

What Was the War of 1861-1865 All About?

By H. V. Traywick, Jr.

If the Union were to undertake to enforce by arms the allegiance of the Confederate States by military means, it would be in a position very analogous to that of England at the time of the War of Independence.

— Alexis de Tocqueville, from *Democracy in America*¹

Names tell a lot, and that conflict had many names. The one that seems to have stuck is “The Civil War.” But is this an accurate description? Civil wars by definition are wars waged between two or more factions within a country struggling for control of the government.² But Robert E. Lee was not fighting to take over the government of Abraham Lincoln any more than George Washington was fighting to take over the government of George III. Quite to the contrary, both were fighting to get out from under those governments, and Lincoln and George III were fighting to prevent them from doing so. Why?

Did the North wage war against the South because the South fired the first shot? South Carolina — with far more provocation³ — did no more than Massachusetts did when she seceded from the British Empire and fired on the British troops at Lexington and Concord.

Did the North wage war against the South to preserve democracy? Notwithstanding Lincoln’s stirring rhetoric in his Gettysburg Address,⁴ government “of the people, by the people, and for the people” did not “perish from the earth” when the Southern States withdrew from the Union. It perished when they were driven back into it at the point of the bayonet. Furthermore, while Lincoln was issuing this stirring address, his suspension of the writ of *habeas corpus* had been in effect for ten months⁵ and up to 38,000 of his critics and political enemies had been languishing in his dungeons without trial from one end of his domain to the other.⁶ At home, opposition printing presses had been destroyed by Mr. Lincoln’s Army and editors threatened with death, while Lincoln was conducting total war against a Southern people who only wished to be let alone, and whose attempt to peacefully withdraw from a voluntary Union would not have in any way

prevented the North from having all the democracy it desired.

We are very often told the War was fought over slavery. “Just look at the Ordinances of Secession,” we are told. “They had slavery written all over them.” A little research will show this generality did not apply to all of them — such as Virginia’s. But even if it did, so what? The Ordinances of Secession were not Declarations of War. They were Declarations of Independence. However, one will notice that this is never mentioned in the National narratives, because it would directly repudiate the National legacy of the Declaration of Independence that the thirteen *slaveholding*⁷ colonies signed in 1776. So to cloud the issue, the contention that slavery caused the war is emphatically and always implied — but never explained! Lincoln himself could not even explain it. In his Second Inaugural Address, Lincoln said of slavery:



Bombardment of Fort Sumter by Confederate Batteries on April 13, 1861.

*"All knew that this interest was, somehow, the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union, even by war; while the Government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it."*⁸

Let us take another look at this. "All knew," Lincoln claims, that "somehow" slavery was the cause of the war. We see here in Lincoln not some infallible Oracle of Truth, but merely an obfuscating lawyer arguing his case by pointedly ignoring the question of "How?" — the very question whose answer was fundamental to his accusation.

The fallacies of Lincoln's accusations are readily apparent.

The Southern States — far from withdrawing from the Union in order to expand the territorial limits of slavery — essentially gave up their claims to the territories rather than live under a Northern despotism, and thereby restricted their avenues for the expansion of slavery! This not only brought about what Lincoln said was the Federal Government's sole object — to restrict slavery's expansion — it went most of the way towards peacefully removing slavery from the United States altogether! As for rending the Union, "even by war," I would ask: Who rebuffed Southern diplomatic overtures of peace from December 1860 to April 1861? Whose garrison committed the first act of war by spiking the guns at Ft. Moultrie and slipping

into Ft. Sumter in the dark of night in direct violation of the truce then in effect? And who deceived the South diplomatically until he could send a powerfully armed armada to Charleston to provoke the South into firing the first shot?

If the North was fighting a Crusade of Liberation, why didn't she wage war on New York and Boston, the largest African Slave-trading ports in the world in 1861?⁹ Or on Africa herself and her slave-raiders — such as the Kingdom of Dahomey — the largest exporters of African slaves in the world?¹⁰ Or on New England and her manufacturing profits gleaned from slave-picked cotton, and from rum manufactured from slave-harvested sugar cane and distilled for trading along the African coast

for more slaves?¹¹ Why? Because slavery was not the issue of the "Irrepressible Conflict," as William Seward contended.¹² The "Irrepressible Conflict" was between the "opposing and enduring forces" of an agrarian economy and an industrial economy. The respective labor systems of the antagonists were just as irrelevant in this conflict as in any other war of conquest.

