

COULD THE CIVIL WAR HAVE BEEN AVOIDED SUBMIT TO QUORA.COM

What was the compromise that both sides should have accepted that would have prevented the American Civil War?

Let's say you are Abraham Lincoln on March 4, 1861. You were elected in November 1860, on the Republican Party platform supporting the building of a transcontinental railroad, passage of a Homestead Act giving land to settlers, and opposition to the expansion of slavery into western territories. However, the Republican Party platform was explicit in its pledge not to interfere with slavery in the states where it already existed.

In your inaugural address, you reiterated that you had no desire, nor did you think you as president had any right to interfere with slavery in the states where it already existed. And you pledged that you would not forcibly invade the South. You explicitly stated: "In your hands, my disaffected countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. *****[get exact words]***** The federal government will not assail you. There can be no war without you yourselves being the aggressor."

Later that day, you were informed with the secret knowledge, known only to the US military, that food and water would soon run out, for the 80-men federal garrison holding Fort Sumter. You knew that a federal garrison facing Charleston, South Carolina, was in the most secessionist city in the most secessionist state. In short, it was located in the most volatile spot in the entire nation. The military officer asked Lincoln, "What should we do?"

Lincoln was now presented with a dilemma. Any decision he made was bound to anger a large number of people.

** If he decided to abandon the little fort, he would anger many in the North, who were upset about the 7 Southern states that seceded.

** If he left them there, it was at risk that the South Carolina artillery would fire on the Fort, leading to the outbreak of civil war.

Lincoln decided to reinforce the fort with food and water only, and he made a pledge to the Governor of South Carolina that he would not try to reinforce the fort with either more soldiers or more arms or ammunition.

In my opinion, this was a mistake. Secessionists considered ANY occupation of a military fort in any seceded state to be completely unacceptable. This was especially true for the secessionist hotheads in South Carolina. If he did this maneuver, he could no doubt claim the moral high ground if the rebels attacked first. Lincoln could order retaliation, and be justified, but at what cost?

What actually happened was that, over the next six weeks, the issue of Fort Sumter became more and more tense. Attempts at compromise failed. Finally, when the US navy ships bringing food and water to supply the federal garrison came close to South Carolina, Confederate President Jefferson Davis ordered the rebel artillery to fire on Fort Sumter. Before the supply ship could get there, the heavy bombardment on April 12 and 13 forced the little fort to surrender. Northerners considered this an act of war, and demanded Lincoln to act.

The fact that Lincoln cleverly maneuvered the secessionists into firing the first shot, while clever, meant war. Northerners cried out "The flag has been fired upon, we must revenge this insult!" That set the nation onto a course that resulted in nearly 800,000 Americans dying, with many times over that being wounded or psychologically traumatized. Almost every family in the nation was directly affected during the four long years of the Civil War.

Lincoln responded with a presidential proclamation, calling for 75,000 volunteers to invade the South "to suppress insurrection." The governors of Virginia, Tennessee, and Missouri each responded with an angry refusal, stating they would never join in an invasion of their sister states of the South. The state legislature of Virginia had previously voted not to secede, but immediately after Fort Sumter they met and reversed that earlier vote. Virginia seceded and joined the Confederacy. This was soon followed by Tennessee, Arkansas, and North Carolina. And it almost happened in Missouri, Kentucky, and Maryland. In all these cases, it was not Lincoln's election that prompted four states of the Upper South to secede. It was Lincoln's call for federal troops to "suppress insurrection." To prevent Maryland from seceding, Lincoln ordered the US military arrest of thousands of secessionists, including members of the state legislature, the mayor of Baltimore, and to hold them in military prisons without trial. That made Southerners even more angry. Thousands volunteered to fight in Confederate armies.

How could Lincoln have avoided this outbreak of fullscale war? In my opinion, if Lincoln wanted to avoid war he should not have tried to resupply Fort Sumter. He should have notified South Carolina's governor that he was sending a ship to evacuate all 84 of the soldiers in Fort Sumter, and then he should have done that to take them away. But secretly, before that, he should have made a deal with North Carolina Governor Zebulon Vance, who opposed secession. The North Carolina legislature had already voted not to secede, and if there had been no outbreak of war at Fort Sumter, North Carolina would not have seceded at all. Lincoln should have promised Vance that he would provide much federal aid to enlarge the port of Wilmington, North Carolina, if Vance would send a telegraph to Lincoln, publicly asking Lincoln to establish a fort at the mouth of the Cape Fear River, "in order to protect the city of Wilmington."

If Lincoln had followed this plan, secessionists would have no justification to complain. The seven states of the Deep South had severed their ties with the Union over the election of Abraham Lincoln. And Lincoln should have offered them no grounds for complaint that he was going to invade the South and impose military rule. By moving troops to North Carolina, which had not seceded, he could say that he was merely responding to the request of Governor Vance, who wanted to protect North Carolina's largest port. But, Lincoln also knew, that if at some point in the future, North Carolina did secede, it would be a great advantage to have a US fort guarding the entrance to the Cape Fear River. Having federal troops in Fort Sumter offered the Union no clear advantage—it was completely surrounded by hostile Confederate forts and artillery batteries. But those same troops in North Carolina could build a new fort that would prevent Wilmington from becoming a major port for the Confederacy (which, in fact, it did become. Wilmington was a major port for Confederate blockade runners, and it was not captured by the Union until January 1865.)

In my opinion, the top priority for Lincoln during his first months in office was to prevent the secession of the Upper South states of North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, and Missouri. These eight states had much more white population than the seven states which seceded and formed the Confederate States, and much more industry. They were much more valuable for the Union than the seven smaller Deep South states. They clearly felt that Lincoln's election was not justification for seceding, since Lincoln won the election fair and square. However, they were angered about Lincoln's proclamation calling for 75,000 volunteers to invade the South.

