

The Causes of the Civil War

18.1 Introduction

In Chapter 17, you read about people who lived in the West. In this chapter, you will learn how Americans disagreed about how to settle the West. This disagreement helped start a bloody **Civil War** between the Northern and the Southern states.

By the 1860s, the regions of the North and South were very different. The **North** was busily building cities, factories, and railroads. Most important, workers in the North were free, not slaves.

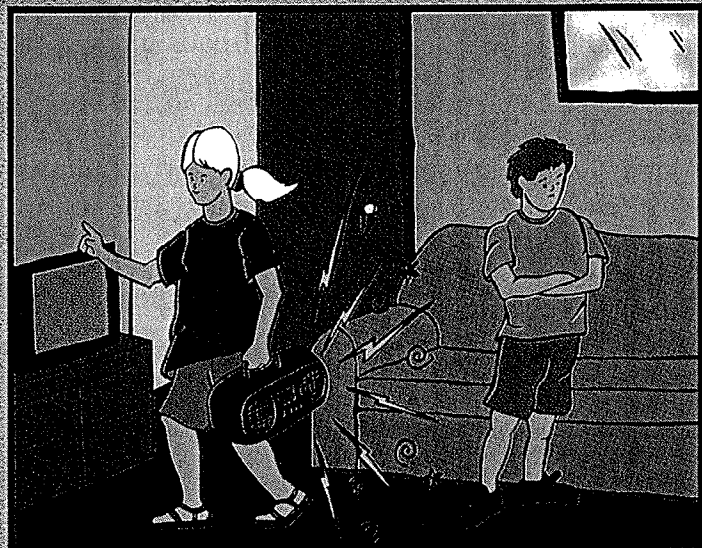
The **South** had few factories or large cities. Most people still lived on farms. On large farms, called *plantations*, African slaves planted and harvested crops, especially cotton.

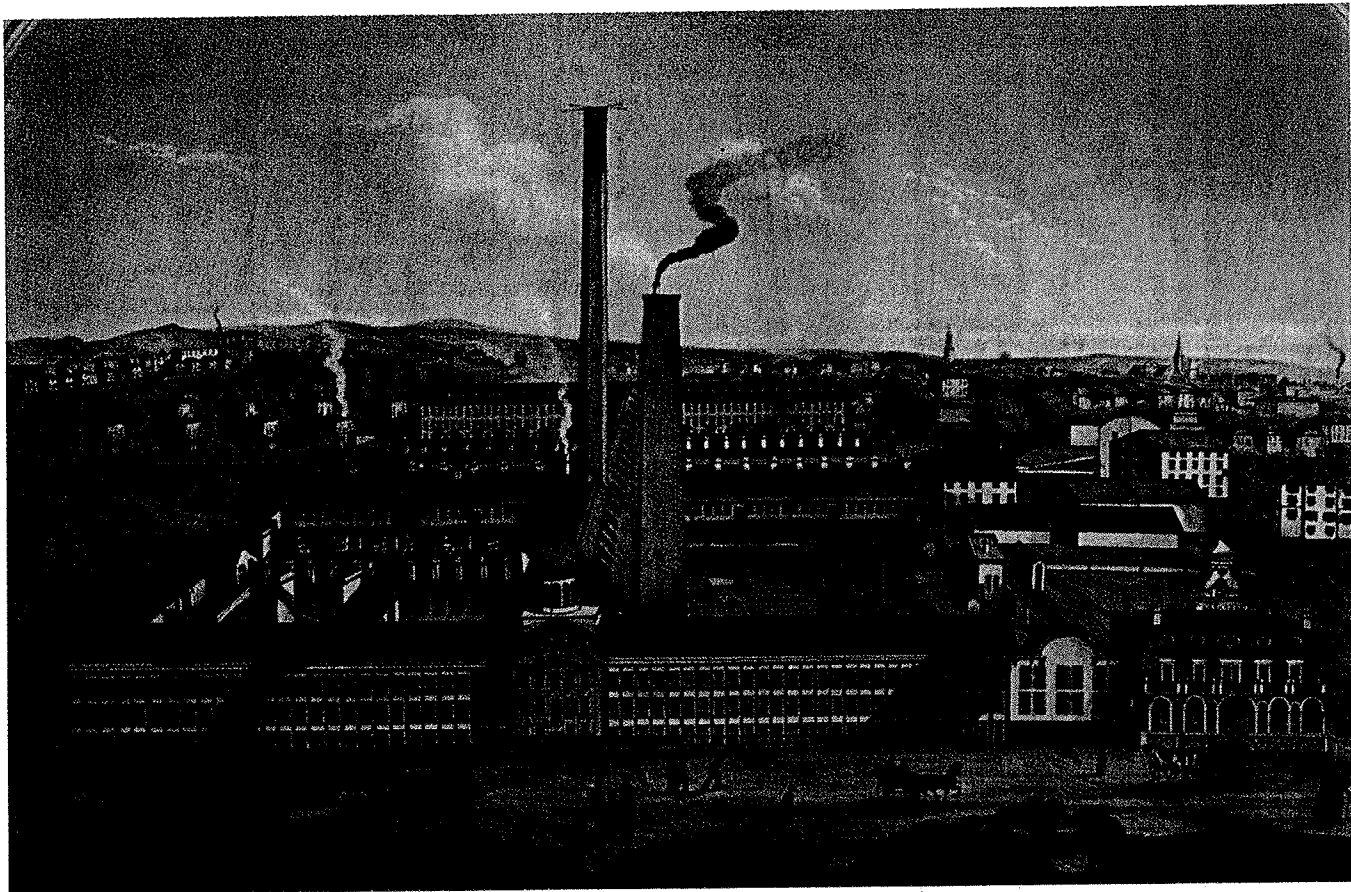
The Southern way of life depended on the labor of slaves. As the United States expanded westward, people in the North and the South disagreed bitterly over whether slaves should be allowed in new territories and states.

