What was slave life like in the antebellum South?



Slaves in front of plantation outhouses

Most slaves lived on plantations. Field work on the plantation was typically all day ‘from sunup to sundown’ under the supervision of a white overseer or a black driver. In winter months there was less to be done and the days were shorter. Sunday was the day off, when slaves could work their own vegetable gardens and attend to their own affairs. More desirable and prestigious among slaves was work around the plantation house (see text box p.128 ‘Skilled work on a Plantation in the American South’).

No matter whether field or house worker, for slaves there was constant interference by whites and punishment, usually by whipping, for breaking rules. Having a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ master was a matter of luck.

Female slaves had to put up with sexual exploitation and, sometimes, rape. On some plantations it was an open secret that the slave owner or his sons were the fathers of some of the children living in the slaves’ quarters.

Food was plentiful and reasonably good, and slaves received up to four suits of homespun cotton work clothes a year. A comparatively good diet was reflected in the fact that slaves in the USA at this time were on average taller than West Indian slaves and even Englishmen at the time.⁷

Slaves’ health was a matter of importance to owners, whose plantations depended on an active workforce. So medical attention was quite good for the time. Furthermore, each slave family was housed in a wooden cabin which, for the same reason, owners tried to keep dry and clean.

Marriage between slaves was not recognized in law, so legal guardianship of the children was with the slave-owner. Male slaves who married a woman on another plantation would get a pass at weekends to visit their wives.

⁷ Kolchin *American Slavery* p.113

Slaves could always be sold, so breaking up slave families was common and greatly feared by slaves.

At Christmas time it became usual for slaves to get a week off. It was a joyous time for slaves, when the daily drudgery of forced work was temporarily lifted.

A growing number of slaves belonged to white Protestant churches—mainly Baptist or Methodist. A religious revival—the Second Great Awakening—swept the country in the first half of the nineteenth century, resulting in a lot of missionary activity in the South to Christianize slaves. But for whites, shared religion stopped short of teaching slaves how to read the Bible.

Slave codes (collections of laws) restricted the teaching of reading and writing to slaves, although the details of how this was to be done differed from state to state. They also prevented slaves giving evidence in a court of law, making it difficult to convict whites of crimes against slaves. Nevertheless, a white who deliberately killed a slave could in theory be convicted of murder, while inflicting excessive punishment could bring a fine of up to 1000 dollars.

For the 5 percent of slaves who lived in towns, life was very different. They worked as servants or handicraftsmen. It was much more difficult for their owners to control them. Running errands around town, they had the opportunity to mix with free blacks and even to earn money by hiring themselves out without their masters’ knowledge.

The antebellum years were southern slavery’s age of ‘Uncle Tom’ paternalism (In Stowe’s novel Uncle Tom served his owner with loyalty and devotion). White slave-owners treated ‘their people’ like children, arguing that negroes (the standard word used for people of pure African descent) were better off being dependent upon them. The slave-master relationship was personal and gave a life of security moulded by Christian values and industriousness—so went the argument. It was better for negroes than being left to the mercies of hard-headed factory bosses and landlords in northern cities. Much has been made of the way in which southern children, both black and white, often grew up together on the plantation. White children were raised by black nannies. On smaller farms there was sometimes genuine affection between slaves and their masters, who might read the Bible to their people in the evening.

Nevertheless, there were good masters and bad. The whip was still a normal feature of life, slave women were often exploited sexually or raped by white men, crimes against whites were punished severely, those by whites against slaves (contravening state slave codes) scarcely at all. Whites’ assumption of slaves’ inferiority daily robbed African Americans of their dignity in countless ways. Nothing could compensate for the denial of personal freedom.

Skilled Work on a Plantation in the American South

The ex-slave Frederick Douglass described life on a big plantation in his autobiography *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845). The following excerpt from Douglass's autobiography shows the contrast for plantation slaves between field-work and work around the 'big house'. As well as working as servants and child carers in the planter's house, they also performed the skilled jobs needed to keep a big agricultural enterprise going, such as blacksmith, miller (grinding wheat to make the flour needed for bread), mechanic, weaver (of cotton cloth) and shoe-maker. We can see how desirable it was to exchange the drudgery and whipping of field-work for the privileged position and interesting work around the planter's big house. For the slave, the honour of being selected to work around the big house was comparable to being elected to Congress. Consequently, slaves competed to please their white overseers (bosses), who supervised the work gangs, and were responsible for recommending individuals for more responsible jobs.

The home plantation of Colonel Lloyd wore the appearance of a country village. All the mechanical operations for all the farms were performed here. The shoemaking and mending, the blacksmithing [making and repairing iron tools], cartwrighting [making carts], coopering [making barrels and tubs], weaving, and grain-grinding, were all performed by the slaves on the home plantation. The whole place wore a business-like aspect very unlike the neighboring farms. The number of houses, too, conspired to give it advantage over the neighboring farms. It was called by the slaves the ~Great House Farm.~ Few privileges were esteemed higher, by the slaves of the out-farms, than that of being selected to do errands at the Great House Farm. It was associated in their minds with greatness. A representative could not be prouder of his election to a seat in the American Congress, than a slave on one of the out-farms would be of his election to do errands at the Great House Farm. They regarded it as evidence of great confidence reposed in them by their overseers; and it was on this account, as well as a constant desire to be out of the field from under the driver's lash [slave-drivers were in charge of slave gangs working in the fields], that they esteemed it a high privilege, one worth careful living for. He was called the smartest and most trusty fellow, who had this honor conferred upon him the most frequently. The competitors for this office sought as diligently to please their overseers, as the office-seekers in the political parties seek to please and deceive the people.

Source: <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Literature/Douglass/Autobiography/02.html>

- **In which ways did the daily life of slaves doing field-work differ from that of those doing house-work?**

Resistance

In the USA slave rebellions were few in number, small-scale and never presented any real threat to security. In contrast to Brazil or Haiti, where large-scale slave rebellions were a real threat to white authority, the greater number of whites in proportion to the black population in the southern United States made rebellion a more or less hopeless cause. In one or two cases when a rebellion was planned, the conspirators were found out before they had a chance to act. In 1811 two hundred slaves marched towards New Orleans but were stopped by armed planters. More serious was Nat Turner's rebellion in Virginia in 1831 in which 59 whites were killed by about 70 slaves. After two days most of the slaves were captured while their leader, Baptist preacher Nat Turner, was caught two months later and hanged.