Slavery was clearly an important motivator for the secession of the seven states of the Deep South. The secession conventions said it explicitly in their articles of secession, which they formulated in the six weeks between December 20 1860 to February 1, 1861. However, slavery was not so crucial for the decision of the four states of the Upper South. It is important to realize that it was Lincoln's call for 75,000 troops to invade the South, not slavery per se, which led Virginia, Tennessee, Arkansas and North Carolina to secede, in April and May.

These four states had a lot more population, and even more manufacturing, than the seven states of the Deep South. If Lincoln had managed the crisis more adroitly, he might have been able to keep them from joining the Confederacy. In my opinion, if Lincoln had withdrawn troops from Fort Sumter, so as not to start a war in that volatile spot, he could have concentrated on keeping any more states from seceding.

How might Lincoln have convinced the Upper South states to remain in the Union? In my opinion, Lincoln could have accomplished this goal by persuading Congress to pass "internal improvements." Southern Democrats had long opposed this old Whig Party idea, but now that there were seven fewer Democratic states after the Deep South seceded, Lincoln had the votes to pass internal improvements bills in Congress. Then he could offer those improvements (for example, railroad building, improving harbors, etc.) to the Upper South states, explicitly to persuade them that their future would be better inside the USA than outside of it.

Once the crisis had passed, and the Upper South states did not secede, Lincoln would have the votes to pass the Republican agenda. After Kansas was admitted as a state without slavery, in January 1861, there were 19 free states and 15 slave states. But, since the Congressmen from the Deep South states had already left the US Congress, there were now 19 free states but only 8 slave states. Lincoln had a grand opportunity to pass the Republican agenda. In their 1860 party platform Lincoln and the Republican Party agreed on these issues: build a transcontinental railroad, pass a Homestead Act, establish land-grant colleges, prohibit slavery in all US territories, and not challenge slavery in the states where it already existed. If Lincoln had stuck to this agenda, he had the votes in Congress to pass all of these planks, while also offering advantages to the Upper South states to keep them satisfied, while avoiding war with the seven seceded states of the Deep South.

Would this plan have guaranteed the continuation of slavery in the United States for the foreseeable future? I don't think so. Here is a scenario suggesting how slavery might have ended. Lincoln could have retired after four years, with a great accomplishment of ending slavery in the territories while also avoiding a bloody and costly civil war. He could finish his term having fulfilled every plank of the Republican Party. But by the time of the next election, in 1864, the Republican Party might decide their new objective would be to end slavery everywhere, even in the 8 states of the Upper South which had remained in the Union. They might ask Lincoln to run for a second term, or they might have turned to a more radical anti-slavery candidate.

How might the end of slavery be accomplished, in 1864 or 1868? After a successful Lincoln administration, the Republican Party would be very popular in the North and West. If they wanted to move to end slavery in the remaining 8 states, they could have returned to the strategy they used in Kansas. Republicans won in Kansas by persuading so many anti-slavery Northerners to move west and settle in Kansas that they simply outvoted the number of pro-slavery settlers. When Kansas applied for statehood in January 1861, the settlers submitted a state constitution that prohibited slavery.

The slave state which had the most potential for change by using this technique was Missouri. It had been admitted as a slave state in 1820, and slavery was established in the Missouri River Valley (mostly growing hemp which was used to make rope). But the rest of the state was not much tied to slavery. Large numbers of German and Irish immigrants had settled in Missouri in the 1850s, and they were strongly anti-slavery. By 1860 half the state's population lived in St. Louis, which was also becoming more anti-slavery. If Republicans had focused on persuading more Northerners and more immigrants to move to Missouri, by 1864 they might have enough votes to end slavery on the state level. To lessen the opposition of slaveholders, they might have offered compensation or a buy-out plan. The government might purchase a large amount of hemp (to use as rigging on US navy ships), but purchase only hemp grown by non-slave labor. This would give hemp growers financial incentives to convert to free labor.

Another state that might be convinced to end slavery on the state level was Maryland. The large population of Quakers who lived just over the border in Pennsylvania, might have conducted a campaign to encourage their denomination to move next door to Maryland. Quakers were strongly opposed to slavery. If the Republican Party could encourage enough Quakers and other anti-slavery Northerners to move to Maryland, then it is possible that by 1864 or 1868 they might have enough votes to end slavery on the state level.

If Maryland became a free state, then it would only be a matter of a short time before Delaware would vote to end slavery in their state as well. Delaware shared a long border with Maryland, and if Maryland ended slavery it is most likely that Delaware slaveholders would sell their slaves to neighboring Virginia. Another factor is that slaveholders were only a tiny minority of Delaware's population, and they might have accepted compensation or moved with their slaves to the pro-slavery Deep South.

If Missouri, Maryland and Delaware ended slavery on the state level, that would bring the total free states to 22, with only 5 slave states.

At the same time, new states in the West might be admitted in the 1860s. The most immediate prospect was Indian Territory (today's Oklahoma). The Cherokee, Creek, Seminole, Chickasaw and Choctaw tribes were known as the "Five Civilized Tribes" and because they had largely adopted the ways of white society, in his 1860 Annual Message to Congress President James Buchanan strongly recommended they should be admitted as a state. After Republicans passed an act abolishing slavery in all US territories, Lincoln should have offered those tribes admission as a state as a reward for them giving up slavery among their people. Only a minority of Indians held slaves, and only a tiny

number held large numbers of slaves. If they could continue their form of government, with each tribe becoming a county in the new state, that would allow them much more power and influence by being directly represented in Congress.

