A SUMMARY OF KENNETH STAMPP’S

**CAUSES OF THE CIVIL WAR**

What caused the Civil War? The many historians who have attempted to answer this complex question have advanced a variety of theories. In attempting to reach an answer, what sources should be consulted? What documents should be studied? Should students of the American Civil War expect to have the question answered to their satisfaction or is the process of seeking an answer the most purposeful of reasons for studying this most critical period in our nation/s history?

Rather than attempting to answer the question ‘what caused the Civil War,’ historian Kenneth M. Stampp poses three other related, yet different questions:

1. What caused the North and South to engage in ceaseless controversy for more than a generation?
2. What caused the states of the Deep South to secede after Lincoln’s election in 1860?
3. What caused the great majority of Northerners to prefer war to the recognition of Southern independence?

In his book, *The Causes of the Civil War*, from which this summary shall draw heavily, Professor Stampp has compiled numerous excerpts from speeches, newspaper articles, and other documents which he organized into seven categories of causes of the Civil War:

1. The ‘Slave Power’ and the ‘Black Republicans’;
2. State Rights and Nationalism;
3. Economic Sectionalism
4. Blundering Politicians and Irresponsible Agitators;
5. The Right and Wrong of Slavery;
6. Majority Rule and Minority Rights;
7. The Conflict of Cultures.

Stampp recognizes, as do most historians, our nation’s history of sectional differences which led to a series of crises and compromises. The roots of the Civil War extended back at least to the founding of the United States of America. Historians, such as Professor Stampp, recognize that we will never know precisely what caused the Civil War, but by exploring the question we will deepen our understanding of this great national crisis.

***1) Slave Power and Black Republicans as a Cause of the Civil War***

Many Northerners, and particularly abolitionists, charged that the nation was being ruled by an aristocracy of slaveholding Southern planters, a virtual ‘Slave Power’. So powerful was this Slave Power, they argued, that an actual conspiracy existed which had as its goal the spread of slavery throughout the nation, threatening the very existence of our democratic institutions and the very freedom of the majority of citizens. To these opponents of the Slave Power the struggle was simply one involving the forces of good against the forces of evil. Proof of the existence of such a Slave Power, they pointed out, could be found in our recent history: the Missouri Compromise, the annexation of Texas, the war with Mexico, the Compromise of 1850, the Fugitive Slave Act, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and the Dred Scott Decision.

The advocates of a Slave Power conspiracy interpreted the Missouri Compromise as a defeat for the anti-slavery people because it permitted that institution to spread into the new state of Missouri and as far north as 36 degrees 30 minutes N. in the remainder of the old Louisiana Purchase territory. The annexation of Texas, in 1845, was recognized as a plot to add more slaveholding territory to the Union and to increase the power of the slave interests in the United States Senate; New Englanders most especially opposed the war with Mexico, which began the next year, on much the same grounds.

Senator Henry Clay, in attempting to compromise the question of extending slavery into the territory gained from Mexico, proposed a series of resolutions which were enacted into law. The ‘Omnibus Bill,’ or ‘Compromise of 1850,’ permitted California to enter the Union as a free state; though the slave trade was prohibited in Washington D.C., opponents of slavery vigorously opposed the introduction of the provision of “popular sovereignty.” Abolitionists opposed this concept which permitted citizens of newly-created Utah and New Mexico Territories to make the determination, when the time came to create state constitutions, whether slavery would be permitted.

The most passionate opposition, however, was directed toward another piece of legislation directly tied to the Compromise of 1850, the Fugitive Slave Law. This law, enforced by the Federal Government, required the return of runaway slaves to their owners and provided fines, imprisonment, and the payment of damages to the masters by any citizen convicted of aiding a fugitive slave.

