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Discuss the Causes of the Civil War

The events that led up to the Civil War are as vast and as numerous as the people that caused them. Although, the nation struggled to remain united, the split was inevitable. The war between the North and the Confederates erupted because of the socio-economical differences between the North and the South, the inability for the two sides to compromise, and the many “sparks” that caused mounting tension.

The North and the South, although both part of the same country, are polar opposites when it comes to the way their society runs. The North does not possess fertile land and is not capable of sustaining cash crops. The North heavily relies on industry to support their economy. Also, the rivers in the North are narrow and rough, making them impossible to use for transportation. The North expressed a great need for roads and canals in order to transport goods from town to town. The North contained a large population of people that belonged to the Society of Friends, a religious group that believes in equality thus shaming slavery. Lastly, the North was well educated and this enabled Northerners to be much more open to new ideas. The South expresses a distinct contrast from the North. These lands are extremely fertile and are ideal for growing cash crops such as cotton, tobacco, indigo, rice, and timber. In order to maintain these crops, farmers survived off the work of slavery. This ingrained slavery into every facet of the lives of

Southerners, making prosperity unimaginable without it. The rivers that flow in the South are wide and slow, perfect for transporting goods. The South saw no need for internal improvements such as roads and canals. The South did not trade with the North, but rather with England. The South also predominantly followed The Church of England. This raised the argument over tariffs. Tariffs were the key in raising revenue for the government but the south disagreed. The South wanted to lower tariffs because of their extensive trade with England, while the North wanted to keep them high to support their trade within the country. The economies of the North and the South could not have differed any greater, setting up the country for internal dispute.

The time period before the Civil War is plagued by an inability for the North and the South to compromise. It is also known for its series of non-powerful, short term presidents. All of the great minds were dead including John C. Calhoun, Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, and several others, leaving the country with a void of proper leadership. Without strong leaders, every bill was bound to fail. The first attempt was the Missouri Compromise of 1820. This stated that Missouri would come into the Union as a slave state and Maine would enter as free to maintain the balance of power. The geographical line at 36 degrees 30 minutes north latitude would separate the boundary between the free and slave states. However, when western expansion occurred, the problem of slavery arose once again. The Compromise of 1850 stated that California would be a free state and the other western territories would decide their status using popular sovereignty. Stephen Douglas, a prominent Senator at this time, created the need for another compromise. Douglas wanted the transcontinental railroad to travel through Chicago because that is where he owed land and he had a need to transport his goods. He also proposed that Kansas and Nebraska come into the Union and decide upon the slavery issue using popular sovereignty. This became known as the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. Kansas, unable to decide

whether to become slave or not, came up with two separate constitutions to send to Washington. The Lecompton (slave) constitution was chosen by Buchanan over the Topeka (free) constitution. This caused a miniature civil war within Kansas known as “Bleeding Kansas” due to John Brown’s brutal slaughtering of slave supporters. Without a true, valid compromise between the North and the South, Civil War was bound to break out in a larger scale.

Other than major issues, there are many “sparks” that built up to create tensions between the North and the South. John Brown created a great disturbance when he raided the arsenal at Harper’s Ferry in order to obtain guns to give to slaves. Brown believed that the slaves should simply kill off their owners and the issue would be resolved. Brown and his followers were captured and killed, but the idea of what could have occurred haunted the South. Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote the novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. This book opened the eyes of many Northerners to the true horrors that occur because of slavery; abolitionist became even more enraged at the lack of progress. When Lincoln was elected for president in 1860, the South was in an up roar. Although Lincoln did not support the giving of full rights to Blacks, he did believe that slavery was wrong and wanted to abolish it. The South began to rebel against the government, no longer wanting to be a part of the Union. However it wasn’t until the incident at Fort Sumter, that the gravity of the situation was understood. The South decided to attack one of its own fortresses, Fort Sumter, S.C. Although no fatalities occurred the fort had to surrender and the South had won their first battle. After South Carolina, the rest of the southern states followed the same pattern. Southern states stole from the mint in New Orleans and committed other crimes that expressed their great distaste for the government, especially Lincoln. President Lincoln would not allow for the South to leave the Union, wanting the country to remain whole. Many events occurred that spurred deep frustration on both sides of the struggle, but the South’s blatant

disregard for the government is the final spark that issued the need for civil war.

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