Another possibility was that California could be divided into two states. In reality, this is exactly what California's state legislature voted to do in 1860, but this proposal was never accepted by Congress because of the outbreak of war. However, Nevada was admitted as a state in 1864 and Nebraska was admitted in 1867. If those territories were admitted in 1864, and all of the above changes were made (ending slavery on the state level in Maryland, Delaware, and Missouri, and admitting Oklahoma, Southern California, Nevada and Nebraska as new states, that would bring the total number of states to 31, comprised of 26 free states and only 5 slave states (Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Arkansas).

At that point, a constitutional amendment ending slavery in all states would require 23 states to pass it. To make it easier for the 5 slave states, it might provide for compensation. Assuming that all 26 free states would vote for such an amendment, it would easily pass.

If all of the above changes happened by 1864 or 1868, keep in mind, slavery would still continue in the 7 seceded slave states. But things might not be going so well for the Confederate States. If there was no Civil War, the first crisis the Confederacy would face was in Texas. For years, white Texans had been expanding westward, but they were met with fierce resistance by the allied tribes of Comanche, Kiowa, Kiowa-Apache, and Arapaho. In the 1850s the US Cavalry protected the white settlers, but once Texas seceded US troops left. What really happened, in reality, is that in 1861 the Comanche and their allies immediately stepped up their attacks, trying to regain their lands. The small Confederacy did not have the strength to protect Texans from Comanche attacks. Confederate leaders had to keep a large number of troops in the east, in case war broke out with the United States. And each state had to keep their militia closeby, in fear of slave revolt.

Even with the Civil War raging, the reality that occurred from 1861 to 1865 was that Texans realized the Confederacy was just too small to protect them. They complained bitterly about the lack of support. In desperation, if the Confederacy was even weaker by being only the Deep South, Texans might have seceded from the Confederacy, and appealed to the United States for help. Lincoln then would be in position to provide help, but only on condition that Texas returns to the United States and ends slavery within their state.

Without Texas on their western border, white Louisianans might rethink their decision to secede. New Orleans was a major port for Midwestern farmers sending their crops in flatboats down the Mississippi River, but if that trade was disrupted the prosperity of Louisiana would decline. Lincoln, or a later US president, might have made a special deal to buy Louisiana sugar, but only if it was produced by free labor. This might have been enough to convince Louisiana to return voluntarily to the USA, without slavery.

If Lincoln and his capable Secretary of State William Seward had been astute enough to persuade Texas and Louisiana to return to the Union, and to end slavery, that would leave the Confederacy with only 5 states: South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama and Mississippi. Close to half of their total population was African American. In such a situation, a likely result would be for more slaves to escape. But the reality is that many Northerners were just as racist as Southerners, and they might not welcome a mass migration of escaping slaves coming to the North.

For many enslaved persons, a more realistic means of escape would be to flee southward, into the swamps of Florida. In 1860, Florida was the least populous Southern state. Escaping black people fled to Florida once before, from the 1810s to the 1840s, when it was still controlled by Seminole Indians. The Seminoles welcomed escaping slaves as allies, to increase their numbers in resisting the United States army. The Second Seminole War lasted from 1836 to 1842, and the US Army was never able to defeat the Indian-Black alliance entirely.

What would happen after large numbers of escaping slaves reached Florida is quite unpredictable. Here is one possible scenario:

If escaping slaves focused on Florida, President Lincoln (or, if Lincoln retired after one term, another US President was elected in 1864) would have been able to send US Navy ships along both east and west coasts of Florida, to "rescue" whites who feared black attacks, and thus further depopulate the already-small number of white residents in the state. The US Navy could send these rescued whites to Brazil, or another country, just to get rid of them while further weakening the Confederacy. As more whites left Florida, most of the remainder would flee northward to Georgia or Alabama. Florida would essentially become a black state.

At this point the Confederate government might attempt to retake Florida, but if the US government covertly supplied black escapees with muskets, small artillery cannon, and ammunition, and taught them how to fire and clean the guns, and how to build earthwork defenses, they might be able to repulse Confederate attacks. If the Confederates were intimidated into inaction, due to threats made by the US Army and Navy, the Confederates might lose control of Florida.

Let's say a real Radical Republican had been elected in 1864. He might send white abolitionists and educated free black people from the North, to settle in Florida, to teach the freedpersons how to read and do mathematics. Then, after 30 days residence, the white men could qualify to vote for each other into the Florida state legislature. This legislature could pass a new state constitution, renouncing secession, returning Florida to the Union, abolishing slavery, passing laws protecting civil rights, and instituting universal suffrage for all residents above age 15. This would be in response not only to gain the vote for black men and teenage boys, but also for black women and teenage girls.

If such a scenario occurred, Florida would end up as a black state, giving African Americans an opportunity to live freely in a state where they controlled not just local political offices, but the entire state government. This would also give them an opportunity to elect members of Congress, so that they would have direct representation in the US government.

What would happen to the remaining Confederate states: South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi? They might limp along as a truncated separate white racist government, or they might eventually appeal to rejoin the United States. If they did so, surely the US would require them to abolish slavery.

At this point it is pure speculation what might ensue. In the scenario above, the point is how unpredictable historical events can occur, to the point that an original action taken for a specific purpose can end up producing a quite different result. History is a complex interaction of many factors, with accidents and mishaps changing results. Thus, it is hard to predict what might occur. Nevertheless, it is good to think about possible alternate histories, as a means of clarifying what did in fact happen, and the potential for worlds yet to evolve.