Further evidence of the actual existence of the Slave Power was perceived in passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854. Not only was the Slave Power successful in repealing that provision of the Missouri Compromise, which established the line of 36 degrees 30 minutes N. as the northern limit of slavery in the territories, but under the pretense of local self-government, the Slave Power conspiracy aimed at expanding slavery into all the territories. If any doubts as to the existence of a Slave Power still existed, Northern opponents were quick to point to the ensuing bloodshed in Kansas when the majority of that territory’s citizens indicated by the popular sovereignty their desire to become a free state. Proponents of slavery entered Kansas Territory in large numbers, not to become permanent settlers, but to insure Kansas became a slave state. Thus, it was charged, the slave owners intended to accomplish the spread of this institution by political conspiracy if possible or by force if necessary.

The rule of the Slave Power was evident to these Northerners not only in the legislative enactments of Congress, but in the nomination and election of Presidents such as Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan who, it was maintained, were in obvious sympathy with the Southern slave owners. It was believed that influence of the Slave Power extended into the judicial system. The Supreme Court’s Dred Scott decision indicated to the foes of slavery the extent to which the influence of the Slave Power had grown by 1857.

While abolitionists assumed the cause of conflict to be the existence of a growing and aggressive Slave Power, spokesmen of the South maintained that it was the intent of the ‘Black Republicans’ of the North to deny the rights of the Southerners and the Southern states which threatened the continued existence of the Union. Defenders of this position held to the belief that it was the South who was injured by a crusade composed of Northerners who, in their hate and contempt for Southerners, wished to see them exterminated.

The ‘Black Republicans’ were envisioned by Southerners to possess no understanding of the institutions of the south; Northern political leaders, through continued abuse and vilification, exhibited to the people of the South a failure to respect the dignity and self-respect of the people of that section of the nation. Those Southerners contended that it was not an aggressive ‘slaveocracy’ which threatened the Union;it was the South who was injured; it was the South who was in the defensive in the years preceding the Civil War. Such were the beliefs of Southern leaders.

Jefferson Davis, former President of the Confederate States of America, following the Civil War described the “systematic and persistent struggle to deprive the Southern States of equality in the Union which constituted the intolerable grievance which led to the secession of that section of the country from the Union.” Davis referred to discrimination in legislation against Southern interests which excluded them from the territories. Northern hostility, as exhibited particularly in the language and action of Black Republicans was, to Jefferson Davis, the primary cause of the Civil War:

…sectional hostility which exhibited itself in 1820, on the application of Missouri for admission into the union, which again broke out on the proposition for the annexation of Texas in 1848, and which reappeared after the Mexican war, never again to be suppressed until its fell results had been fully accomplished, was not the consequence of any difference on the abstract question of slavery. It was the offspring of sectional rivalry and political ambition. It would have manifested itself just as certainly if slavery had existed in all the States or if there had not been a Negro in America.

Each of the antagonists attempted to blame the other and attempted to prove that it was the intention of a vast and ruthless “Slave Power” to rule the entire United States; Southerners accused “Black Republicans” of continued violation of Southern rights.

***2) State Rights and Nationalism as a Cause of the Civil War***

Another cause of the Civil War, as viewed most especially by Southern historians after the conflict, was the differing interpretations of the Constitution by the two sections of the nation. Alexander Stephens, who had been Vice President of the Confederate States of America, dismissed slavery as a cause of the war and identified as the real cause the opposing ideas of the nature of the “General Government.” Stephens wrote that there were those who viewed the government of the United States as “Federative” in its nature, and those who viewed it as National. Stephens did not view the Federal Government as National or Centralized; he maintained that it had no jurisdiction, under the Constitution, to impose any conditions or restrictions upon a state.

Southern leaders argued that the Constitution was a compact between the states. They emphasized that within the Constitution were certain specific delegations of power to the United State Government and that those powers not delegated were reserved to the states. As with any compact, obligations were held to be mutual, when one party failed to perform its part of the compact, the other party was released from its obligations. South Carolina charged the United States Government with not living up to its constitutional agreement to protect the rights of property, thereby releasing South Carolina from her constitutional obligations. Northern political leaders argued that the union was perpetual and that secession constituted rebellion. Abraham Lincoln reacted to South Carolina’s Ordinance of Secession by declaring: “that no State upon it own mere motion can lawfully get out of the Union.”