The Turner rebellion coincided with a sudden increase in abolitionist propaganda in the North through the founding

of the *Liberator* newspaper (see p. 145). Some southerners suspected a connection between the two events. Although there was no connection, 1831 marked a new spirit of defensiveness in the South. In view of the perceived threats to their way of life and its 'peculiar institution', southerners' resolve to defy the North hardened. Antislavery opinion at home was silenced and slave codes (collections of laws) overhauled to increase control over both slaves and free blacks.

If rebellion was pointless, which other forms of resistance were open to slaves? Firstly, passive resistance was natural and widespread among people being forced to work for no pay. Passive resistance could be practiced in a variety of ways and could include pretending to be sick or not to understand instructions or simply working slowly. Doing the former was effective in a country where slaves represented a valuable investment. The latter two would have the added advantage of frustrating the master or his wife but might result in a whipping. A slow work tempo led to the commonly held opinion among whites that Africans were lazy.

Excerpt from the lead article in the Richmond Enquirer newspaper, 30th August 1831, on Nat Turner's rebellion

So much curiosity has been excited in the state, and so much exaggeration will go abroad, that we have determined to devote a great portion of this day's paper to the strange events in the county of Southampton.... What strikes us as the most remarkable thing in this matter is the horrible ferocity [cruelty] of these monsters. They remind one of a parcel of blood-thirsty wolves rushing down from the Alps; or rather like a former incursion of the Indians upon the white settlements' Nothings is spared; neither age nor sex is respected-the helplessness of women and children pleads in vain for mercy. The danger is thought to be over-but prudence [carefulness] still demands precaution. The lower country should be on the alert.-The case of Nat Turner warns us. No black man ought to be permitted to turn a Preacher through the country. The law must be enforced or the tragedy of Southampton appeals to us in vain.....

A fanatic preacher by the name of Nat Turner (Gen. Nat Turner) who had been taught to read and write, and permitted to go about preaching in the country, was at the bottom of this infernal[devilish] brigandage [terrorism].

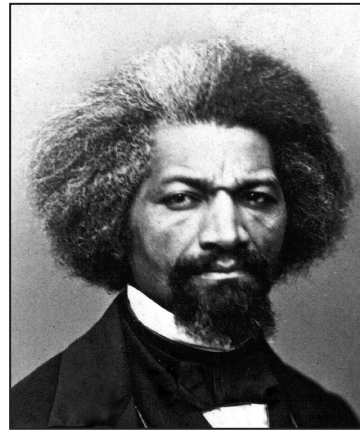
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part3/3h499.html>

- **Why did the article emphasize the facts that Turner could read and write and was a preacher (church minister)?**

A more active form of resistance was when male slaves physically resisted whipping, when pushed too far. There are plenty of examples of slaves grabbing the whip from their overseers or even their masters in self-defence, something which could lead to a fight between the two. Resistance like this, although dangerous, could well pay off because masters or overseers were forced to recognize that there were limits beyond which they could not go without getting into dangerous situations.

The most commonly practiced form of active resistance was running away. Around 1000 slaves each year managed to get across the Mason-Dixon line (the line dividing free from slave states) in the 1850s and early 60s.⁸ One of them was Frederick Douglass, the son of a slave woman and a white man.

8 Kolchin *American Slavery* p.158



Frederick Douglass (1817-1895)

Douglass taught himself to read, escaped to the North and became famous in both the USA and Europe as an abolitionist campaigner. Most of those who escaped to the North were young men and came from the upper South states - Maryland, Virginia, Kentucky and Missouri - which bordered on free states. Some fugitive slaves received help from free blacks and sympathetic whites on the way to the North. This network of helpers became known as the 'Underground Railway'. Runaway slaves were given food and shelter and some were fortunate enough to receive the guidance of a 'conductor', such as Harriet Tubman. Tubman had herself escaped slavery but frequently returned to her native Maryland to help others escape. She succeeded in bringing three hundred fugitives to safety, including her own parents.



Harriet Tubman (1820-1913)

But reaching the North did not necessarily mean safety for runaway slaves. Fugitive slave laws compelled authorities in free states to cooperate with slave-owners trying to get their slaves back. So Canada was a safer refuge for runaway slaves than any northern state, particularly after the federal fugitive slave law of 1850, which made resistance more difficult.

Despite the fame of the Underground Railroad, the fact remains that most fugitive slaves made the journey to the North alone. Fear of betrayal, either by whites or fellow slaves trying to gain the favour of their masters, kept them from

seeking help. Hiding by day, walking at night, the trek to the North was extraordinarily difficult and more often than not resulted in capture and forced return to the slave-owners.

However, a larger number of fugitive slaves remained inside the South. As in colonial times, they often hid quite close to the plantations where they worked, surviving for short periods of time in caves or woods. Most of them were soon tracked down by slave-owners or hired professional slave-catchers. Hunger forced others to return voluntarily to their plantations. But some of them reached cities where they could pass unnoticed in free black communities. Others hung on to their freedom for longer periods of time by disappearing into swamps and forests. But groups of maroons (communities of escaped slaves living in the wilderness) were always few and small in the southern USA, in contrast to the West Indies and Brazil. Whites were too numerous and wilderness areas disappearing fast.

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US Civil War

Unit 2 Contents

The Origins of the Civil War:

- Political Issues.
- States' Rights.
- The 1832 Nullification Crisis.
- Sectionalism.
- Modernization.
- Economic Differences between the North and the South.

Unit 2 Political Issues

The constitution of 1787 was a compromise between many interest groups in the country. One of the compromises was between southern states with their slave-based economy and the northern states in which slavery was in the process of dying out. For purposes of representation in the House of Representatives, where a state's population determines the number of representatives it has in the House, slaves were allowed to count, on the basis of 5 slaves being equivalent to 3 free men. To avoid offending anti-slave sentiment, the constitution avoided using the word 'slave', referring to slaves merely as 'other persons'.

The constitution supplied a political solution to the North-South sectional difference over slavery. But the economic and social differences kept on growing after independence. Far from dying out in the South, as many Founding Fathers had hoped, slavery increased in importance. Plantations spread west as cotton boomed.

In the middle and northern states, however, slavery died out in the early years of the nineteenth century. There was a shortage of labor, which attracted immigrants from Europe. Western settlement north of the Ohio, where slavery had been banned by the 1787 Northwest Ordinance, was by individual farmers who worked their own land. The South's society and economy remained rural and agricultural, while in the North cities and modern industry grew fast.

The political implications of the growing socio-economic difference were to be found primarily in the fact that the North's population grew faster than the South's.

Divergence of the populations of the South and North

	South*	North	Difference	%
1790	2	2	0	0
1840	7.3	9.7		
1860	12	19		

Approximate figures in millions

*including Kentucky, Missouri, Maryland and Delaware, which did not secede from the Union in 1861

- Work out the absolute and percentage differences for 1840 and 1860 .

