Historians have long debated the causes of the Civil War. Some scholars have argued that...
This principle of territorial division had thus become the second basic formula, and the second of these was skillfully used to separate two opposing majorities to get it passed—one as a solid bloc of southerners in the Missouri territory; the other as a solid bloc of northerners, together with slightly more than a sprinkling of northerners, to defeat restrictions on slavery in the rest of the rest of the Louisiana Purchase (except the state of Tennessee, already admitted) along with the western land that constituted most of the Southwest Territory, or later the Texas and Mississippi territories. Both motions caused divisions along strictly sectional lines; both passed the House and failed to pass the Senate. Each precipitated a crisis that was not settled until a later session of Congress. Each inspired the formulation of an alternative plan making some kind of territorial adjustment between proslavery and antislavery interests. In 1820, Congress adopted the compromise proposed by Speaker of the House James Madison, which became the compromise of 1820. It allowed admission of Louisiana and Maine, with the remainder of the Louisiana Purchase to be organized as the first free state of the Union. This free-soil formula was, in a sense, older than the Constitution, having received its first sanction in the Jefferson-inspired Ordinance of 1787, which declared: "There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in the said territory, other than such as exists at the time of the admission of the said territory into the Union; and in the said territory so admitted no person shall be held to service or labor other than pursuant to the laws thereof, or under the laws of the United States." This free-soil formula was, in a sense, older than the Constitution, having received its first sanction in the Jefferson-inspired Ordinance of 1787, which declared: "There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in the said territory, other than such as exists at the time of the admission of the said territory into the Union; and in the said territory so admitted no person shall be held to service or labor other than pursuant to the laws thereof, or under the laws of the United States." This free-soil formula was, in a sense, older than the Constitution, having received its first sanction in the Jefferson-inspired Ordinance of 1787, which declared: "There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in the said territory, other than such as exists at the time of the admission of the said territory into the Union; and in the said territory so admitted no person shall be held to service or labor other than pursuant to the laws thereof, or under the laws of the United States." This free-soil formula was, in a sense, older than the Constitution, having received its first sanction in the Jefferson-inspired Ordinance of 1787, which declared: "There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in the said territory, other than such as exists at the time of the admission of the said territory into the Union; and in the said territory so admitted no person shall be held to service or labor other than pursuant to the laws thereof, or under the laws of the United States."
The doctrine of popular sovereignty need not have been so ambiguous. To give it a clear and definite meaning, Cass needed only to do at the outset what both he and Douglas did not. The Missouri Compromise, like the Compromise of 1850, was based on the idea that popular sovereignty would enable the territorial legislatures to determine the future status of slavery in the territories. But for two reasons, Cass did not adopt this idea directly. The first is that he was a Unionist and believed in the Constitution's power to exclude slavery. The second is that he wanted to preserve the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, which prohibited slavery in the Northwest Territory.

While President Polk was supporting the Missouri Compromise plan, the chief signs of its failure were the lack of a clear mandate from Congress and the absence of a clear statement of the constitutional principles that would underlie it. Cass, however, did not see in the Constitution any mandate for popular sovereignty. He believed that Congress had the power to exclude slavery, and he thought that it was the responsibility of the territorial legislatures to decide whether or not to allow it. He also believed that the Constitution did not give the federal government the power to regulate slavery in the territories.

In the end, the Missouri Compromise was a compromise of convenience rather than of principle. It was a way to avoid the issue of slavery and to keep the Union together. It was also a way to preserve the balance of power between the North and the South. Cass believed that the Constitution itself contained the principles of popular sovereignty, and he thought that the territorials should be allowed to decide for themselves whether or not to allow slavery. He also believed that the Constitution did not give the federal government the power to regulate slavery in the territories.

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The Political Divisions That Contributed to Civil War

The four doctrines championed by Wilmot, Buchanan, Cass, and Calhoun soon became the cardinal tenets of southern orthodoxy and operated as one of the key unifying factors in the party that was to become the Democratic Party. After the passing of the Missouri Compromise, which explicitly denied slavery in any new states north of the 36°30' line, the North and South drifted further apart. The Missouri Compromise was an early example of the sectionalism that would eventually lead to secession and war.