The importance of “States Rights” as a cause of the Civil War has been discounted by the historian Arthur M. Schlesinger who pointed out that those individuals who wrote and spoke of States Rights usually associated the doctrine with the South. The most commonly cited examples of the application of States Rights being those of South Carolina’s opposition to a federal tariff and to federal aid for internal improvements, both of which would have favored the North; to associate the doctrine of States Rights solely with the South is to be historically inaccurate contends Professor Schlesinger. He recounted that the first appearance of the doctrine was the Virginia resolution of 1798 and Kentucky resolution of 1799. These were written by Jefferson and Madison to arouse public indignation against the Alien and Sedition Acts passed by the opposition political party, then in power.

Schlesinger observed: “…the ‘Ins’ have always tended to be strong nationalists, and the ‘Outs’ strict constructionists and advocates of state rights.” In support of this contention, Schlesinger noted other instances involving the states rights controversy: New England Federalists’ opposition to Jefferson’s Embargo Act of 1807 and their subsequent threat at the Hartford Convention in 1814 to dissolve the Union; the Massachusetts resolution which refused to acknowledge the annexation of Texas and that same state’s resolution in 1847 to oppose war with Mexico. Several Northern states came close to nullification of a federal law in the 1850s when they resolved the Fugitive Slave Act. Professor Schlesinger agreed that state’s rights agitation has played a large part in our history but that it should not be emphasized as the major cause of the Civil War and that it should not be emphasized as a doctrine peculiar in the South.

Abraham Lincoln declared, in an 1862 letter to Horace Greeley of the New York *Tribune* that “my paramount object in this struggle is to save the union.” Historians sympathetic toward the South have posed the question that after all, was it so glorious a thing to have saved the Union by means of a Civil War? These historians have contended that the cost of the Civil War has been greatly underestimated. What, they ask, would the cost have been to the North had Lincoln permitted those first Southern states to secede? They argue further that had this war not been fought, the Union would hardly have been comparable to the effects of poverty which were visited upon an entire generation in the South following the war and the cultural and economic decline of that part of the nation.

If the Civil War was the inevitable result of a rampant nationalistic fervor in the North as so many Southerners believed, there seemed to be much evidence to support such a belief. Northern newspapers did appeal to the patriotic fervor of the people, and that sense of patriotism, of national pride, existed as much in the North as it did in the south. Pride in the United States of America, the legacy of Jacksonian Democracy, found its voice in Northern newspaper editorials of 1860 and 1861:

“The proud title of ‘a citizen of the United States’ could be claimed no longer, and having no nationality commanding the respect of the world, our persons and property would be secure in no part of the globe.”

“We love the Union, because at home and abroad, collectively and individually, it gives us character as a nation and as citizens of the Great Republic; because it gives us nationality as a People…”

“A surrender to Secession is the suicide of government…If we succumb to secession now—if we suffer these insurgents and usurpers to dictate to us the terms of a national dismemberment, our national government is gone—hopelessly, irretrievably gone.”

The *Boston Post* identified the age as being one of nationalities and, in an editorial of May, 1861, counseled:

…Fired by our example, the oppressed of the world have aspired to the dignity of nationalities.

…Shall the first to set the example, and the grandest in the procession of the nations, suffer its nationality to depart, at the bidding not of a foreign foe, but of rebel traitors of the soil? Rather let us dispute every inch of ground and every blade of grass.

***3) Economic Sectionalism***

If one were to identify some incident in our history which had such a profound affect upon the course of events as to set the two sections of the nation, North and South, upon a collision course, it might well be the invention of the cotton gin in 1793. Before Eli Whitney designed his famous machine, cotton production was an unprofitable enterprise. The hours of tedious hard labor required to separate fiber from seed discouraged Southern farmers and planters from growing the crop which, within a generation, would dominate Southern agriculture and Southern economy.