Walter L. Williams, Ph.D. for more essays see walterwilliamsphd.org

If Texas and Louisiana left, the Confederacy would consist of only five states: South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi. In these states, African Americans were almost half of the population. One of the biggest fears of white Southerners was of slave revolts. They all knew about a massive slave revolt in Haiti, in which the slaves defeated the French army and turned to mass killings of white slaveholders. Such a bloodbath could have happened in the Confederacy. If a major revolt had started, many non-slaveholding families would have no doubt fled for safety, across the border to resettle in the United States. This would have reduced the white population of the Confederacy even further.

White Southern slaveholders gained their wealth by selling cotton abroad, mostly to England, Belgium and France. But in those countries anti-slavery sentiment was growing rapidly. And England was buying more and more of its cotton from its colonies in India and Egypt. If these nations stopped purchasing Southern cotton, that would result in a massive economic collapse. If this happened, Southern planters would suddenly have low income but massive expenses supporting large numbers of slaves. Many planters might give up and leave, taking as much money with them as they could. With the price of slaves plummeting, more masters would abandon their enslaved families. Now, with society falling apart, gangs of black men would start raiding nearby plantations, searching for food. The South could descend into chaos. Whites would run for their lives.

What would happen after that is impossible to conjecture, but it might have occurred that the United States government sent in troops to reestablish order, and then start rebuilding society by educating the freed persons, sending educated free black people from the North to establish governments, and readmit them as states in the United States, but as all-black states.

A DIFFERENT SCENARIO

Here is one possible alternative that Lincoln might have used. In his inaugural address on March 4, 1861, Lincoln should have called for a special session of Congress to convene in three weeks, to deal with the national crisis. Then, in planning for that event, Lincoln should have privately asked a friend of Roger Taney, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, to float an idea and see Taney's reaction. Roger Taney was no friend of Lincoln's, or any Republican. He was the author of the infamous Dred Scott decision, which in 1857 ruled that all US territories were open to slavery. That decision was so unpopular in the North and West that it was a major motivator for people to vote for Republicans. However, despite the fact that Taney was pro-slavery, he began his career as a loyal supporter of Andrew Jackson. When South Carolina attempted to defy the federal government in the Nullification crisis, Jackson firmly opposed any ideas of secession. As a reward for Taney's loyalty, Jackson appointed him to the Supreme Court. Taney was a slaveholder from Maryland, but as a Jacksonian nationalist he did not want to see a breakup of the Union.

Lincoln should have outlined a proposal regarding a ruling by the Supreme Court, to expand the federal government's right of eminent domain. He wanted to have legal justification for taking possession of land and buildings to make national historic sites like the New Orleans French Quarter, to take natural wonders to make national parks, and to develop flood control programs along the Mississippi River.

Taney said as long as those acts were passed by Congress, and owners of those buildings and lands would be fairly compensated, they could be removed by the power of eminent domain granted in the Constitution to the federal government. Taney added that he would not favor making a Supreme Court decision denying the right of secession of states that had originally joined to approve the Constitution of the United States, but he was prepared to rule that any state that was formed later, as a result of a purchase by the federal government, would not be able to secede unless an amendment to the Constitution was passed. Thus, because the state of Louisiana was part of the Louisiana Purchase that the federal treasury paid to France in 1803, Taney concluded, it had no right to leave the Union unless three-fourths of the other states agreed.

Lincoln was overjoyed to hear this. Knowing that Taney would be able to press other Justices to agree, the Supreme Court would back up his actions in Louisiana. Lincoln wanted to take back control over Louisiana first, because he realized the economic importance of the Mississippi River trade. After every harvest, Midwestern farmers floated their crops down the great river to be sold in the trading houses of New Orleans. The new Confederate Congress had closed the lower Mississippi River to "foreign" trade, alarming people from Ohio to Montana Territory, who were dependent on trade along the Ohio, Missouri, and Mississippi Rivers. Always an astute politician, Lincoln knew this would especially be an immediate benefit for his home state of Illinois.

As soon as Congress convened, Republicans rapidly introduced a Homestead Act, a Transcontinental Railroad Act, and an act to abolish slavery in all US Territories. They were able to quickly pass these main planks of the Republican Party platform, ironically because conservative Democratic Congressmen from the seven Southern states that seceded had already left Congress. This meant Republicans had a majority and would be able to pass other bills. With Republicans favoring "internal improvements," they passed bills that Lincoln suggested to establish a national university, a new military academy, and within the Interior Department to establish a national park system, a national historic sites commission, and a bureau to address problems related to the flooding of major rivers.

To mask his real intent, Lincoln made great ceremony to dedicate George Washington's Mount Vernon home as a National Historic Site, and to create a National Historic District incorporating Jamestown and Williamsburg in honor of Virginia's first English settlements, with another National Historic District in downtown Philadelphia, incorporating Independence Hall, William Penn's house, and Benjamin Franklin's home and print shop. Lincoln also announced the creation of National Parks at the ancient Indian Mounds at Cahokia, Illinois, at the Grand Teton Mountains and Yellowstone River Valley in Wyoming Territory, and at Yosemite Valley in California.

At the same time, Lincoln secretly ordered US Navy Captain David Farragut to assemble a flotilla of battleships and head toward Louisiana. As soon as Confederates took any military action, Farragut was ordered to speedily move his ships to the docks of New Orleans and, with his ships' cannon pointed directly toward downtown, to demand the immediate surrender of the city. Before they knew what was happening, without a shot being fired, the citizens of New Orleans were under the control of an occupation force of US Marines who had arrived with Farragut. [Keep in mind this is exactly what happened in reality, in April 1862, when Farragut captured New Orleans without firing a shot]

As soon as the US Marines had secured the city, Captain Farragut put out a request for loyal men to demonstrate their loyalty by volunteering to join the US Navy and US Marines. Only a few white Louisianans volunteered, but large numbers of black men and mixed-race men did so. Armed Marines then went from house to house, demanding that all pistols and muskets must be turned over. Anyone who did not surrender all firearms, they were told, would be subject to arrest. Volunteers were immediately instructed in how to load and aim a musket.