Because representation in the House of Representatives was by population, the North had 48 more representatives in the House than the South by 1840.⁹ The same was true of the **Electoral College**, the number of a state's electors also being fixed by population.

By the mid-century, southerners had good reason to feel that sooner or later they were going to be politically dominated by the North through weight of numbers.

But the constitution had foreseen such problems by giving each state the same number of Senators (two). As Senate approval was needed for all new federal laws, the South could

block any legislation it disliked in the Senate, provided it could prevent a northern majority there.

This was possible, as long as the North kept to the unwritten agreement that the number of slave and free states should remain the same, giving an equal number of Senators to the two sections.

As settlers pushed westwards, new territories continued to knock on the Union's door for admission as states. To keep sectional equality in the Senate, their admission had to be balanced. For every free state admitted, a slave one had to be admitted too and vice versa.

Track the numerical balance between slave and free states from independence until the Missouri compromise 1821.

- **Of the 13 original states: which ones soon became free and which remained slave?**
- **What, then, was the free-slave balance in numbers among the original 13?**
- **From independence until Missouri joined in 1821, 11 states (including Missouri) joined the Union. Find out which states they were and whether they joined as slave or free states. What was the numerical balance between slave and free states after Missouri joined the Union in 1821?**

Year acceded	Name of state	Free/slave	# free states : # slave states

⁹ John Calhoun, 1850 US Senate speech on the slavery question, Heffner, R. (1991) A Documentary History of the United States Penguin USA, p.120. Calhoun excluded Delaware.

This was the background to the Missouri compromise of 1820-21. With the number of free and slave states equal, Missouri applied to join the Union in 1819. Both climate and geography in Missouri happened to favour the plantation system and slavery. But Missouri's **accession** as a slave state would tip the balance in favour of the slave states. More importantly, Missouri was the first territory entirely west of the Mississippi, in the lands acquired by the 1803 Louisiana purchase, to apply for admission. As such, it was a test case: would slavery be permitted in the new states which would soon emerge from the land of the Louisiana purchase? If yes, then a **precedent** would be set.

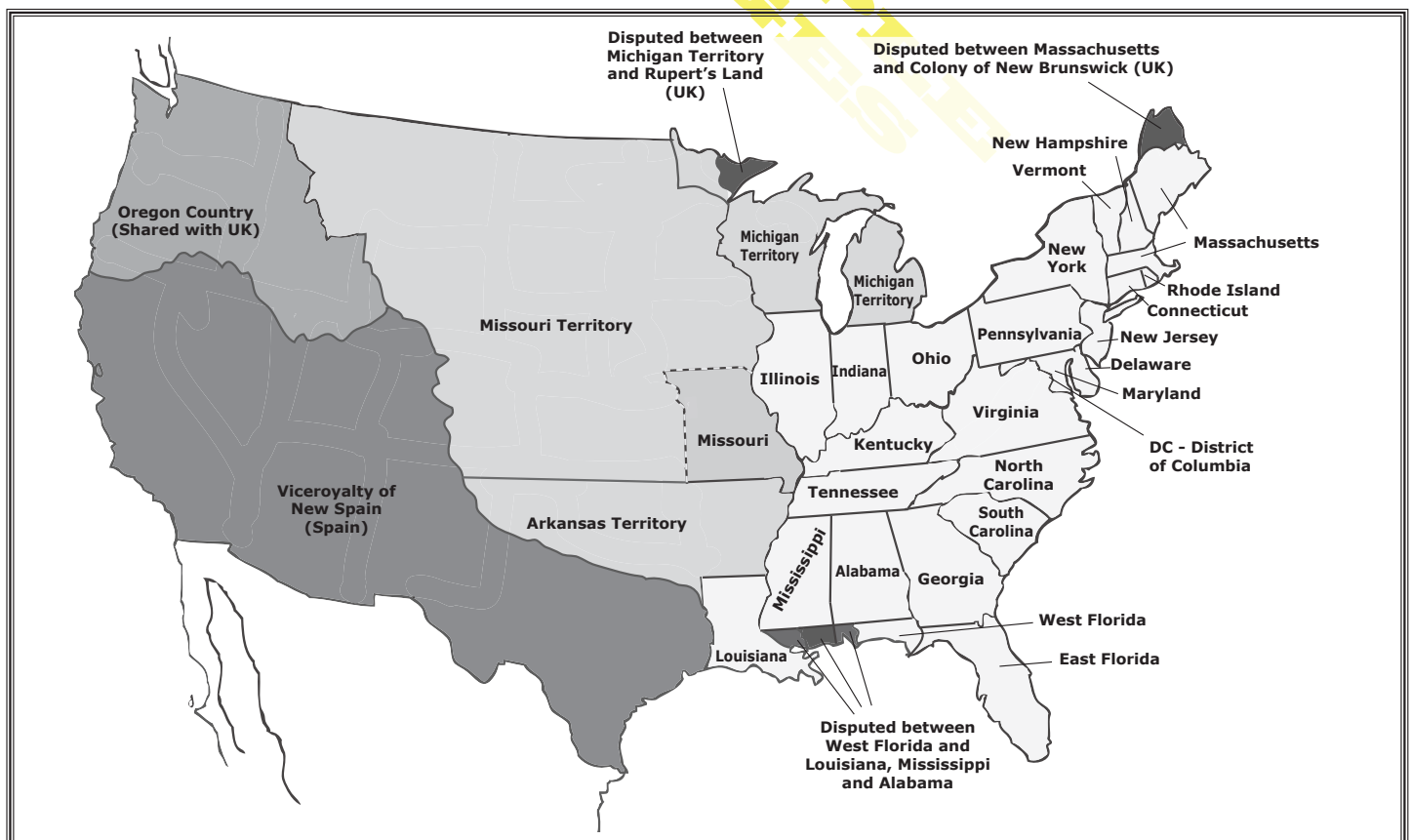
Such a precedent would enable the South to spread slavery west and north and thereby gain numerical superiority in the Senate. The Missouri crisis suddenly made it clear that the sectional division over slavery had become a conflict, which threatened to get out of control. People were forced to acknowledge that the slavery issue went to the heart of the new nation's identity: was the United States to become a country of slavery or not?

The House of Representatives responded by attaching a condition to Missouri's accession—known as the Tallmadge amendment—stipulating that slavery would be gradually

abolished in Missouri (by the law of free birth and no slaves coming in from outside). Now it was the South's turn to fear a precedent. If Congress could abolish slavery in a territory or a new state, then might it not be able to abolish it anywhere in the Union? Enraged southerners managed to block the Tallmadge amendment in the Senate. Tempers began to cool off while Missouri waited to be admitted.