The North questioned the morality of slavery but many in the South, the planter aristocracy and the small farmer alike, convinced of the economic necessity of that institution defended it upon constitutional bases. As a result, there have been those historians who have been tempted to identify the basic cause of the Civil War as being a moral issue or a constitutional one.

*The Rise of American Civilization* was, for some time after its publication in 1927, one of the most well known interpretations of American history. The historians Charles and Mary Beard, in their portrait of the Civil War, explained it as having resulted from the conflict of two different economic systems: the capitalist, laborers, and farmers of the North and West, and the planting aristocracy of the South.

Beard viewed the Civil War as an irrepressible conflict because of the rivalry between the very different economic-political interests of the sections. While southern planters realized that federal protection of their slave labor system was necessary, they opposed governmental aid to the business enterprises of the North; thus accounting for the opposition to protective tariffs, national banking, national currency systems, and federal subsidies to shipping by the South. Beard explained that prior to 1860, the South had controlled the federal government with support from the free farmers of the West and North, but at this time the Northern capitalists were successful in allying the free farmers of the West and North against the South by supporting proposals for free homesteads, a Pacific railway, and by opposing the extension of slave labor into the territories.

Marxist interpretations of history usually emphasize economic causation. In seeking to explain the cause of the American Civil War, Marxist-oriented historians discern a class struggle as being of the most fundamental significance. This was a struggle between the newly-arising capitalist class in America and the feudal planter aristocracy of the South. The bourgouise recognized the opportunity presented in the resistance of the frontier; the unsettled West gave hope to all of rising into the class of capitalists. The war, therefore, resulted when the capitalist class wrested control of the national government from the chattel slaveholders who would not compete economically with wage slavery.

The historian Louis Hacker also viewed the Civil War as revolutionary in its nature and wrote that it was nothing less than conflict between two different systems of economic production. But while the Marxists generally view the election of Lincoln as typifying the best days of capitalism to be followed by its inevitable decline, Hacker views the decade of the 1860s as the beginning steps in the triumph of American capitalism.

Professor Hacker wrote that the Civil War freed capitalism from both the political and the economic restraints imposed upon it previously by the slave power. Although hostile to the antislavery movement because of its doctrines of equality, he observed that northern commercial and industrial capitalists successfully utilized the movement to rally the people of the North against the Southern slave lords. These Southern planters had opposed those governmental programs so essential to the growth of industrial capitalism: a system of tariffs which would protect industry from foreign competition and national control of currency so as to prevent issuance of cheap currency by state banks which had favored the South and other debtor classes.

As proof of his contention that the Civil War resulted from economic differences to a much greater extent than it did from any question of the morality of slavery, Hacker cites that Republican platform of 1860 which “spoke in timid and flattering accents about slavery;” but made good its promises to enact a protective tariff, pass a homestead law, support a Pacific railway, write a national banking code, and encourage the entry of immigrant contract labor into the country.

Spokesmen for the South insisted that the duties being charged on goods being imported into the country were not levied to produce revenue, as was contended, but to protect Northern manufacturers from foreign competition; this, they contended, was taxing Southern and Western consumers in order to support the Northern manufacturers. Southerners pointed to the drain of capital from the South to the North regardless of how great the production of wealth by the South. They resented being compelled to go to the North for every one of the manufactured articles they needed or desired. They reasoned that they were being forced to pay tribute to the Northern states who, in turn, were determined to use the federal government to further exploit farmers and planters of the South. By 1861, Southern representatives to Congress were warning the North that the South was being compelled to free itself of Northern domination and to use that tribute money paid to support an unfriendly government to build up Southern commerce and industry.

