

History

The transition from GCSE to A Level can be a challenging but rewarding one. There are many opportunities to research the topics that you are studying and this must be seen as an absolutely necessary part of your studies. All components require extra reading to support and prepare for the work done in class.

Pupils study two separate topics in depth for A Level rather than the four topic areas they study at GCSE. Pupils need to fully understand the concepts of themes in order to fully achieve at A Level. Pupils need to read all the main themes of the American Civil War – make notes and further develop their knowledge for the main themes especially the theme of federalism.

Causes of the American Civil War

Sectionalism

Sectionalism in 1800s America refers to the different life styles, social structures, customs, and political values of the North, South and West. It increased steadily in 1800–1850 as the North, industrialized, urbanized and built prosperous factories, while the deep South concentrated on plantation agriculture based on slave labour, together with subsistence farming for the poor whites. Southerners defended slavery in part by claiming that Northern factory workers toiled under worse conditions and were not cared for by their employers. Defenders of slavery referred to factory workers as the “white slaves of the North.”

- Political – government and laws.
- Economic – **tariffs**.
- Social – social institutions such as slavery – or its organization of society.
- Cultural – interests, shared beliefs and experiences, values and attitudes.

For much of the early nineteenth century there were rivalries between the newer Western states and the older Eastern establish states. Far more important, however were the differences between North and South – the north tended to be a more **egalitarian** society. Northerners focused on fast-paced business and industry, spending their days manufacturing, shipping, and trading goods. By contrast, the south was a more **agrarian** society - the Southern economy relied on slow and steady agricultural growth. Planting and picking crops was the work of slaves who supported **plantation owners' (planters)** with their labour.

Slavery and the Growth of the Anti-Slavery Movement

The **abolitionist movement** sought to eradicate slavery in the United States. Prominent leaders in the movement included **Theodore Weld, Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, Elijah P. Lovejoy, and William Lloyd Garrison**, among others. Garrison, a radical abolitionist who called for immediate emancipation, became infamous when he started an antislavery newspaper, *The Liberator*, in 1831. His articles were so vitriolic that warrants for his arrest were issued in the South. Garrison and Weld also founded the **American Anti-slavery Society** in 1833.

Anti-Abolitionism in the North

Although the North was the hotbed of the abolitionist movement, not all northerners were abolitionists: many felt ambivalent toward emancipation or were downright against it. Trade unions and wage workers, for example, feared that if slavery were abolished, they would have to compete with free blacks for jobs (an argument also used by pro-slavery southerners). Most public figures and politicians shunned abolitionists for their radicalism

and unwillingness to compromise. Even the “Great Emancipator” Abraham Lincoln, though more open to abolitionism, was wary of radical abolitionists.

Abolitionist Propaganda and Media

Because **William Lloyd Garrison** published the first edition of *The Liberator* the same year as Turner’s uprising, many southerners jumped to the conclusion that Garrison had incited the rebellions with his antislavery rhetoric. Furthermore, former slave **Frederick Douglass** became a celebrity in the North when he published his experiences in *A Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* in 1845. Perhaps one of the most important books of the Era was *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* written by **Harriet Beecher Stowe** which caused sectional tensions between the North and South with its publication in 1851.

Federalism

Federalism has evolved over the course of American history. At different points in time, the balance and boundaries between the national and state government have changed substantially. In the twentieth century, the role of the national government expanded dramatically, and it continues to expand in the twenty-first century.

Dual Federalism (1789–1945)

Dual federalism describes the nature of federalism for the first 150 years of the American republic, roughly 1789 through World War II. The Constitution outlined provisions for two types of government in the United States, national and state. For the most part, the national government dealt with national defense, foreign policy, and fostering commerce, whereas the states dealt with local matters, economic regulation, and criminal law. This type of federalism is also called **layer-cake federalism** because, like a layer cake, the states’ and the national governments each had their own distinct areas of responsibility, and the different levels rarely overlapped.