After a few more days, US Marines went to the large mansions of New Orleans' white elite, with a document stating that their home was chosen to become part of a New Orleans historic district. All adult occupants were given receipts from the United States Treasury, stating that as law-abiding citizens of the United States, they would be compensated for their loss, in monthly payments to begin in one month's time. But, they were told, in order to receive payment, they must move west of the Mississippi River. If they did not cooperate, they were told, they would not receive any compensation. They were given two days to pack up their belongings and go to the river to be ferried across to the western bank. They could take whatever they were able to carry to the ferry, including horses to pull their wagons. However, if they tried to take their slaves with them, US Marines would rescue any adult slave who expressed a desire not to board the ferry, along with any minor children of that adult slave.

However, since their property was now located within a United States federal territory, slavery was illegal, so they would not be compensated for the price of their slaves.

First, Interior Department officials informed building owners that their home was included in the New Orleans Historic District, and they must move to somewhere west of the Mississippi River. They would do the same thing with Louisiana landowners who held property anywhere east of the Mississippi River, telling them their land was going to become part of a new National Park and Swamplands Nature Preserve, or part of the Lower Mississippi flood control program.

US Marines distributed information verbally as they went throughout New Orleans and surrounding parishes, telling slaves that they were now free, and suggesting that they apply for jobs working for the United States Department of the Interior. They were given jobs cleaning and refurbishing the grand mansions and nicer houses in the city, and were offered free places to reside in the more modest housing of the city. Those who were house servants were offered jobs taking care of an assigned building, while field slaves were offered jobs working in the Nature Preserve or the Mississippi River flood control program. Areas subject to flooding were changed from sugar plantations to small farms growing hemp, which could be sold to the US Navy for making rope.

The New Orleans French Quarter of old historic houses and public buildings, he suggested, could be used as spaces for a Lafayette museum honoring the French heritage of Louisiana (with a boarding school teaching orphans and the young children of vacationers to speak the French language), while their parents and older siblings could spend days visiting the George Washington museum of American history, a Dolly and James Madison museum highlighting the works of great American artists, an Alexander Hamilton museum of economics and business, a Thomas Jefferson museum of world history and cultures, a Benjamin Franklin museum of natural history, science and technology (especially teaching about new inventions, building techniques, and modern methods of agriculture), while the other old houses could be converted into rooming houses for vacationers escaping the cold Northern winters, as well as housing for students and faculty at the American University, the Andrew Jackson US Army and Naval Academy, and a school and boarding houses for homeless orphans awaiting adoption.

To Lincoln's great joy, Taney liked all these ideas, especially naming the military training center in honor of Andrew Jackson. After all, Taney knew, his mentor Jackson first became famous during the War of 1812 as the military commander who defeated the British army in the Battle of New Orleans.

After Taney approved the idea, Lincoln assembled Congress. He with the first order of business being passage of the Republicans even got several Democratic votes, by naming all this after Jackson. The first act that Republicans in Congress would pass (and they would be able to have enough votes because would have opposed it were not in Congress

After he had withdrawn federal troops from Fort Sumter, no doubt the Confederate government would have demanded that he also abandon Fort Pickens on the west coast of Florida, near Pensacola, and Fort Jefferson in the Florida Keys.

What did the average Confederate soldier believe that he was fighting for during the Civil War?

Answer

ChatGPT

.

Bot

The reasons why individual Confederate soldiers fought in the Civil War were varied and complex. However, many Confederate soldiers believed that they were fighting to defend their homes and families from invasion by the Union army, and to

Chris Krhovjak

.

Follow

Bachelor of Arts in History, The University of Texas at Austin (Graduated 2000)[Sat](#)

The politicians and the wealthy plantation owners that backed them fought for slavery. They were trying to preserve their wealth and power, and they had unfortunately painted themselves into a corner by investing most of their economy and wealth into an outdated and barbaric form of labor.

But the average Confederate soldier fought because he did not want to be seen as a coward by his community and fellow soldiers. He fought for personal honor and for the honor of his family.

When a Confederate soldier charged headlong into artillery and rifle fire, it wasn't slavery that propelled him forward. Most of them could not afford slaves and never would. It was for his community and for the men to his left and right that he risked mutilation and death. The fear of being branded a coward and a deserter by your peers is an extremely powerful thing.

.

Follow

Self Taught Cat Tech[4y](#)

Not so much for the Confederacy but for his State. My Great- Great Grandfather fought for the State of Virginia serving in the 24th Virginia Infantry. People in the past did not have the worldview we have now. Many never traveled more than 20 miles from their home during their lifetime. No this does not excuse slavery. The whole idea is repulsive so I can't understand anyone fighting and dying for it. However, I do understand fighting for the sovereignty of my nation and if necessary dying for it.

Upvote

8

1

John Conlin

.

Follow

Presenter, Tiktok @your.internet.dad at Conlin Associates (2018–present)[Updated 3y](#)

This is a great question and resulted in a lot of great answers. At Sandhurst I studied the American Civil War under Sir John Keegan who created the seminal military history "The Face of Battle" which simply asked for the first time why the enlisted men fought. It is possible that all the theories submitted by fellow Quorans may be less significant or controlling than a simple economic one.

It is difficult today to imagine that owning another human being is acceptable but it certainly was a common belief prior to the Civil War, as the Dred Scott case showed in 1857. In "The Trail of Tears" in the period 1830 to 1850, the native American tribes that were displaced west of the Mississippi had their land, crops and buildings taken over by whites, but were permitted to bring their black slaves with them.

The abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1834 had less to do moral outrage and more to do with the collapse of the Caribbean sugar market. The rise of the sugar beet as an agricultural product in Europe was devastating to the white plantation class in the sugar islands, so their slave holdings would have been seen as a rapidly depreciating asset, in modern economic terms. There was no white working class on the islands to be displaced by the freedom of slaves cheapening labor rates and the owners had good friends in the UK government who were able to compensate them through the British taxpayer at a time when the UK was immensely wealthy.

Contrast that to the slave owning class in the United States, where their holdings were an appreciating asset and the sum required to buy out slave ownership was vast and beyond any possibility. Most of the millionaires of the USA at that time lived along the banks of the lower Mississippi in the sugar and cotton plantations. America could rely on the London capital markets for loans for the Louisiana Purchase and the purchase of Alaska, etc. Freeing slaves did not result in a significant asset accretion to the USA and might have been seen as a bad credit risk.

To address the central question, there was one dimension that I didn't see discussed and that is perhaps an uncomfortable truth to some self-righteous New Englanders who are critical of the Confederacy. There was, in effect, a racial "cordon sanitaire" north of the Mason Dixon line. This is what made

the "underground railway" more Hollywood than history. With the exception of Quaker-influenced Pennsylvania this stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific. No black person, slave or freeman was permitted to enter New Jersey, but those already in the state could remain. To the west of Pennsylvania, Ohio failed to vote an outright ban by one vote, but any black person entering the sta...

Access this answer and support the author as a Quora+ subscriber

Access all answers reserved by

John Conlin

for Quora+ subscribers

Access exclusive answers from thousands more participating creators in Quora+

Browse ad-free and support creators

[Learn more](#)

everything you type with instant feedback for correct grammar, clear phrasing, and more. Try now!

Learn More

Upvote

2.7K

Related questions

More answers below

[If General Robert E. Lee hated slavery, why was he a Confederate?](#)

[Did blacks fight alongside the Confederates against the Yankees during the Civil War? If yes, how were they treated?](#)

[Why wasn't Confederate General Robert E. Lee hanged at the end of the American Civil War?](#)

Chaac

.

[Follow](#)

Former Peace Corps volunteer, then homesteader do-gooder. **14h**

My great-grandfather fought for the state of South Carolina, and for the right of products from South Carolina to be exported from his state without interference from the federal government. He was the son of a shopkeeper in Charleston who never considered owning slaves. GGrandfather Riecke wrote a journal "to save from oblivion the memories and traditions of the Confederacy; they are too grand to be forgotten."

"I have written these pages, and commit them to my children with the request, that they ever hold in reverence the cause their father fought for, for, "lost" though it be, it was none the less a just one. There is not a day, nor a deed, of the struggle for the same, of which we may feel ashamed."

In his book-length journal

[1]

Antony Riecke tells of his participation in the war effort with the Charleston Zouave Cadets and other South Carolina forces. While he describes his loyalty to his state and his thoughts on joining its struggle he never mentions slavery.

Footnotes

[1]

[Anthony W. Riecke's Recollections of A Confederate Soldier](#)

2.9K views

View 15 upvotes

[Your response is private](#)

[Was this worth your time?](#)

[This helps us](#) Upvote

27



Clay Reynolds

[Follow](#)

Studied History & Literature at The University of Texas at Austin (Graduated 1971)[Updated 2y](#)

Most people today would say “slavery” as the answer to the question. That would be simplistic and, while broadly true, incorrect in the specific.

The average Confederate soldier did not own slaves and never thought to. That required far more money and capital and, for that matter, need than the average southerner had in the first place. Not all southerners were in favor of slavery and many objected it on moral principles, in the second place. In fact, only about three percent of all southerners owned any slaves at all; and while the majority of southerners of all classes did at least tacitly support slavery as an institution, they probably would not have been willing to fight and die for it as a single idea or to preserve it as a permanent state of affairs. What they feared more was the freedom of millions of slaves, who they saw as their inferiors. They also regarded slavery as a way of life in the society they and their parents and their parents before them, etc., had been born into, just as millions of black slaves had been born into it and accepted their bonded role in the world as a painful but natural reality. Abolition of slavery was for most Americans, including and especially southerners, especially slaves, an abstract idea, almost unimaginable.

What the average Confederate soldiers believed they were fighting for was to defend what they believed to be their Constitutional Right to secede from the Union of the United States. This question had been born during the Constitutional Convention eighty years previous; it had been argued and debated, often violently, on the floor of the Congress; compromises had been reached, but agreement on the question remained elusive. From the beginning, those southern leaders who were involved in the framing of the Republic contended that no federalist or centralized government should have powers to impose laws or other regulations on the states without the individual permission and will of the states. (This is why an amendment to the Constitution requires ratification by a two-thirds majority of the states.) This attitude covered a variety of federally mandated measures such as banking, taxes, maintenance of a standing army and navy, tariffs on imported goods, and a variety of other considerations the “states rights advocates,” including Thomas Jefferson and James Madison opposed giving control of to the Federal Government.

The “Federalists,” principally led by Alexander Hamilton, disagreed with them on the grounds that without such a right and such a power, such a federal government, the concept of Union was meaningless. Southerners, though, particularly those from Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama and Louisiana, Tennessee and Kentucky disagreed, or at least a demonstrable plurality of them did. And they carried that disagreement into the Union from the beginning. Newer states such as Arkansas, Missouri, Texas, had been admitted to the Union as slave states, and they were largely settled at that point by people from those other southern states, so their sentiments favored the southern position. Other states, California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado were more ambivalent on the issue, but they were not pro-slavery in their own territories, not as a demonstrable majority.