***4) Blundering Politicians and Irresponsible Agitators as Causes of the Civil War***

Reflective of a general attitude toward war which existed during the period between the two World Wars of the twentieth century was the so-called ‘revisionist’ interpretation of the cause of the Civil War. Revisionist historians expressed contemporary feelings of hostility to war as a means of settling disputes between civilized people. They reacted against previously held views of nationalism, economics, slave power conspiracy, etc., as causes of the Civil War and expressed their belief that the conflict was an unavoidable one had the American people not heeded the rhetoric of ‘extremists’. Revisionists stress the importance of human emotions during the crisis of 1860-1861. They maintain that the crisis was inspired by the blundering and incompetence of pre-Civil War politicians and agitators who created animosities between the North and South.

Historian James G. Randall wrote that it was fanaticism, not cultural or economic motives, which caused the Civil War. As in most wars, it could not be explained as being the result of some elemental force such as nationalism, and therefore ‘reasonable.’ Randall states that it was the actions of small minorities which actually caused the war.

Revisionists maintain that the institution of slavery had passed its peak by 1860; the question of its expansion into the territories was not based upon geographic reality. Texas was the western limit of the cotton belt, to grow cotton in the Great Plains or deserts of the newly-acquired territories was impossible and no slave-owning planter would risk the attempt. The institution of slavery had reached its natural frontiers before the war began; the free farmers of the North had no real cause to fear its further spread; and those individuals who wished the institution destroyed had but to wait a little longer for it to be ended naturally.

David Donald, author of *An Excess of Democracy: The American Civil War and the Social Process* believes that the war can be best understood as an outgrowth of social processes which affected the entire United States during the first half of the nineteenth century. He reasons, contrary to the revisionists, that the war was inevitable; but he agrees with the revisionists in the belief that no fundamental differences actually existed between the people of North and South. Donald states that by the middle of the century, Americans were simply unable to arrive at reasoned, independent judgments upon the problems facing their society.

In support of this theory, Donald emphasizes the newness of American life in the mid-nineteenth century—the rapid rise of the city; the expansion of the frontier and the exploitation of its natural and mineral resources and the opportunity for rapid social advancement—contributed to an erosion of recognized values of orderly civilization. Because of this newness, little recognition was given precedent. It was a time in which individualism became a dominant trait of the American personality. Governmental power had declined and with it respect for all governmental authority. The franchise (the right to vote) was being extended; women’s rights were being recognized, especially in the West; children were valuable in this time of abundance and, as economic assets, were being given increased attention and freedom. Donald contends that these influences, this excess of democracy, secured at the expense of governmental authority, made the entire American society incapable of enduring the shock of undergoing the series of crises brought about by the physical expansion of the country.

Revisionist historians denounce abolitionist agitators and Southern “Fire-Eaters” alike. They recognize, in such men as Stephen A. Douglas and John J. Crittenden, that essential element of moderation unheeded at a time in which extremist propaganda nullified their pleas for compromise.

***5) The Right and Wrong of Slavery as a Cause of the Civil War***

Professor Stampp observes that Douglas and Crittenden, representing the attitude of moderate pre-Civil War statesmen, exhibited no strong sentiments as to the moral rightness or wrongness of slavery. But many Americans of the time viewed that “peculiar institution” as a great wrong and were convinced that only by war could this evil be eliminated. Following the Civil War, Northern historians wrote of slavery as being the fundamental cause of the war and thus concluded that the war had been both inevitable and justifiable. The historian James Ford Rhodes, though conceding that “there is a risk in referring any historic event to a single cause,” concludes emphatically that “of the American Civil War it may safely be asserted that there was a single cause, slavery.”

More recently, Charles G. Sellers theorized that so great a conflict of cultural values had evolved by the mid-nineteenth century, that the South, driven to belligerency, adopted such an irrational and aggressive attitude that a violent course of action became inevitable. The liberal and Christian heritage of the Southern cultural tradition provided no logical defense of the existence of slavery. Southerners became increasingly apologetic and defensive of an institution which seemed to nullify the liberal idealism of Jefferson, Madison, Mason, and other Revolutionary patriots of the South. Southern leaders, such as John C. Calhoun, began trying to convince themselves and others that slavery was a “positive good.”