Moderates on both sides recognized that there was more to be gained by compromising. In Congress, Henry Clay of Kentucky played the leading role in engineering a compromise. The main points of the compromise which emerged were as follows:

- Missouri was to be admitted as a slave state.
- But in the rest of the Louisiana purchase territory north of the parallel
- 36° 30' (the northern border of Arkansas Territory) slavery was to be permanently prohibited.
- Maine was to be admitted at the same time as Missouri, to keep the numbers of slave and free states equal.



The United States in 1819. The Missouri Compromise prohibited slavery in the Unorganized Territory of the Great Plains, acquired by the Louisiana purchase, and permitted it in Missouri and the Arkansas Territory.

Nevertheless, there were plenty on both sides who regarded the Missouri compromise as a dirty business. Northern abolitionists raised their voices against it, while a majority of southern Congressmen voted against it (although enough of them voted in favour for it to pass).

Who gained most? On the whole the compromise gave both sides enough for them to feel satisfied. The sectional balance in the Senate was maintained—the admission of Maine as a free state balanced Missouri. The South gained Missouri for slavery, while the North had the satisfaction of seeing slavery kept out of the rest of the huge Louisiana purchase territory, which would henceforth be reserved for free white labor. As the prairies north of the 36° 30' line were unsuitable to the typical cash crops of the plantation system (tobacco, rice and above all cotton), the exclusion of slavery there was no great loss for southerners.

Although the terms of the compromise held for over 30 years, it was obvious to many that simply extending an existing line (the 36° 30' parallel) westwards was actually deepening the division in the nation by ensuring that it would divide all future states. Old Thomas Jefferson regarded the crisis and the compromise as the most serious threat to the nation's future.

But this momentous question [the Missouri crisis], like a fire bell in the night, awakened and filled me with terror. I considered it at once as the knell [the sound of a church bell at a funeral] of the Union. It is hushed, indeed [by the compromise], for the moment. But this is a reprieve [a temporary solution] only, not a final sentence. A geographical line, coinciding with a marked principle, moral and political, once conceived and held up to the angry passions of men, will never be obliterated; and every new irritation will mark it deeper and deeper.¹⁰

States' rights

The doctrine of states' rights is as old as the constitution. In the early Republic it was used by both Republicans and Federalists to fight their opponents. The first to campaign for states' rights were the Republicans Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. They championed states' rights versus the federal government when in opposition to the Federalist administration of John Adams. In their Kentucky and Virginia resolutions (1798-99), written for the state legislatures of those two states, they claimed that the government's Aliens and Sedition laws (designed to silence the opposition), were unconstitutional. The Sedition Act, they claimed, contradicted the first amendment which guaranteed freedom of speech.

¹⁰ Jefferson in a letter to a friend, 1820
<http://frank.mtsu.edu/~lnelson/Jefferson-Slavery.html>

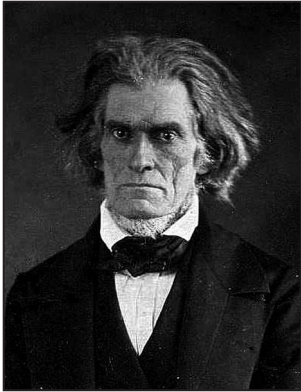
In the resolutions, Jefferson and Madison argued that the constitution and the federal government it established were a 'compact' or contract, by which the states delegated certain of their powers to a central power. As such, if the federal government overstepped its powers by making an unconstitutional law, then the states had a right to 'nullify' that law, to declare it null and void (invalid). The state legislatures of Kentucky and Virginia passed the resolutions but failed to persuade other states to do likewise. Jefferson's and Madison's attempt to make the states the guardians of the constitution had proved unsuccessful.

During the controversy, Federalists argued that it was the people, not the states, which had made the compact to set up a federal government. In their view, only the Supreme Court could nullify unconstitutional legislation. This view gained ground in 1803, when Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall ruled that a federal law (the Judiciary Act of 1789) was unconstitutional. In doing so, Marshall established the principle that the Supreme Court had the right of 'judicial review', the right to interpret the constitution in the light of possible conflicts with laws or court rulings. Marshall, a Federalist, did much to establish the supremacy of federal over state law during his long career as Chief Justice, a position he held from 1801 to 1835.

Soon after the Kentucky and Virginia resolutions Jefferson became president. Now it was his turn to use the powers of the federal government to achieve his aims, while Federalists opposed him with his own arguments. Accordingly, the young New Hampshire Federalist Daniel Webster quoted Jefferson himself, when opposing President Jefferson's 1807 trade embargo (see Section 1, p.15): 'The Government of the United States is a delegated, *limited* Government.' Similarly, in the 1812 war against Britain, Webster voiced New England's opposition to the war by arguing that President Madison's compulsory military service bill was unconstitutional.

The 1832 Nullification Crisis

The doctrine of states' rights was developed further by the South Carolinian John C. Calhoun in the 1830s. Calhoun was one of the three statesmen—Daniel Webster and Henry Clay were the others—who dominated Congress in the 1830s and 40s. In his long career, Calhoun held the positions of Vice President, Secretary of War and Secretary of State and was a US Senator for most of the 1830s and 1840s. As well as being a statesman, he was probably the most gifted political theorist of his generation. His interpretation of the relationship between federal and state government in the constitution provided the theoretical justification for the southern states' **secession** in 1861 – even though he died 11 years before that.



John Calhoun (1782-1850), photographed here when he was old and suffering from tuberculosis.

Calhoun was a South Carolinian plantation owner and the most prominent defender of states' rights in the antebellum period.

Calhoun started off his political career as a nationalist advocating measures to strengthen the federal government: an improved national system of transportation, increased federal taxes, high tariffs, to protect infant industries, and a national bank. As Secretary of War (1817-1825) he tried—without much success—to get Congress to agree to measures to increase the size of the army and navy. However, as the 1820s progressed, he realized that the North's rapid increase in industry and population would lead it to dominate the South. He became convinced that the preservation of the South's position in the Union was more important than strengthening a Union dominated by the North.

Not surprisingly in a federally structured political system, Calhoun chose to defend the South's interests from a states' rights platform. But his purpose was very different to that of Jefferson and Madison 30 years earlier. They had seen themselves as democrats defending the rights of ordinary people against an over-mighty central government. They considered that they were defending the interests of the whole nation, not those of any particular section. On the other hand, Calhoun's defence of states' rights was clearly aimed at politically strengthening the South—even, it finally seemed, at the cost of national unity.