The Civil War and Federalism (1861–1865)

Part of the disputes that led to the Civil War (1861–1865) concerned federalism. Many Southerners felt that state governments alone had the right to make important decisions, such as whether slavery should be legal. Advocates of **states’ rights** believed that the individual state governments had power over the federal government because the states had ratified the Constitution to create the federal government in the first place. Most Southern states eventually seceded from the Union because they felt that secession was the only way to protect their rights. But Abraham Lincoln and many Northerners held that the Union could not be dissolved. The Union victory solidified the federal government’s power over the states and ended the debate over states’ rights.

The Move West – Westward Expansion

Many settlers believed in a concept called Manifest Destiny; they believed that it was their God given Right to rule the North and push out towards the West. During the first quarter of the nineteenth century the United States grew drastically, in power and in geographical size. [The Louisiana Purchase in 1803](#) more than doubled the nation’s size and opened up a little known region to exploration and eventual settlement. Soon, explorers were returning from forays into the wilderness with stories of great stretches of beauty and fertile land. Some Americans ventured westward, but the nation was largely consumed by its struggle to maintain its neutrality in the face of threats from Britain and France. The nation turned its attention to the issue of expansion. The founding fathers had envisioned the United States as a bastion of freedom that would cover territory reaching all the way across the North American continent. Their descendents had not forgotten this desire, and encouraged expansion into western territories through laws and rhetoric.

The first wave of westward expansion accompanied the rise of manufacturing in New England and increasing mobility throughout the nation. As settlers moved to what is now the Midwest, the national infrastructure grew up around them, connecting the nation's cities and towns through a system of roads, canals and railroads. Accompanying the rise in new methods of transportation came progress in the fields of agriculture and medicine, as new machines were invented and new treatments for disease discovered. However, expansion did not occur exclusively in an atmosphere of progress. The age of Jacksonian Democracy saw the rise of political strife between the ruling Democrats and the opposition Whigs. As the two-party system matured, political tension became clearly focused around the issue of slavery. As the West gradually developed, the existing states were rapidly torn apart. Economic and social divisions became accentuated and both North and South clung to their beliefs and customs.

In 1848, the **Mexican War** concluded, and the United States gained full control of the Texas, California and New Mexico territories. As settlers poured into these regions, it was clear that the westward expansion was closely linked to the future of slavery. North and South focused significant energy on pursuing their political desires in regard to slavery in the settled territories of the West, and the famous Lincoln-Douglas Debates had at their core the future of slavery in the West. Despite efforts at reconciliation, most notably the Compromise of 1850, the Union was thrown into a civil war over the issue of slavery from 1861 to 1865, and western expansion slowed due to the conflict.

The Election of Abraham Lincoln

With the parties split and compromise no longer a solution, the **election of 1860** was less a national election than two sectional elections. Most Southern states refused to put Lincoln's name on the ballot or acknowledge his candidacy, and several even vowed to leave the Union if Lincoln were elected. Few people took this secession talk seriously, however, for the South had been making similar threats for decades.

The run-up to the election was intense as the four major candidates crisscrossed the country discussing the issues. On top of their traditional platform of higher tariffs and internal improvements, Lincoln and the Republicans added the promise of maintaining the Union. The Constitutional Union candidate, Bell, likewise promised to preserve the Union. Northern Democrat Douglas delivered antiseccession speeches, and Southern Democrat Breckinridge defended slavery.

In the end, Lincoln won a resounding victory, with 40 percent of the popular vote. He won a total of 180 electoral votes, while the other candidates combined won 123.

Secession

A month after Lincoln's election, legislators in **South Carolina** voted unanimously to secede; within several weeks, **Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas** followed suit. Despite "Honest Abe's" reputation in the North as a moderate, he was vilified as a radical abolitionist "Black Republican" in the South. Much to the dismay of anxious Northerners, lame-duck president **James Buchanan** did nothing to address the secession crisis. Lincoln also waited to take action until he had officially become president.