Along with a fundamental moral anxiety which had become intolerable under the mounting abolitionist attacks, was added an intense fear of slave insurrections instilled as a result of John Brown’s raid. Thus, it led Sellers to conclude that the Civil War was unavoidable and salutary, for it freed the South’s people—both Negro and white—to move again toward the realization of their essential natures as Southerners, liberals, Christians, and Americans.

Some of the most respected historians of today challenge the revisionist explanation that the Civil War was caused by emotionalism stirred up by irresponsible agitators and that it could have been avoided had the national political leadership been more enlightened. Bernard DeVoto criticized the revisionists for understating or ignoring such fundamental matters as the successful functioning of constitutional governments, the basic paradox and conflict in our social system. These were conflicts and paradoxes which created problems which had to be solved, maintained DeVoto, and whether or not the war was inevitable, in his judgment the crisis was. Were we to accept the revisionists’ viewpoint, DeVoto warned, “history would be in imminent danger of forgetting that slavery had anything to do with the war.”

Although the revisionists insisted that slavery was an unimportant issue, Professor Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. would challenge them to show what policies a non-blundering generation would have used in resolving that issue. With reference to World War II, professor Schlesinger offered the opinion that perhaps we have overrated man’s capacity to solve peaceably all the problems that overwhelm him. “The unhappy fact” wrote Schlesinger, “is that man occasionally works himself into a log-jam; and that the log-jam must be burst by violence.” Such a log-jam was the social conflict involving the moral issue of slavery which simply could not be solved objectively.

Many Southerners agreed with the Northern abolitionists on one point: that slavery was a major issue leading to conflict between the sections. Defenders of slavery contended they were being excluded from the territories, that they were being denied the constitutional right to take property—their slaves—into Kansas, California, and New Mexico. *The Charleston Mercury* of February 28, 1860 insisted that the expansion of slavery into the territories was practical as well as constitutional; the use of slaves in mining the rich mineral resources of New Mexico, as an example, would be both useful and profitable. In October of that year, the same newspaper predicted the election of Lincoln would lead to emancipation of the slaves and would mean “the loss of liberty, property, home, country—everything that makes life worth having.”

Speaking in Savannah, Georgia, less than three weeks before the war began, Vice President of the Confederate States, Alexander Stephens declared the “immediate cause of the late rupture and present revolution” to be the status of the Negro in Southern civilization. Stephens identified the foundation upon which the cornerstone of Confederate government rested: “…the great truth that the Negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery, subordination to the superior race, is his natural and moral condition.”

Professor Stampp has identified three classic Northern statements relative to the slavery issue; the first statement, by William H. Seward was made in a speech opposing the Compromise of 1850. Seward reminded his fellow Senators that the institution of slavery was recognized in the Constitution and that in the slave states it was a ruling institution. Because the Compromise did not restrict slavery from the Mexican Cessesion, Seward justified his opposition with an appeal to a higher authority than the United States Constitution:

But there is a higher law than the Constitution, which regulates our authority over the domain, and devotes it to the same noble purposes. The territory is a part…of the common heritage of mankind, bestowed upon them by the Creator of the universe. We are his stewards, and must so discharge our trust…

Eight years later, in 1858, Seward gave warning that the North and South were headed for collision. He cited the reason as being the two radically different political systems, one of which rested on the basis of servile labor, the other on the basis of voluntary labor of free men. He predicted:

It is an irrepressible conflict between opposing and enduring forces, and it means that the United States must and will sooner or later become either entirely a slave-holding nation or entirely a free-labor nation.

Seward’s prophecy may have been inspired by a speech of Abraham Lincoln four months earlier. Lincoln’s political reputation had not spread much beyond Illinois before he gave his famous “House Divided” speech. By giving that speech, Lincoln earned the Republican nomination for the U.S. Senate and the distrust and even the hatred of Southern slaveholders. In this, the third of three classic statements by Northerners on the slave issue, Lincoln asserted:

In my opinion, (slavery agitation) will not cease, until a crisis shall have been reached, and passed. A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free.

