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History

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**Leading Economic Considerations For The Civil War**

The civil war was in large part due to the economic imbalance between the northern and southern states, perpetuated by the reliance of the south on an agricultural economy reliant on slave labor. However, the slave economy was not the most important economic consideration that led to the civil war, it was the large gap in industrialization between the north and the south. This supreme imbalance of industrialization that flourished in the north and languished in the south, further reinforced the south’s reliance on slave labor and put the northern states in an economically superior position going into the war.

The industrial revolution that firm entrenched the UK and her empire in the highest tier of world powers followed closely by France in a whole new league of economic opportunity and increased worker output. However, the benefits of this new opportunity were not dispersed evenly across the US, but firmly rooted themselves first as textile mills in Massachusetts largely due to the machinery plans that Samuel Slater stole from the UK. The textile manufacturing empires that quickly established themselves in the Northern United States were fed by armies of plantation owners in the South, greatly increasing the overall economic output of the fledgling US - and building an emerging middle class in cities across the North. However, the industrial might of the United States did not stay relegated to textiles alone for long, the emergence of greater industrial capabilities in steel, railroad construction and steamboats propelled the northern US into the realms of industrial nations while the south firmly stayed an agricultural one. By 1860, just one year before the start of the civil war the North held 90% of the country’s manufacturing capacity and produced 32 times the amount of firearms that the south did: keeping them on a far better footing for the start of the war according to the National Park Service.

The industrial revolution that held sway over the northern US did not hold itself just to increases in manufacturing efficiency, the Southern US also began to slip in terms of agricultural output. The advances that made factories possible started to revolutionize farming, starting with the mechanical thresher that was 72 times as efficient as a man threshing by hand. This led to the North holding a dominant portion of foodstuffs produced, including half of the nations corn crop, 80% of wheat production and 88% of oats. This increased agricultural efficiency only further spurred industrial growth as flocks of previously rural farmers came to cities in search of industrial jobs. The increased pace of urbanization across the north only further pushed factories to make more goods to support this new urban population, becoming a self-fulfilling cycle where more efficiency led to more growth. Waves of European immigration also contributed to the growth of Northern agriculture and manufacturing, bringing techniques for both from European farms and foundries to America, forging a new class of robber barons who made their money not through print or title but through steel and powder.

Finally, the gap in industrialization between the North and the South was also in large part due to geography. The North, while lacking in slow navigable rivers great for barges to transport farm goods more than made up for it in deep fast moving rivers great for water wheels. The South had the exact inverse of this geography, leading to cotton and other cash crops being almost exclusively transport via barges, but lacking the deep fast moving rivers useful for hydropower of machinery. These deep, fast moving rivers also frequently connected directly to the great lakes and thus the Atlantic Ocean, allowing finished goods to be moved via water. The lack of easily navigable rivers also spurred on the use of railroads throughout the Northern US, with 71% of the US’s railroads concentrated throughout the north allowing soldiers, war material and freight to be shipped extremely efficiently.

Sources:

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