While middle-ground alternatives to the Wilmot Proviso were being developed in Congress, any federal law affecting "immediately or immediately" the institution of slavery was perceived as a violation of states' rights. By 1848, many southerners were asserting that they would never lend their support to a presidential candidate or party that advocated any federal law affecting slavery.

The territorial issue, difficult at best and badly interpreted after the election of 1848, became a major object of political struggle. Jefferson regained the presidency, and the sectional conflict continued to be played out in the territories.

In the election of 1848, Calhoun's supporters wanted to prevent the Union from adopting the free-soil position of Wilmot and the Democratic Party. They hoped to impose their own interpretation of the Constitution, which they believed favored slavery.

The Missouri Compromise, which Calhoun introduced in the Senate on February 19, 1847, set the stage for a political debate on the issue of slavery in the territories. Calhoun's position was that Congress had the power to prohibit slavery in any territory it acquired from Mexico.

The election of 1848 brought back the Wilmot Proviso, which prohibited slavery in any territory acquired from Mexico. Calhoun believed that this would lead to the breakup of the Union, which he saw as a natural and permanent union of sovereign states. He believed that the Constitution did not give Congress the power to prohibit slavery in the territories.

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The timethatconflictseemedto be irrepressible, toofundamental.tobecontained
withincommonconsensualboundaries. Becausethewarwassuchananomaly,both
participantsandlaterhistorianshavebeenfascinatedwithitscausessincethe
shootingstarted.

TheliteratureonthecausationoftheCivilWarisvastandrequiresnodetailed
reviewhere. Basicallyhistorianshavebeendividedintotwocamps,althoughthere
havebeenanumberofvariationsineach. Becausethewarpittedonesectionagainst
another,manyinsistthatafundamentalandintensifyingconflictbetweentheNorth
andSouthbroughtiton. Membersofthisgrouphavedifferedaboutthesourcesof
sectionaldivision, butmosthavearguedthatirreconcilabledifferencesoverNegro
slaveryinexorablyrupturedonenationalinstitutionafteranotherbetween1830and
1860 untilthosedifferencesproducedwarin1861. Inreplyrevisionisthistorianshave
minimizedtheinternalsolidarityofboththeNorthandtheSouthandtheserious
nessofthedisputesbetweenthem. Theyhaveblamedthewarinsteadonthemis
takesofpoliticalleadersandtheeffortsofagitatorssuchastheabolitionistsand
Southernfire-eaters. Despitethevariationsofthedebate,thecentralissuehasalways
beentheroleofslaveryincausingthewar, andrecentlythefundamentalistshave
wonthelargeraudience. HistorianslikeEugeneGenoveseandEricFonerhavees
ablishedbeyondcaviltherealityandgravityofideological,economic,andpolitical
conflictbetweenthefreelaborsocietyoftheNorthandtheslave-basedplantation
societyoftheSouth. Slaveryandirreconcilableviewsaboutthedesirabilityof
slavery'sexpansionlayatthebaseofthatsectionalclash, theyargue, andtheunwill
ingnessofeithersectiontotoleratethetriumphoftheother'svaluesproducedthe
war. ThuswehavereturnedtoanolderviewthatsectionalconflictoverNegro
slaverycausedtheCivilWar.

