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US History

**Political Reasons Leading To The Civil War**

The Civil War was an extremely complicated conflict. There were an indescribable number of reasons that led to a conflict that pitted family against family, and citizen against citizen. The most important of the political issues however was the collapse of the Whig Party, a major political force for much of the early 1800s, and the ascension of the Republican Party with Abraham Lincoln as its leader.

The collapse of the Whig party was not at all sudden, but it came to a head at the exact time that it caused the most difficulty for the country. The Whig Party had been a major force in politics for much of the early 1800s, electing several presidents and had numerous congressional candidates get elected into both the Senate and House. However, the societal and political leaders of the Whig Party could not come to a coherent party-line on slavery, becoming leaders in the half measures that kicked the can down the road on the civil war. While the unity of the Whig Party was unquestionable on measures including government corruption, namely prominent figures like President Andrew Jackson and his hand-picked successors, the Whig Party generally lacked cohesive views on policy prerogatives for the government which led to their downfall. The downfall of the Whigs empowered both the fledgling Republican Party, who had combined from a number of smaller parties fighting the Kansas-Nebraska act which would have led to the continued expansion of slavery. The disillusion of the Whig Party and the vacuum it created allowed the Republican Party to poach the abolitionists of the Whig Party and become the political party of abolition across the country.

The rise of the Republican Party, which took political control of the northern states within a few years of its founding had its greatest triumph with the election of Abraham Lincoln. While Lincoln stated a number of times that he had no prejudice against the people of the south, he believed that slavery was a moral, political and religious abomination and must be removed. He was for a longer term wind down of slavery, so that a civil war could be avoided but with many anti-abolition newspapers and politicians smearing him as revolutionary they actually forced the southern states’ hands in secession. Abraham Lincoln became the political face of the abolitionist movement, after decades of local leaders for the first time a truly national political leader holding the highest office in the land ran a campaign largely focused on this issue, and this energized both vehement slave owners in the south and abolitionists in the north, which came together to form the hawks of the civil war.

The rise of the Republican Party, collapse of the Whig Party and relegation of the Democratic Party to the role of a pro-slavery southern bastion was not the sole political turning point leading to the civil war, but they were certainly some of the most significant. The increasing political polarization and radicalization, most violently seen in the case of the battle over the admission of Kansas as a slave or free state leading to it being called “Bloody Kansas” further hastened the outbreak of outright hostilities between the CSA and USA. The historical causes of the civil war, and specifically the political ones are important to know considering their mirrors in the modern day political world so that we never return to a state of hostilities that is brother versus brother.

Sources:

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