Already as Vice President, Calhoun began to oppose the nationalist programme of President John Quincy Adams (term of office: 1825-29). In this, Calhoun reflected the mood of the country. The high tide of nationalism following the 1812-14 war had ebbed, leaving a more sectional spirit.

In 1828 Congress passed a new tariff law which raised tariffs on both raw materials and manufactured goods to an all-time high. New England industrialists accepted the tariffs. Although they had to pay more for raw materials such as wool, they also benefited from a high tariff barrier

against British manufactured goods. Not so the South, which scarcely manufactured anything at all. For southerners, British manufactured goods would now be expensive—more expensive than northern ones. Thus the South would have to pay more for the privilege of buying northern manufactures while the North got rich. On the other hand, Britain would be bound to retaliate against the protective tariff by buying less American cotton. So the South would be doubly punished. This was the South's argument against what it called the 'Tariff of Abominations' (abominable = terrible).

The fact that the South chose to make the 1828 tariff such an issue should also be seen in the light of the Missouri crisis 8 years earlier, which had brought the North-South sectional difference into sharp focus. On top of this was the fact that the old southern states – the Carolinas and Virginia – were experiencing hard times, as agricultural production declined due to soil exhaustion. Fear of becoming the North's poor relative combined with a determination not to be pushed around by money-grabbing Yankees. South Carolina led the anti-tariff campaign, which quickly broadened into a stand on states' rights.

In 1828, Calhoun was asked by South Carolina's legislature to draft a report on the tariff situation. The result was a propaganda brochure against the tariff, referred to as the South Carolina Exposition and Protest. Calhoun, who was vice president at the time, published it anonymously but it was generally assumed that he was the author.

Calhoun's Exposition claimed that by passing the 1828 tariff law, the federal government had exceeded its constitutional powers. He explained the tariff's disastrous economic implications for the South and threatened state action by South Carolina to put the tariff out of operation there. Calhoun was not advocating secession (although he did so later on) but his nullification argument did play into the hands of secessionist hotheads.

Excerpt from Calhoun's South Carolina Exposition

That there exists a case which would justify the interposition [intervention] of this State [South Carolina], and thereby compel the General [Federal] Government to abandon an unconstitutional power [the 1828 tariff].....the committee [of the South Carolina legislature] does not in the least doubt; and they are equally clear in the existence of a necessity to justify its exercise, if the General Government should continue to persist in its improper assumption of powers, belonging to the State...
http://www.sewanee.edu/faculty/Willis/Civil_War/documents/SCEExposition.html

But in 1828 General Jackson, who was expected to be more sympathetic to the South, was elected president. Other southern states did not follow South Carolina and even there a majority in favour of nullification was not yet in sight.

Hoping Jackson would pursue policies friendly to the South, Calhoun agreed to serve under him as vice president. But Jackson did nothing to get rid of the 1828 tariff. In fact his supporters had been largely responsible for getting the tariff law through Congress.



Webster replying to Hayne in one of their famous 1830 Senate debates

Meanwhile the doctrine of nullification gained ground, as southerners argued for it in the Senate. Robert Hayne from South Carolina presented the case against the tariff, hoping to gain the support of western states in return for a deal on cheap public land for settlers in the west. Daniel Webster from Massachusetts replied, speaking magnificently against nullification and even the idea that states had a right to secede from the Union. The Hayne-Webster debates were followed closely by the nation and remain some of the most famous in US history. Webster touched Americans' feelings of national patriotism in the concluding words of one speech: 'liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable.' Thousands of copies of the speech were printed up and distributed.

In 1832 Congress passed a new tariff law, providing only for a slight reduction in tariffs. Calhoun and Jackson finally parted ways over the tariff issue and Calhoun resigned. He returned to South Carolina where he founded a nullifier party.

Calhoun developed the theory of nullification further. He overcame the old Federalist point that only the Supreme Court—not state legislatures—could nullify federal legislation by arguing that a **state convention**, specially convened to decide on a specific issue, could nullify federal laws. Only an amendment to the constitution—requiring **ratification** by three quarters of all the states—could override a state nullification ordinance (order). But even then, a state would still have the right to resist—by seceding from the Union.

South Carolina put the theory of nullification to the test in 1832, when a state convention declared the 1828 and 1832 tariffs to be null and void within the state and threatened secession. President Jackson took the view that this action amounted to rebellion. He began to assemble a military force to invade South Carolina, should state officers prevent federal officials from collecting the tariff revenues. But South Carolina failed to get the support of other southern states. Calhoun's nullification doctrine did not become the rallying point for southerners, as he had hoped. Alone, South Carolina stood little chance of successfully resisting Union forces. Furthermore, South Carolinians were by no means united. A minority among them were fiercely loyal to the Union.

A compromise was worked out in Congress by Senator Henry Clay of Kentucky, by which the 1832 tariffs were to be gradually reduced by a new tariff law, which was passed in 1833. Simultaneously, Congress passed the Force Bill, authorizing the president to use armed force, if necessary, to collect federal tariff revenues. The compromise tariff gave Calhoun and the South Carolinian nullifiers the opportunity to back down without losing face. Convention delegates reconvened and repealed (cancelled) the nullification ordinance. Just to make sure that no-one thought they were giving in to Washington, delegates voted to 'nullify' the Force Bill before returning home (an empty gesture, since they had already voted to accept the new tariff). Calhoun, disappointed by the lack of support in the rest of the South, spent the rest of his career in the US Senate promoting the cause of southern unity.

What was the significance of the 1832 nullification crisis, in view of the outbreak of civil war some 30 years later? Certainly, Calhoun's legalistic arguments concerning states' rights and nullification played no role in the immediate lead-up to the civil war. But they did provide a theoretical justification for secession. A generation after the nullification crisis, when the threat of civil war was looming, southern 'fire-eaters' jumped over the nullification stage of the doctrine to its logical conclusion—secession. The right to nullify became the right to secede.

Sectionalism

Because the regions of the USA are so large, the sections contained sub-sections with their own particular interests. For example, New England and the deep South formed distinct sub-sections within the North and the South. Complicating things further was the fact that until the 1850s, there were two nationwide political parties, the Whigs and the Democrats, both of whom had supporters in all the sections. Southerners and northerners had much in common spiritually and culturally, too, because until the 1840s many of them were joined together in the same churches (Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterian). So sectionalism, although a problem, was a

fairly fluid (flexible) thing, until the North-South conflict over slavery became uncontrollable in the 1850s.