I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided.

It will become all one thing, or all the other.

***6) Majority Rule and Minority Rights as a Cause of the Civil War***

The success of democracy, notes Professor Stampp, is measured by its capacity to deal with fundamental issues directly and decisively. “If there are controversies which cannot be settled peacefully to the ballot box, then democracy may fail us when we need it most.” Does the Civil War represent just such an example of a breakdown of the democratic process? Had our system of government become a “tyranny of the majority” as Southern secessionists claimed? Or, was the minority demanding the right to dictate to the majority, as was asserted by the Northerners. These questions and others relating to the workability of popular government make a study of America’s Civil War a most relevant one for today.

The Civil War does represent, to the historian Avery Craven, a complete breakdown of the democratic process. He poses the question, not of *What caused the Civil War?* but asks instead *How did it come about?* Craven enumerates many causes of the war: geography, historical developments, economic and social rivalries, differences in moral values, influences of personalities, psychological factors, slavery, and others. But it is the matter of how issues got beyond the abilities of the democratic process which concerns Professor Craven. He counsels that we, as citizens of a democracy, must understand the process by which the real issues related to the Civil War were reduced to abstract principles. We must also understand the process by which conflicts between various interests become over-simplified to the point of emotion instead of reason.

Craven utilizes a statement by Lincoln to illustrate how issues had become reduced to only right or wrong. Alexander Stephens had written to Lincoln late in 1860 and had reminded his old friend of the grave responsibilities which rested upon the newly-elected president. He also warned Lincoln of the great peril which faced the nation. Professor Craven finds Lincoln’s reply significant because it reveals the extent to which the issues had been simplified. Wrote Lincoln: “You think slavery is right and ought to be extended, while we think it is wrong and ought to be restricted. That I suppose is the rub. It certainly is the only substantial difference between us.”

Until his death in 1850, John C. Calhoun was the spokesman for the Southern minority. He advocated a doctrine which would protect the South and its slave system and his political theories continued to influence Southern thought long after his death. Calhoun’s idea of *concurrent majorities* was based upon his contention that the role of government was to keep order and to protect the minority, especially economic minorities. Calhoun did not profess to believe in human equality. He did not believe that human beings were born with and inalienable right to freedom, which included the right to vote, or that all people were naturally entitled to liberty. Liberty and freedom were to be earned only by deserving persons.

Calhoun defended slavery as a positive good; it explained the stability of the South as compared to the dissension evident in the North. Slavery represented to Calhoun, the foundation upon which the aristocracy produced culture and refinement. He believed that human character was governed by personal desires and emotions resulting in constant social conflict between individuals; permanent chaos could be prevented only by government. But since government depended upon human beings, how could individuals be prevented from using government for their own purposes rather than for the good of society? Calhoun’s answer was his doctrine of *concurrent majority*.

Because he did not believe in the equality of all men, Calhoun discounted the effectiveness of majority rule. Just because a man was permitted to vote did not, in the opinion of Calhoun, entitle him to make important decisions; voting should be for only selecting “true and faithful representatives,” stated Calhoun. These representatives, in turn, should not represent numbers of people but should represent great and permanent interests of society. Calhoun explained his theory with the following illustration:

If you have an association of seven equal partners, four shoemakers and three tanners, the majority would end up by exploiting the minority, because such is human nature, but this danger would be eliminated if you make a legal provision that the association could take action only when a majority of its constituent members—in this instance a majority of the shoemakers and a majority of the tanners—agreed to it. Each would then speak with one voice for all the shoemakers and all the tanners through its own particular organ.

Calhoun intended that his ideas of *concurrent majorities* be included as part of the Constitution. This would assure a continuation of Southern power within the government and would permit the South an effective veto over federal legislation considered by the South to be detrimental to its interests.