Look at the drawing of the brother and sister at the right. The sister has a habit that her brother does not like. She plays her music loudly and refuses to turn it down. The brother likes quiet. Think of the differences between the North and the South as being like the differences between this brother and sister. As you may remember, this kind of comparison is called a *metaphor*.

As you read this chapter, think about this metaphor of the brother and the sister arguing about loud music. Does the brother have the right to change his sister's habit? What will happen if his sister refuses?

The Causes of the Civil War: Like a Family Feud





This Colt factory, which produced weapons, was like many of the factories that began in the North.

18.2 Differences Grow Between the North and the South

In the first half of the 1800s, people in the North and the South developed very different ways of life.

In the North, cities grew large, and new industries began to appear. Busy factories made all kinds of products, including new inventions such as the sewing machine. Canals and railroads made it possible for farmers, ranchers, and business owners to move goods over long distances. Factory owners in the East made tools and supplies for farmers a thousand miles away and shipped them by railroads. Farmers sent grain and other crops to the growing cities.

All this activity provided jobs for large numbers of workers, including new **immigrants** from Ireland and Germany. Workers in the North were paid for their labor and were free to take jobs of their choice. For this reason, these workers were called “free labor.”

Unlike the North, the South had few large cities and factories. Its way of life was based on farming and slave labor. While many Southern families worked their own farms, owners of large farms, called *plantations*, used slave labor.