In the USA in the antebellum period the sections were:

- the North, including New England and the middle states New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. The North was characterized by rapid industrialization and urbanization and was the financial centre of the USA. Most of the increasing number of European immigrants came to the North.
- the South, defined by slavery and the plantation system, comprising
 - The old South—Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Maryland and Delaware. In the last two states, slavery was in the process of dying out. By the 1840s, Delaware no longer always voted with the rest of the South in Congress on sectional issues.
 - The newer southern states: Kentucky and Tennessee to the north and the deep South—Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, where the proportion of slaves to whites was highest (about 50 percent).
 - Arkansas and Florida joined the Union in 1836 and 1845 respectively as slave states.
 - Texas, part of Mexico but settled by slave-holding Anglo-Americans, broke away from Mexico in 1836 and joined the Union in 1845.
 - Missouri joined the Union in 1821 as a slave state. But Missouri was not a typical southern state. Over many issues, the 'Gateway to West' was more likely to get together with other western states in Congress. The proportion of non-slave holding white farmers was growing and slavery was in the process of dying out by the time of the civil war.
- The West was of growing importance as the number of new territories and states multiplied. Slave and free states to the west sometimes behaved politically as extensions of the North and the South. But at the same time, western territories and states, whether slave or free, had their own special interests. These included federal help in providing cheap land for settlers and improved road and canal – later railroad - transportation to connect them to cities and ports in the east. Thus sectional politics in Washington could mean the West acting independently and the North and South competing to get the West's support (as in the case of the tariffs issue).

- In the early antebellum period, the West consisted of territories and states west of the Appalachians—Kentucky and Tennessee (slave states), followed by the states of the slave-free Old Northwest—Ohio, Indiana and Illinois.
- Later on these were joined by the northern states of the Old Northwest—Michigan and Wisconsin.
- Then came the new territories and states west of the Mississippi: to the north, free states and to the south slave ones (Arkansas), with territories in between being contested—Missouri, Kansas and Nebraska.
- The USA's defeat of Mexico in 1846-48 and its annexation of the whole of what is the present-day USA's southwest made the Californian gold rush of 1848 possible, as well as a large influx of Mormons into Utah Territory. As neither Mormons nor gold miners held slaves, it was clear that both territories would be admitted as free states, although the South fought for slavery in California and had to be bought off in the 1850 compromise (see p. 155).

Sectional politics was complicated by the fact that until the 1850s, the North and the South shared the same churches and political parties. It was not until the 1840s that the Methodist and Baptist churches split along North-South lines over the slavery issue. They were followed by the Presbyterians in 1857.

Regarding political parties, the 1830s and 40s saw the beginning of the two-party political system in the United States. The Whigs and Democrats were mass parties (by the 1820s all white males could vote in many states) which cut across the North-South divide. Only in the 1850s did the parties disintegrate into northern and southern wings (parts).

The Whigs took their name from the patriots who had opposed British tyranny in the independence era. As they had opposed George III, they now opposed the rule of mighty General Jackson (president 1829-37). Whigs favoured having a national bank, protective tariffs, 'internal improvements' (constructing canals and roads) and taxation to provide public schools. They appealed to richer voters.

The Democrats, led by war hero (the battle of New Orleans, 1814) General Andrew Jackson, stood for Jefferson's ideal of a nation of small, independent owner-farmers (both men were actually slave-owning planters!) and opposed a national bank, big business and protective tariffs, while defending states' rights against interference from Washington. Not surprisingly, their voters were poorer people. Their main strength lay in the small farmers of the West and the South. These people supported opening up new territories to settlement by further westward expansion. In 1844 Democrat James Polk was elected president with a policy of annexing Oregon and California.

The tariffs issue has been looked at already (see pp. 134-136), ‘The 1832 Nullification Crisis’. The sectional difference on high tariffs was clear, with the North in favour and the South against. Whigs wanted high tariffs and Democrats low. (The fact that Jackson did not reduce high tariffs when he became president simply goes to show that politicians do not always keep the promises they make before being elected.)

Another sectional political issue was cheap land for western settlers. Both parties could offer something. Democrats stood for small farmers’ interests, while Whigs stood for a strong federal government, which would have the financial strength needed to buy up land in the West. With available farmland rapidly disappearing in the North, this political platform was obviously a vote-catcher there. But there were enough small farmers in the South (plantation-owners were relatively few in number), with or without slaves, to make cheap land for settlers an issue which could attract voters.

Lastly, Jackson’s ‘Bank war’ brought out sectional differences in the 1830s. The Bank of the United States (BUS), founded in 1791 and refounded in 1816 to provide for the federal government’s financial needs, came to be associated by Democrats with the wealthy business **elite** of the northeast. But the Bank did provide the country with a stable currency (money).

People had confidence in the value of paper money because the credit supplied to smaller banks by the BUS was backed by government tax revenues, which the federal government deposited in the Bank. For the Democrats, the Bank’s control of the nation’s credit supply conflicted with the interests of pioneer farmers who needed easily available loans to buy and equip their farms. President Jackson was determined get rid of the Bank. Whigs led by Henry Clay pushed a bill to renew the Bank’s charter (license to operate) through Congress in 1832 but Jackson **vetoed** it.

Clay had hoped to score a victory over Jackson on the Bank issue but miscalculated. Now the number of voters in log cabins out west and overcrowded apartments in eastern cities outnumbered the middle class voters who had dominated politics a generation earlier. ‘Plain folks’ agreed with Jackson, not Clay, on the Bank. Jackson made doubly sure that the Bank would die by withdrawing government money from it in 1833.

With the Bank of America paralysed, local ‘wildcat’ banks issued paper money without any real backing (such as gold or government tax revenues). But paper money without any backing leads to inflation. The government’s depositing of federal funds with its ‘pet banks’ (favourite banks) helped fuel a **speculative boom**. To meet the threat of inflation, Jackson ordered that public lands be only bought by metallic money. That cut back the money supply (the supply of gold and silver is limited, unlike that of paper money) and drove up interest

rates, making loans harder to get. Around the same time, the dying Bank, now without government funds, called in its loans, putting pressure on the supply of credit in the whole economy. To make matters worse, a British banking crisis caused British investors to withdraw funds.

The result was a major recession, which began in 1837. Confidence in the ‘wildcat’ banks disappeared, the supply of credit dried up, farmers lost their farms through foreclosure (ownership of their farms reverted to the banks which had lent them the money to buy), small businesses failed and factories closed down. Jackson had already stepped down as president, so his Democrat successor, Martin van Buren, was left to face popular anger over the recession. Not surprisingly, the Whigs won the 1840 presidential election.