Secessionists argued that the majority made and executed the laws and the minority, while living under the government, had no choice but to submit to these laws. Defenders of the Union countered with the accusation that secessionists were expressing disbelief in the very principles on which our government was founded. Northerners claimed that while the South retained control of the government and used its powers to further their own advantage, they had no quarrel with the theory of democracy. But once these Southerners lost control of the government, they questioned the right of the majority to rule.

By mid-1861, the issue, as it appeared to Northerners was no longer one of whether the government of the United States should put down an insurrection, it had become an issue involving the cause of constitutional liberty the world over.

***7) The Conflict of Cultures as a Cause of the Civil War***

The final category of causes to be examined by Professor Stampp is that of differences which existed between the cultures of North and South. Prior to the Civil War, most Americans lived on farms which provided a basis of common understanding between the citizens of the two sections. Yet differences were apparent even in the common pursuit to agriculture. Cotton was “king” in the South; the one-crop economy and plantation system exerted the dominant influences upon the economy and the culture of that section of the country. In the North, the family-size farm was the rule, and the culture was influenced by a sense of individualism which resulted from such self-sufficiency.

If one were to accept Calhoun’s envisionment of Southern culture, it would best be described as “stable” in comparison to the apparent “restlessness” of the more progressive North. The Southern states, essentially rural, did not witness the ferment of intellectualism and reformism which characterized the growing cities of the North. These differences, and others, inspired attitudes of defensiveness or of superiority within the sections.

These cultural differences were responsible, in the extreme, for sectional hatreds which were becoming increasingly evident by 1860. Northern newspapers were describing Southerners as “barbarians”, envious of Northern wealth, power, and civilization; they were capable of only hating that which was beyond them. Southern newspapers described Northerners as a “conglomeration of greasy mechanics, filthy operatives, small-fisted farmers, and moon-struck theorists.” If Southerners accepted such a stereotype of their fellow citizens to the North, they also found it satisfying to accept a more romanticized stereotype of themselves: dignified southern gentlemen, chivalrous and refined, who possessed a heritage of leadership which made their habitual use of authority natural.

A more realistic appraisal of the cultural differences between North and South is that of historian Allen Nevins. Professor Nevins identifies the white population of the South as being far more largely Anglo-Saxon than the population of the North. British influence was evident in the original South where investment of capital was in large land-holdings. Anglo-Saxon influence was to be noted in the broad social emphasis of the Southern churches which were solidly Protestant.

Nevins describes Southern life as having a quality of remoteness and possessing an atmosphere of romanticism. These may be attributed to the milder climate and the abundance of nature in the South. He notes, also, the marked stratification of classes and traces of feudalism in Southern society. Life in the South was more aristocratic in its tone than life in the North, and this represents to Professor Nevins the central weakness of the South: the lack “of a great predominant body of intelligent, independent, thoughtful, and educated farmers in the slave states to match the similar body at the North.”

Emphasis in education differed in these sections. While Northern schools prepared students for lives of usefulness, Southern schools emphasized the social graces. The South could boast of its institutions of higher learning, its state universities and privately endowed high schools; but Professor Nevins observes that “The South was for the most part a land without free public schools—a land where the poor man’s son was likely to go untaught, and the workingman or small farmer to be ignorant if not illiterate.” This difference, remarks Nevins, represents one of the great gulfs which separated North and South.

Because the sections differed in many ways does not imply that the South loved the Union less; too many Southerners had given their lives in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and the more recent Mexican War. The South had provided perhaps even more than her share of patriot leadership to be accused of not loving the Union. But the Union was becoming different for Southerners; their institutions, customs, ways of life, seemed to be threatened by the trend toward a more unified and somewhat alien nation.

***Conclusion***

Seven categories of causes of the American Civil War have been investigated. In all probability, the student has found no single cause for combination of causes satisfactory in attempting to answer the initial question,” What did cause the Civil War?” Perhaps, the student is more impressed by the relevance of an observation made by the revisionist historian, James C. Randall, who commented: “As to wars, the ones that have not happened are perhaps best to study.”