Why did Northerners abolish slavery in the first place? Was it because of their superior morality? Or was it because in an industrialized economy a free-labor system is more profitable to an employer than a slave-labor system? Adam Smith — in his classic treatise on economics entitled *The Wealth of Nations* — explained it all in 1776 and set the Abolition ball rolling.¹³ And if abolishing slavery in their States was because of the Northerners' superior morality, why did they first sell their slaves "down the river" before the abolition laws went into effect? Did they wish merely to rid themselves of a troublesome and unprofitable labor system, or to rid themselves of their African population as well? Alexis de Tocqueville makes some interesting observations on this in his classic work, *Democracy in America*.¹⁴

But did the North in fact abolish slavery? Or did she merely transform it into something a little more discreet and a lot more profitable? Slavery is as old as Egypt, and the preacher tells us there is no new thing under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:9). If the borrower is the servant to the lender (Proverbs 22:7), then some of us have voluntarily sold ourselves into indentured servitude to our mortgage bankers, but our children have been sold into involuntary servitude with a seventeen-trillion-dollar national debt. And when did this happen? It was all inaugurated during Reconstruction. Lt. Gen. Richard Taylor, CSA, son of President Zachary Taylor, described the carpetbagger as being worse than Attila the Hun, for Attila could only steal existing wealth, while the carpetbaggers stole the labor of unborn children with their invention of public credit.¹⁵ And they are still waxing fat on the backs of our enslaved children.

No, the North was not fighting to free the slaves. Lincoln said so himself. He specifically stated that he was fighting to save the Union.¹⁶ What he neglected to add, however, was that he was fighting to save the Union for Northern financial and industrial interests! And what were some of these interests? The industrializing North, with her sectional majority, was rapidly gaining control of the Federal Government

and wielding it to accomplish her political ambitions to centralize its power, and use her control of that power to accomplish her industrial ambitions for high protective tariffs, bounties for transcontinental railroads, and the creation of national banks to manage it all, all at the South's expense, turning the Southern States into her agricultural colonies — of the sort that England had earlier created with her thirteen Colonies. With the election of Lincoln and the triumph of his strictly Northern sectional party, the Cotton States saw it all coming and got out from under the North's control once and for all.

So what was the War all about? Quite simply, it was the North's war against the South's secession. Secession is an Imperialist's worst nightmare. When the thirteen Colonies rebelled against England's economic exploitation by seceding from the Empire, England sent in the Redcoats. When the Southern States rebelled against Yankee economic exploitation by seceding from the Union, the Yankees sent in the Bluecoats.

With the secession of the Southern States, the North lost her largest source of tariff revenues, her source of cotton for her mills, a large portion of her markets for her manufactured goods, and control of the mouth of the Mississippi. If the South were to be allowed to leave the Union and get out from under the control of the North and her sectional majorities, the Northern economy would wither on the vine.¹⁷

So the North provoked the South into firing the first shot, blockaded the Confederate coasts, and marched her armies across the South to the tune of the Puritanical and militantly intolerant *Battle Hymn of the Republic* — burning and pillaging and raping and killing — until she drove the Southern States back into the Union. Then, by the Reconstruction Acts that disfranchised Southern intelligence and enfranchised Southern ignorance under the control of unscrupulous and predatory Northern carpetbaggers and demagogues propped up by Federal bayonets — the North passed Amendments that effectively gutted the Constitution of its federative nature, and put the Federal Government under her unlimited control.¹⁸ With the stumbling blocks of the South and the Constitution finally out of the way of her ambitions, the North then sent Sherman, Sheridan and Custer out to the Great Plains to tend to the Indians, who were in the way of her transcontinental railroads. (The South's accounts of these genocidal incendiaries are underscored ten-fold by the Indians'



Attorney-General Dan'ls' Secretary Mallory, Secretary Menninger, Vice President Stephens, Secretary Walker, President Davis, Postmaster Douglas, Secretary Temple.
 THE CABINET OF THE CONFEDERATE STATES AT MONTGOMERY.—(FROM PHOTOGRAPHS BY WHELDON, OF WASHINGTON, AND HINTON, OF MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA.—[SEE NEXT PAGE.]

subsequent accounts in Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*.¹⁹ But this doesn't look too good on the pages of a fourth-grade history book or in a National Park Service film presentation, so the North's war of conquest must be cloaked in robes of morality and turned into a war of liberation. To the victor belong the spoils, and the "Official History Book" — written by "Court Historians," taught in public schools, and romanticized endlessly on the TV and movie screens — is one of the spoils of war.