When the war broke out in 1861, the average southerner believed that he was fighting to support his home state, as well as to resist invasion and encroachment by federal forces bent on imposing the will of the United States government on the individual states. In sum, they believed they were defending their individual states, their homes and hearths, so to speak; and they were working on concert (or in confederacy, to use the technical term) with the other southern states to resist the imposition of federal authority over their individual state’s autonomy. In other words, they believed they had the right to secede if they wanted to, and they were willing to fight and die to defend that right, even from “invasion” by federal armed forces sent to seize it.

On a more fundamental level, though, the average Confederate soldier enlisted, fought, and often died or suffered in battle because of an innate loyalty to his home, community or town. He was often pressured into volunteering by family, or by friends, and often joined up and fought to support friends and family, terrified more of shirking his duty or of coming home in disgrace than of dying in battle. For the most part, the average soldier was minimally educated, minimally literate, generally devout, and committed to his hearth and home first, to his state second, and to the federal government and flag, if at all, third. Most had never ventured more than a few hours’ travel from the place where he was born. Outsiders of any kind were viewed with a suspicious eye. They felt they were taking a stand to protect their own freedom; they also believed that God was on their side, because they firmly believed they had the moral high ground.

This was no idle decision for any individual or one that was made in haste or carelessness. For decades brawls and fights had erupted in taverns and inns, during civic meetings, in churches, even, in all communities all across the country regarding this very issue, and other rebellions and uprisings had occurred as a result of the question. People took the question of Federal vs States’ Rights seriously, and they defended their positions with vigor.

Slavery, as a legal institution, was part of the question, of course, and a significant part. It was the flash-point, in a sense, because southerners fundamentally believed that Lincoln and his newly minted Republican party would work rapidly to abolish slavery regardless of what the states wanted. It wasn’t so much a matter that southerners were so devoted to slavery that they would die to preserve it; it was a matter that they didn’t think the federal government had the right to dictate laws that would have effect in the individual states, particularly if those laws ran counter to the will of a majority of people in those states. Had they waited, they would probably have discovered that the abolitionism movement in the North, while growing and spreading, was by no means strong enough to initiate such sweeping and immediate legislation; and even if it did, it would take a Constitutional Amendment to accomplish it; this could require years before full ratification.

(It’s worth noting on this point that the Emancipation Proclamation, issued by Lincoln, was a wartime emergency measure; it extended the “Confiscation Acts” that were passed by Congress in the same year and that declared that any slave who made his or her way to Union lines would be automatically freed. The Emancipation Proclamation also only applied to those state that were “in rebellion,” not to Maryland, Kentucky, West Virginia (which had newly formed after Virginia seceded), Delaware, or Missouri. Lincoln did not personally have the power to abolish slavery by the stroke of a pen, although he could do so as an emergency measure connected to military necessity. In truth, the Emancipation Proclamation may well have been unconstitutional, inasmuch as the United States did not recognize the Confederacy as a bona fide country and did not officially recognize that any state within the Confederacy was fully in rebellion. Those were military decisions, not political ones, and the question of who, other than the duly elected officials of a state, had the authority to change that states’ laws was still not decided. But the Emancipation Proclamation was made; there was no legal

challenge to it; so that's what he did. It still took a Constitutional Amendment to abolish slavery nation-wide, and this wasn't passed until 1865, at a point when all the states, including those which seceded, were controlled by federally appointed legislators.)

It's also worth noting that many citizens in many northern states, particularly the so-called "Middle Border" states of Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana were not in favor of u...

Access this answer and support the author as a Quora+ subscriber

Access all answers reserved by

Clay Reynolds

for Quora+ subscribers

Access exclusive answers from thousands more participating creators in Quora+

Browse ad-free and support creators

[Learn more](#)

3.3K views

View 35 upvotes

Answer requested by

[David Wilkerson](#)

Upvote

35

7

Sponsored by Betterbuck

What are the stupidest things people overspend on in the U.S.?

In my experience, the average American overpays for things constantly. Here are the 5 worst culprits.

[Read More](#)

Upvote

1.3K

[Michael Miller](#)

.

[Follow](#)

professional journalist, historian4y

For some great resources on this question, consult "Soldiers Blue and Grey" by James I. "Bud" Robertson. It's a sort of summary of the life of the soldiers based on their correspondence. Also, a good perspective on how the war was wound up in the south would be the letters of Sherman when he was in Atlanta before the war.

Typical guys who became southern soldiers were influenced by a couple of pre-war actions that started them thinking about the sectional conflicts. First, there were a multitude of abolitionist activities that were started by northern societies who attempted to create communiti

... [\(more\)](#)

Upvote

12

5

1

[Bryan Norton](#)

.

[Follow](#)

Writer (2003–present)Mar 22

Think of any game or sport between two competing teams. The outcome for world peace or national pride is usually non-existent. These players are playing to win. During the Revolutionary War, what did the colonies fight for? For independence, for self-determination, for independence from the king, for the right to form local governments, for a smaller tax burden, for property rights, for a more civi

... [\(more\)](#)

Upvote

2

Sponsored by Performance Golf

Tiger Woods practices This Move with his son. Here's why.

The #1 swing trainer for amateur golfers.

[Learn More](#)

[Upvote](#)

1

Kevin Burke

.

[Follow](#)

[Upvoted by](#)

Ravi Vaish

, MA English Literature & History (1990) and

Wendy Weaver

, B.A. History & Mathematics, Willamette University (1973)[2y](#)

[Related](#)

What major mistake did the Confederates make to lose the war?