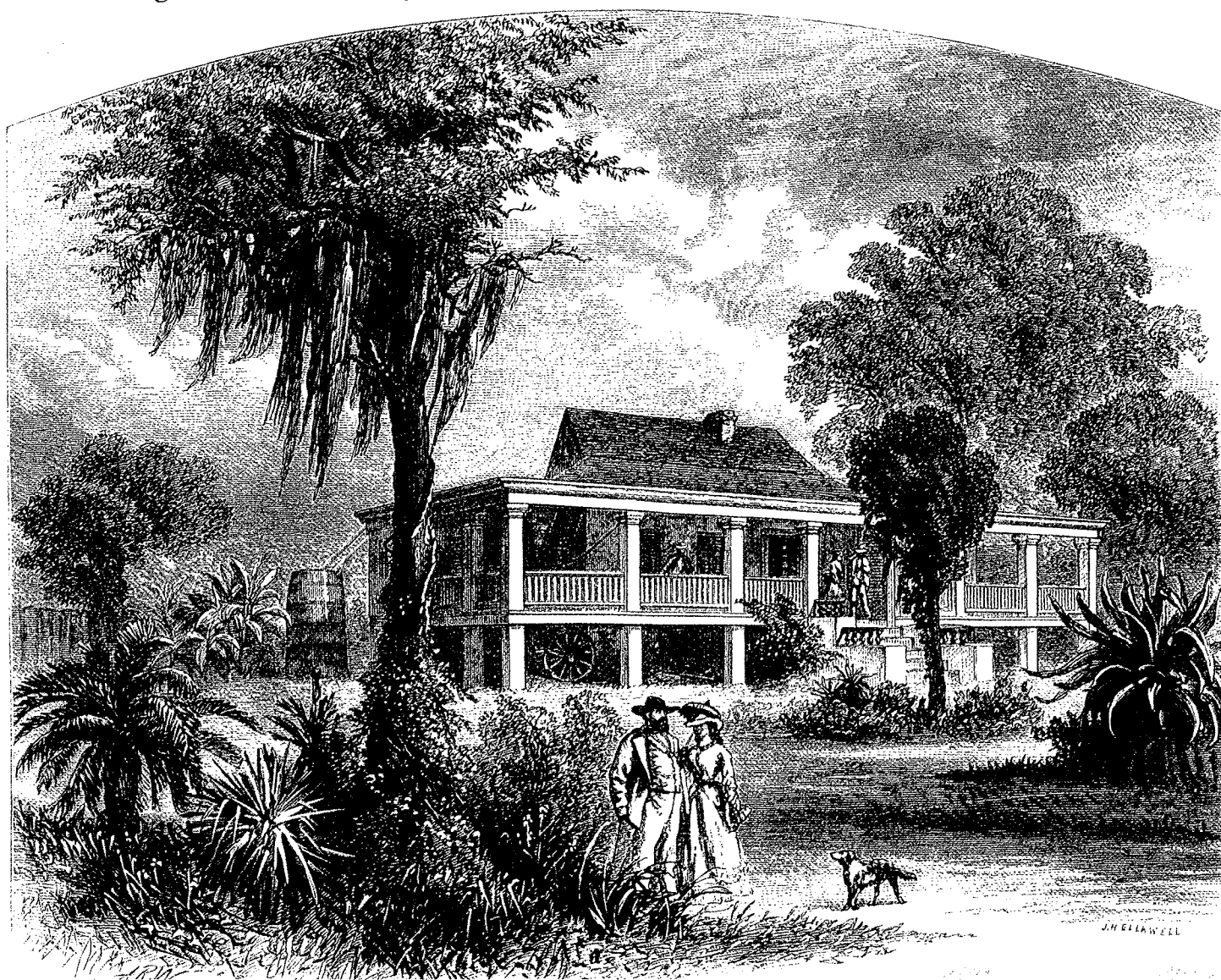
immigrant: a person who comes to live in a country from another nation

The most important plantation crop was cotton. The South's warm weather and rich soil had always been good for growing cotton. But cotton growers made little money until Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin in 1793. Whitney's machine quickly separated the seeds from the cotton, something that used to be done by hand. The cotton gin made it easier to make money by growing large amounts of cotton. It was so successful that, by 1860, three-fourths of all the world's cotton was grown on southern plantations.

As cotton plantations spread, the South depended more than ever on large numbers of slaves. Most people in the North disliked slavery. They especially did not want to see slavery spread to new territories in the West. But white Southerners insisted on their rights to have slaves and to take them wherever they wanted.