WithoutdisputingtherealityofsectionalconflictbetweenNorthandSouth, one
canstillpointoutthatthesectionalconflictinterpretationleavescertaincrucial
questionsaboutthebreakupofthenationunanswered. Foroneathing,todelineate
thefactorsthatdividedNorthfromSouthdoesnotbyitselfexplainwhytheslave
statesbehavedsodifferentlyfromeachotherduringthesecessioncrisis. Whense
cessionfirstoccurredandtheConfederacywasformed, onlysevenstatesintheDeep
Southwithdrew, yeteightotherslavestateschosetoremainintheUnion. True,
fourmorestatesjoinedtheConfederacyonceAbrahamLincolncalleduptroops
afterthefiringonFortSumter, butresistancetoovertfederalcoercionwasfar
differentfromsecessioninanticipationofaRepublicanadministration. Ifadesireto
protectorextendblackslaverycausedSouthernerstobreakup thenation, why didn’t
alltheslavestatesreactthesamewayintheinitialcrisis? Moreimportant, theargumentthatanescalatingsectionalconflictbetween
NorthandSouthbeforeApril1861 producedwarbetweenthemafterthatdate
doesnotreallyexplainwhyaconflictoflongdurationproducedwarthenandnotat
someothertime. Theproblemishowabasicconflictbetweensectionalinterests
andvaluesthathadlongbeencarriedoninpeacefulchannelsuchaspolitics
abruptlybecameashootingwaraftersmolderingfordecades, andwhyitdidsoat
onetimeinsteadofatanother. Whatproducedthesectionalhostility,inother
words, wasnotnecessarilywhatcausedarmedconflictin1861. Ideologicaldiffer
ences, afterall,donotalwaysproducewars.... Itremainscertainlywassectional
conflictbetweenNorthandSouthoverslavery-relatedmatters, yetthatconflict,or
hadexistedatleastsincetheConstitutionalConentionof1787. Can on...
Like other Americans in the 1850s, Southerners had lost faith in politics as politicians had long recognized that group conflict was endemic to American society and that the vitality of individual parties depended on the intensity of their competition with opposing parties. Thomas Jefferson had perceived in 1798 that "in every free and deliberating society, there must, from the nature of man, be opposite parties." A political party, indeed, was "most in jeopardy when an opposition is not sufficiently defined." During "the contest between the great rival parties, Federalists and Jeffersonians" each found in the strength of the other a powerful motive of interest. The common fear for the republic also fed the fire of sectional antagonism. Most Americans, North and South, therefore, were concerned with the same thing in the 1850s: the need to reform the political process in order to preserve republicanism. Others claimed with justice that this new anti-Catholic organization was a threat to republican government by insisting that native-born Protestant Americans rule the political organization that promised to restore government to the people and to purify the ballot and the voting process. Some saw the political pretensions of the hierarchical Catholic Church, directed by the Pope, as an obstacle to the spread of American republicanism. Jeffersonians and Whigs, on opposing sides, regained confidence that they could do battle for republicanism, and they moved quickly to remedy it. Although any party might suffer defeat, they continued to believe that inter-party conflict was needed to unify their own party and to prevent the state's Democracy from disintegrating. Another warned that "tension is certain to acquire additional strength... by the attacks of adverse parties," and he added, "I think the only danger to the Democratic party is that it will become too much of an omnibus in this State. Vehavenothing to fear from either the Union, or the Democracy." So, the Southern section's government was another manifestation of the national sense of crisis, of disgust with the corruptions of the old two-party system, and of the search for a new framework of political competition. But if the conflicts that sustained the old two-party system began in the North and upper South—to help restore public confidence that republicanism could function within the federal government, to protect the equality and liberty of individuals from aristocratic privilege, and to provide inter-party competition on any important issue at any level of the government—these same conflicts became anathema to the Southern section's Democratic party.
The advantages of the federal system went beyond this important mechanism. The system of political parties that emerged in the early 1800s—1860s (1988). The Civil War (1970).

Audiences lined up for party conflict that did not necessarily apply to the country as a whole. Many voters, probably the vast majority, learned of national and even state issues, for example, were often debated along party lines in the states. New York Whigs and New York Democrats in the same state could have diametrically opposed views on a matter involving slavery, but at home they could use their divergent positions to strengthen themselves against those of their party. The ability of the old system to provide party alternatives was important in determining its longevity, even when national parties were divided by it. One of the reasons the Second Party System lasted so long, despite the presence of sectional conflict, was the federalsystem. Historians of the politics of the 1840s and 1850s, indeed, of most periods, have not adequately assessed the impact of the federalsystem on parties. They have assumed that forces operating at different levels and in different parts of the country, they could defend for home solutions because they provided a mechanism for different people to cooperate within their respective systems. The federalsystem was a key to the success of the Second Party System. The system was such a vital link in the war's causation, therefore, one arrives at a more accurate portrayal of the political antecedents of war.

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