It should come as no surprise, then, that the South has been made the nation's foil, the scapegoat, the traitor, the guilty one, fighting not to defend herself from *invasion, conquest, and coerced political allegiance*, but fighting to defend slavery. And it should come as no surprise that the North has been made the righteous one, the "good guys," fighting not a war of *imperialism and conquest*, but fighting a noble war of liberation under the tragic benevolence of "Father Abraham." But the truth is that when Abraham Lincoln got the war he wanted, he suspended the writ of

habeas corpus, secured for himself dictatorial powers, and — with the collaboration of his political party — implemented the very usurpation that the Founders had struggled to prevent.

With the possibility of secession and nullification destroyed by force of arms in 1865, the States — who created the Federal Government in the first place²⁰ — are no longer the final arbiters of the limits of Federal power granted by the Constitution. The Supreme Court is. But the Supreme Court is part of the Federal Government. Therefore the Federal Government is the final arbiter of the limits of its own power — and that is the very definition of despotism. This, then — the exact opposite of Emancipation — is the true legacy of Abraham Lincoln and his War to Prevent Southern Independence. The Confederacy — the last remnant of the Republic of sovereign States bequeathed us by the Revolutionary Founders — was the American Empire's first conquest.

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Notes

1. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2 vols. Trans. Henry Reeve (New York: D. Appleton, 1904) 2: 425.
2. *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Fifth ed., (Springfield: G. & C. Merriam, 1943.)
3. "The War Begins." Editorial. *Richmond Dispatch*, April 13, 1861, quoted in H. V. Traywick, Jr., *Empire of the Owls: Reflections on the North's War against Southern Secession* (Manakin-Sabot, Virginia: Dementi Milestone Publishing, 2013) p. 59-61. See also Edward A. Pollard, *Southern History of the War*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles B. Richardson, 1866) 1: 55-6, 58-9, 61. And see Abraham Lincoln's May 1st, 1861, letter to Capt. G. V. Fox, the commander of the Ft. Sumter expedition, in Samuel Wylie Crawford, *The Genesis of the Civil War: The Story of Sumter 1860-1861* (New York: Charles L. Webster & Co., 1887) 420.
4. Abraham Lincoln, "Gettysburg Address" (1863) in Charles W. Eliot, LLD, ed. *The Harvard Classics*. 50 vols. (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1910) 43: 441.
5. "Another Proclamation from Abraham." Editorial. *Richmond Enquirer*, September 29, 1862, quoted in Traywick, p. 161-2.
6. "The Reign of Terror in the North." Greg Loren Durand, *America's Caesar: The Decline and Fall of Republican Government in the United States of America* (Wiggins, Mississippi: Crown Rights Book Co., 2001) 171-87.
7. See U. S. Census Returns of 1790 in Thomas Prentiss Kettell, *Southern Wealth and Northern Profits* (New York: George W. & John A. Wood, 1860) 120.
8. Abraham Lincoln, "Second Inaugural Address" (1865) in Eliot, 43: 451.
9. "The Slave-Trade in New York." Editorial. *Continental Monthly*, January 1862, 87, in W. E. B. DuBois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America 1638-1870* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1896) 179, quoted in Traywick, p. 31.
10. See Zora Neale Hurston's interview with Cudjo Lewis, the last living ex-slave who had come over on a slave ship, in Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942; New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969) 206-12.
11. Kettell 42-3, 52.
12. William H. Seward, "The Irrepressible Conflict," speech, Rochester, New York, October 25, 1858, in *The Works of William H. Seward*, 5 vols. Ed. George E. Baker (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1853-84) 4: 289, 291-2.
13. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), ed. C. J. Billock, PhD, in Eliot 10: 85.
14. Tocqueville 1: 385, 387-8, 391-2.
15. Lt. Gen. Richard Taylor, CSA, *Destruction and Reconstruction* (New York: D. Appleton, 1879) 236.
16. Abraham Lincoln, "First Inaugural Address" (1861) in Eliot 43: 334. See also Lincoln's letter to Horace Greeley August 22, 1862, in *Abraham Lincoln: His Speeches and Writings*, ed. Roy Basler (New York: DaCapo Press, 1946) 652.
17. Kettell 19, 24, 42, 52, 75-6. See also "The Difference." Editorial. *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, January 21, 1861, quoted in Traywick, p. 66-8.
18. William A. Dunning, PhD., *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction: and Related Topics* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1898) 247-52. See also Walter Lynwood Fleming, *The Sequel of Appomattox: A Chronicle of the Reunion of the States*. Textbook ed. The Chronicle of America Series. Ed. Allen Johnson. Gerhard R. Lomer and Charles W. Jeffereys, assistant editors (New Haven: Yale UP, 1919) *passim*.
19. Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1970) *passim*.
20. Article VII, *U. S. Constitution*. See also Tocqueville 2: 425-6.

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