Modernization

In general, the North was changing rapidly in the antebellum period, while the South lagged behind.

The rapid growth of the USA’s population in the antebellum period was due to a high rate of natural increase, boosted after the 1840s by a growing flood of immigrants. Partly due to the fact that most immigrants went to the North, the North’s population grew more rapidly.

	Total US population in millions	Percentage share of the South
1830	13	44
1860	31.5	35

Urbanization transformed life for much of the northern population in the decades before the civil war. By 1860 New York’s population reached one million, Philadelphia’s over half a million. Numerous smaller cities sprang up—Detroit, Cincinnati and Cleveland, to name a few. Chicago, which had not even existed in 1830, reached 100 000. Of the biggest cities in the South, Baltimore (around 200 000) and St. Louis (160 000) were located on the northern edge of the South and were economically more closely connected to the North than the South. In the Deep South only New Orleans was a city of any size. The South, especially the Deep South, remained a rural society.

	Percentage of population living in towns or cities in 1860 ²
North	25
Northeast	35
South	10

New York was the busiest port in the country. Business, factories and banks were all concentrated in the North. So were most of the most of the country's canals and, later on, railroads. Trade followed the new transport routes. The Erie canal, linking the Great Lakes region to the Hudson River and New York, was completed in 1825. Buffalo, at the head of the canal, rapidly grew into a trade centre surpassing even New Orleans, the 'Queen of the South'. In the 1840s railroads boomed, enabling freight to move east-west in railcars rather than north-south in Mississippi steamboats. From New York, cities as far west as Chicago could now be reached in days, rather than weeks. In the 1850s the USA was laying down more track each year than any country in the world. By the end of the decade three quarters of the country's rail network was located in the North.

If the transportation revolution reinforced the North's economic lead, the communications revolution introduced by the telegraph also had a huge economic impact, helping to link the slave-free far west to the rest of the country. In 1835 a New York professor, Samuel Morse, proved that signals could be transmitted by wire. In the 1840s and 50s telegraph lines began to connect US cities. The instant communication afforded by electric telegraphy not only enabled news to spread more quickly. It also made it much easier to operate banks and railroads on a continental scale. Orders for money transfers and train departure times could be transmitted instantly. In 1861, the Western Union company completed a telegraph line linking California to the East via Salt Lake City. San Francisco was now in instant communication with New York.

Immigrants came to the North, where nearly all the opportunities were, rather than the South, which supplied its labor needs through slavery. Irish and German immigrants brought different customs and skills. Industrious Germans soon became some of the nation's most productive farmers. Irishmen provided the unskilled manual (physical) labor needed to construct canals and railroads. Their wives and children (child-labor was common) swelled the growing factory workforce. Northern cities were becoming cosmopolitan. This left the South as the most ethnically English section of the country.

It was also the most old-fashioned. The planters who dominated the South economically and politically were an aristocracy. Family dynasties going back to colonial times pursued their leisured way of life living in mansions set in large estates. Most of the slaves were held by these aristocratic planters. Less than two thousand families owned all the plantations with over 100 slaves.¹¹ There were more whites who held just a few slaves. However, three-quarters of southern whites had no slaves at all. Although too poor to buy slaves, these uneducated 'hillbillies' did not oppose slavery. If they had little, at least they were white, which gave them a feeling of racial superiority. 'Poor

11 American Pageant, p.364

white trash' could dream of one day buying a slave or two, leading an easier life and rising up the social ladder.

In education, too, the South lagged far behind. The North made rapid progress in the antebellum period at establishing tax-funded elementary schools in every community, however rural it might be. New England led the way. 95 percent of New Englanders could read and write in 1850 with the rest of the North not far behind. By contrast, only 80 percent of southern whites were literate.¹² Nevertheless, free blacks were still excluded from public schools in the North, just as they were in the South.

Education, an adaptable workforce and the promise of quick profits all added up to a highly inventive society in the North, especially in New England. Nearly all the mechanical inventions which were so important to the industrial revolution came from the North.

Around the middle of the century there were important signs in the North that women's traditional position in society was changing. For the first time anywhere in history, as many girls were getting an elementary education as boys, although high school and college remained male preserves. An increasing number of women were working outside the home. 25 percent of the factory workforce was female. By 1850 three quarters of all the public school teachers in Massachusetts were women.¹³ The beginning of feminism as a political movement dates from this time. In 1848 a women's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls in upstate New York. It issued its own version of Jefferson's Declaration: 'all men and women are created equal'. Women were in the forefront of reform movements to reduce alcohol consumption, to improve education and the condition of prisons and attitudes towards the mentally ill and, most important, abolish slavery.

Economic Differences between the North and the South

The South's workforce remained agricultural in the antebellum period, whereas the North's shifted into industry and other economic sectors.

	1800	1860
North	70	40
South	80	80

Percentage of the workforce involved in agriculture

12 McPherson, J. (1988) *Battle Cry of Freedom. The American Civil War* Penguin, UK p.20

13 McPherson *Battle Cry Freedom* p.33

The contrast between society in a slave state and a free one in the early 1830s

The Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville described the experience of sailing down the Ohio River where a traveller could simultaneously observe a slave state, Kentucky, on the left bank and a free one, Ohio, on the right.

Upon the left bank [Kentucky].....the population is rare [thinly spread]; from time to time one descries [sees] a troop of slaves loitering [hanging about] in the half-desert [half-cultivated] fields; the primeval forest recurs at every turn; society seems to be asleep, man to be idle.....From the right bank [Ohio], on the contrary, a confused hum is heard which proclaims the presence of industry; the fields are covered with abundant harvests, the elegance of the dwellings announces the taste and activity of the labourer, and man appears to be in the enjoyment of that wealth and contentment which is the reward of labour.

Whites avoided physical labour in Kentucky for fear of appearing to do the same work as slaves, whereas manual labour—skilled and unskilled—was highly valued in Ohio.

Upon the left bank [Kentucky] labour is confounded [confused] with the idea of slavery, upon the right bank [Ohio] it is identified with that of prosperity and improvement; on the one side it [labour] is degraded, on the other it is honoured; on the former territory no white labourers can be found, for they would be afraid of assimilating themselves to the negroes; on the latter, no one is idle, for the white population extends its activity and its intelligence to every kind of employment.