They fired on Fort Sumter. It was all down hill from there. Ironically the film "Gone With The Wind," foreshadowed this during the party at 12 Oaks. Pro war men were talking up how easy the Yankee Army would be to beat. Rhett Butler was asked about his thoughts since he had been in the North extensively. He pointed out the vast military resources the North had, listing them at length. Finally he said, . . . "and there is not a single cannon factory in the whole South." A young man challenged him saying, "What difference does that make to a gentleman?" and Butler replied, correctly, "It's going t
... [\(more\)](#)



Aaron Davis

and

Joseph Boyle

[upvoted this](#)

[Upvote](#)

2.4K

189

4



Francis

.

[Follow](#)

amateur historian.[Feb 17](#)

Rich man's war, poor man's fight. There's no "average Confederate soldier" but reasons included:

- "They made me" - the Confederates introduced conscription in April 1862, a year before the Union
- Pay and food - especially as you don't want to be competing with slaves in the job market
- My Home State - and the Northern armies were in Confederate territory most of the time
- My friends/my unit
- Chicks dig a guy in uniform (or Maisie asked me or some variation)

- To prevent [Bad things heard about the Union army]
- Slavery (as confirmed by many of their letters)
- Many other answers

People aren't clones.

Upvote

434

175

4



Scott Cochran

.

[Follow](#)

Biker Nation (2000–present)[3y](#)

As an amateur historian, I feel qualified to give my opinion and you can take it for what it's worth.

While one of the commenters correctly said there is a lot of material from the leaders of the Southern States and various politicians that mention slavery and race dominance as the "reason" to secede from the Union, the truth is more complicated.

Remember, the Southern leaders were offered the Corwin Amendment, which guaranteed that slavery would remain as it in the states where it currently existed "in perpetuity." So, on the face of it, that would suggest there was another, more compelling, re

... [\(more\)](#)

Michael Lee Russell

.

[Follow](#)

Former Battalion Commander 4/2 at Texas State Guard (2020–2023)[Upvoted by](#)

Carlos Marcelo Schäferstein

, M.A. Defense & Military History and Wars , War School (1999) and

James M. Volo

, MA Military History and Wars , American Military University (1997)[4y](#)

Here is how the armies were raised in the civil war: There wasn't that big of a Federal Army. Most of the Troops on the field are State Militias. The States reached down to the local mayors and levied able-bodied men to serve. Companies were formed at the town level. You were fighting alongside your lifetime friends and neighbors. The elected their Company level officers by ballot.

Look at the Battle of Bull Run, just to show one Union Division:

First Brigade

Col [Erasmus D. Keyes](#)

- [1st Connecticut](#): Ltc John Speidel
- [2nd Connecticut](#): Col [Alfred H. Terry](#)
- [3rd Connecticut](#): Col John L. Chatfield
- [2nd Maine](#):

... [\(more\)](#)

Upvote

6

Did Confederate soldiers believe that they were fighting for the "right side" during the Civil War?

Did Confederate soldiers believe that they were fighting for the "right side" during the Civil War?

Most believed that they did, although they did for various reasons such as:

"If I fall it will be in a good Cause in the defence of my country defending my home and fireside." – Private Andrew J. White, 30th Georgia Infantry

"I feel that I am fighting for your liberty and the liberty and privileges of my little children." – Private J.V. Fuller, 2nd Mississippi Infantry

"This country without slave labor would be completely worthless. We can only live and exist by that species of labor; and hence I am

... [\(more\)](#)

Upvote

150

118

6

20 answers collapsed

(Why?)

Related questions

[If General Robert E. Lee hated slavery, why was he a Confederate?](#)

[Did blacks fight alongside the Confederates against the Yankees during the Civil War? If yes, how were they treated?](#)

[Why wasn't Confederate General Robert E. Lee hanged at the end of the American Civil War?](#)

[What motivated Confederate soldiers to fight?](#)

[What did Union and Confederate soldiers believe about the purpose of the U.S. Civil War, and what were their reasons for fighting?](#)

[Why is Robert E. Lee considered a great general? Didn't he use Napoleonic tactics with modern weapons \(which is a recipe for high, unnecessary casualties\)?](#)

[Why didn't Britain vigorously support the Confederate States of America during the American Civil War since the Union's cotton blockade was financially painful for Britain and supporting the rebels would have weakened the rising rival USA?](#)

[Why was Robert E. Lee so great if he was part of the Confederate States?](#)

[In the US Civil War, the British "elites" tended to support the Confederacy, and ordinary Britons tended to support the US. Did Britain ever consider giving one side any material support?](#)

[Would the Union have won the war quicker if Robert E. Lee had decided to fight for them instead of the South?](#)

[How racist was Robert E Lee?](#)

[How evil was the Confederate States of America? Was it as evil as the Nazis or as evil as the old empires e.g. French, Spanish, etc.?](#)

[Why didn't the Confederate Army just attack Washington D.C. in 1863, and tried to end the war right then and thereby forcing Lincoln to surrender?](#)

[Why didn't the British empire just invade the USA when it was weaker? For example, after the civil war? They owned Canada, which would have been a prime place to use as a base.](#)

Who was a better general/commander, Robert E. Lee, or Stonewall Jackson?

Related questions

If General Robert E. Lee hated slavery, why was he a Confederate?

Did blacks fight alongside the Confederates against the Yankees during the Civil War? If yes, how were they treated?

Why wasn't Confederate General Robert E. Lee hanged at the end of the American Civil War?

What motivated Confederate soldiers to fight?

What did Union and Confederate soldiers believe about the purpose of the U.S. Civil War, and what were their reasons for fighting?

Why is Robert E. Lee considered a great general? Didn't he use Napoleonic tactics with modern weapons (which is a recipe for high, unnecessary casualties)?

Add question

Advertisement