The North and the South had other disagreements, as well. But nothing made them more suspicious of one another than their disagreement over slavery.

Plantation owners became wealthy as they used slave labor to plant and harvest cotton.



18.3 The Missouri Compromise

the Union: The United States as one country. In the Civil War, "the Union" also meant the government and the armies of the North.

compromise: a settlement of differences in which each side gives up some of its demands

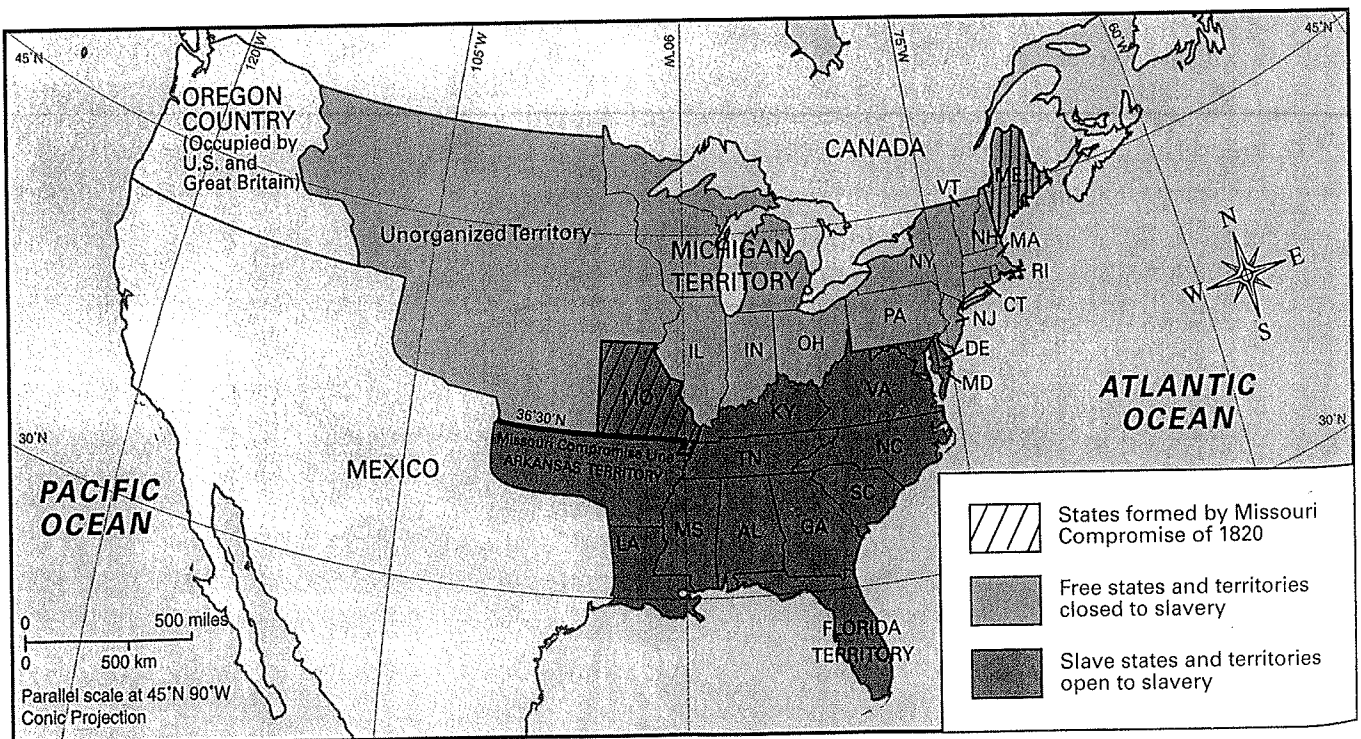
In 1819, differences over slavery threatened to cause serious trouble between the North and the South. That year, the territory of Missouri asked to join **the Union** as a slave state. Settlers had been moving into Missouri and other western lands ever since the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Many of them were Southern slave owners looking for new places to grow cotton.