Source: De Tocqueville, A.(2004 - first published 1835) *Democracy in America* Bantam Classic, New York pp. 419-420

- **In which ways, according to de Tocqueville, did free labour help to promote change, economic progress and modernization?**
- **How did slavery do the opposite?**

By the middle of the century, economic specialization had made the regions of the country interdependent. Modern industry and banking were concentrated in the Northeast, grain and livestock in the Old Northwest and cotton in the South. The southern cotton economy was to a large extent financed by northern banks. The North was the South's second biggest cotton customer after England. Conversely, the South was a huge market for the North's manufactured goods.

On the whole, there were few purely economic reasons for conflict between North and South. It is true that the issue of tariffs (see pp.10-12 'the 1832 Nullification Crisis) had caused a sectional crisis in 1832. But since then the North had become more aware of the need not to provoke the South over this issue. Neither was the South's cotton economy, in itself, any reason for conflict with the North. But the South's dominating position in world cotton production tempted southern politicians to dream of world power.

The 'King Cotton' argument went thus: should the North decide to go to war and blockade the South, Britain would lose its cotton supply. Rather than see its factories grind to a halt,

Britain would side with the South and use its naval power to break the North's blockade. In this way, the North would be forced to back down. As James Henry Hammond of South Carolina boasted in the US Senate in 1858:

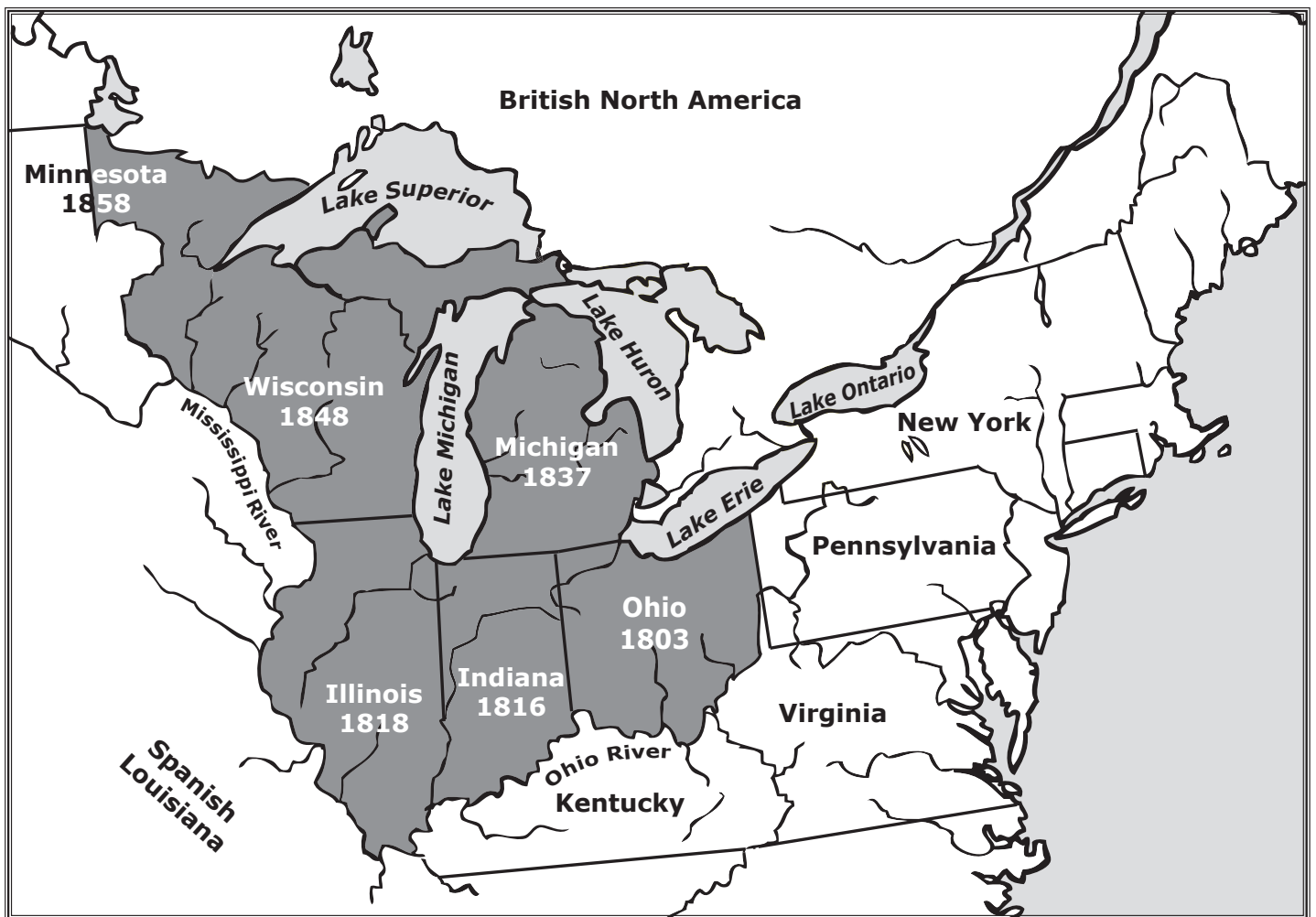
"Without the firing of a gun, without drawing a sword, should they [the northerners] make war upon us, we could bring the whole world to our feet. What would happen if no cotton was furnished for three years? England would topple headlong and carry the whole civilized world with her. No, you dare not make war on cotton! No power on earth dares make war upon it. Cotton is King."

In the heated atmosphere of 1858, Hammond was probably trying to overawe northern Senators with the King Cotton argument. It was nevertheless true that southerners hoped for British intervention, if it came to war. But they knew they could not count on it. Slavery was as unpopular among the British as it was with northerners. Furthermore, the North was an important trade partner for the British.

If we can see few purely economic causes of the civil war itself, economic reasons rank high, when we search for explanations for the North's victory. The North's economy grew much faster than the South's in every sector: banking, modern industry, transportation—even agriculture. Only through the commercial crop of cotton was the South able to compete.

Internal trade expanded tremendously in the antebellum period, especially between the Old Northwest and the Northeast. Sellers and buyers were connected by telegraph. Cincinnati meatpackers could find out the prices of a barrel of pork in New York City and Boston within a few hours.

Mechanical improvements (the steel plow, the mechanical reaper-mower) greatly increased grain productivity. One farmer could now do the work which had kept several men busy before. With factory-made goods available at affordable prices, farmers and their wives no longer had to worry about making their own clothes and furniture. Farms could now be run for profit. The corn (maize), wheat, pigs, dairy produce and cattle which the region poured forth were now shipped to distant markets in the east, thanks to the transportation revolution. From New York, the Northwest's wheat was shipped on to England, especially after Britain opened its market to foreigners in 1846.



The Old Northwest, originally organized by Congress (1787) under the name of the Northwest Territory :