When Missouri asked to join the Union, there were 11 slave states and 11 free states. Northerners did not want to upset this balance by letting in another slave state. They were afraid of giving the slave states too much power in Congress.

A fierce debate erupted in Congress. For a time, it seemed that the country might fall apart. Then, Henry Clay of Kentucky proposed a **compromise**.

Let Missouri join the Union as a slave state, Clay proposed, and, at the same time, let Maine join as a free state. That would keep the number of free and slave states equal. In addition, Clay suggested drawing a line across the map of the western United States at latitude $36^{\circ}30'$ north. Except in Missouri, no slaves would ever be allowed north of that line.

Clay's idea became known as the *Missouri Compromise*. For 30 years, it kept the peace between North and South. But white Southerners were still afraid that, sooner or later, Northerners would try to interfere with their way of life.



18.4 Abolitionists and the Underground Railroad

White Southerners became even more distrustful when groups of Northerners began speaking out against slavery. The fiercest opponents of slavery were called **abolitionists** because they wanted to abolish (end) slavery forever.

One of the leading abolitionists was Frederick Douglass, a former slave who had escaped to New York. Douglass gave powerful speeches against slavery. He also wrote a book telling about his terrible life as a slave. He convinced many Northerners that slavery had to end.

Opponents of slavery also organized the Underground Railroad to help slaves escape to freedom. The Underground Railroad was not really a railroad, and it was not under the ground. The name *Underground Railroad* was a metaphor for people who secretly helped escaping slaves when they reached a free state. They provided safe houses, called *stations*, where runaway slaves could hide and rest. They gave the slaves food and clothing.

Then they guided them to the next station.

Many slaves traveled from station to station all the way to Canada. They were safer there, because even in free states they could be tracked down by Southern slave hunters and brought back to slavery.

One of the bravest “conductors” on the Underground Railroad was a former slave named Harriet Tubman. After escaping to the North herself, she risked her life by going back to the South 19 times and guiding hundreds of other slaves to freedom.

Most Northerners were not abolitionists or members of the Underground Railroad. But people who openly opposed slavery made white Southerners angry and fearful. More and more, the North and the South saw each other as enemies.

abolitionist: a person who wanted to see slavery ended (abolished) everywhere



The Underground Railroad helped runaway slaves escape to free territory.

18.5 The Compromise of 1850

The fight between the North and the South over western lands started again after the Mexican-American War in the 1840s. As a result of the war, the United States gained a huge amount of territory in the West and Southwest, including California. In 1849, California asked to enter the Union as a free state. Southerners were furious because that would mean having more free states than slave states in Congress. Also, much of California was south of the 36°30' line, where slavery should have been allowed. Some Southerners began to talk about removing their states from the Union.

Once again, Senator Henry Clay suggested a compromise. Called the *Compromise of 1850*, Clay's proposal included several laws.

To please the North, Congress admitted California into the Union as a free state and stopped the sale of slaves in the nation's capital, Washington, D.C.

To please the South, Congress said that people in New Mexico and Utah could vote on whether to allow slavery in their territories. In addition, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Law. According to this law, officials in the North would help capture runaway ("fugitive") slaves.

The Fugitive Slave Law surprised and angered many Northerners. In Illinois, a rising political leader named Abraham Lincoln was "thunderstruck" (stunned) by the law.

Some states passed laws forbidding officials to help the slave hunters. Opponents of slavery broke into jails to free captured runaways. And the Underground Railroad was busier than ever.

The Compromise of 1850 left many people unhappy. Southerners accused the North of wanting to destroy slavery. Northerners accused the South of wanting to spread slavery. Later, Abraham Lincoln would warn that the United States could not go on forever "half-slave and half-free."

In 1850, Henry Clay proposed a second compromise to keep peace between the North and the South.

