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Slavery as a Dividing Force

Thesis

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the Civil War was indeed brought about because of the presence of slavery in this country. It is this paper’s thesis that not only did slavery provide a demonstrable economic incentive for the South to secede from the Union but also provided a social impetus as well. Slavery created a society in the South that favored the economic independence of states rather than economic integration not just because of a love for state’s rights but also because any form of economic integration would diminish returns from the sizeable investment they, slave-owners, had made in slavery. Furthermore, slavery created a type of siege mentality in the South. This mentality, while helpful in muting the class tensions between the slave holding elites and poor whites, created a narrow identity amongst southerners that would have made secession that much easier. This paper will look at how the concepts of social distance and social capital helped make secession a likely outcome for the southern states. With these two factors in play, the cost of leaving the Union, of re-coordinating a new constitutional arrangement, was less costly than it might have been if not for slavery.
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Introduction

The U.S. Constitution is one of the most enduring documents in world history, helping provide stability for vastly different states and their respective citizens in both the political and economic sphere. Yet before the U.S had reached the centennial celebration of its break with England war broke out between the North and the South. The Constitution survived this tumultuous period, growing stronger in the following years. The fact that the Constitution survived, though, hides that the Constitution, as originally written, was not a durable document. The three-fifths clause, included to ensure Southern participation in the Union and also to assuage northern fears of southern domination, contributed to the creation of divergent economic interests in the North and South. The economic power of slavery made the concept of secession that much more alluring for the South, as secession would provide safety for the considerable investment of capital into the peculiar institution. The purpose of this paper, however, is to show that the social institution of slavery also helped create social distance between North and South. Furthermore, slavery helped create a social capital in the South that proved incapable of bridging the gap with any group not overtly friendly towards slavery. As a result, the cost of re-coordination became less meaningful over time until the Civil War broke out.

It is hoped that this paper can provide satisfactory evidence to this claim by looking at three areas. First, the role slavery held in the economy of the South and how this created the foundation for secession. This will require looking at how central the
slave economy was to the southern way of life and how it came to be so. This evidence, while certainly not new, will show how the Founders, despite their best intentions, crafted a constitution that was ultimately not durable as it helped create divergent, and ultimately opposed, economic systems. Second, how the South remained disconnected, as far as transportation was concerned, from the rest of the country shall be examined. This isolation contributed to the social distance between the North and South and also contributed to both regions developing strong, cohesive identities that were, again, in conflict with one another. Finally, a closer look at southern slavery and its impact on both race relations and relations between rich and poor whites in the South is needed. This will show that, while the social capital generated in the South was able to gloss over class differences, it also exacerbated the regional differences with the North.

Understanding Constitutions

First, it is important to explain how constitutions will be understood in this paper. For this reason, Russell Hardin’s argument that constitutions are coordination interactions rather than contractual exchanges is central to the purposes of this paper. As will be explained, understanding constitutions as contracts clouds the fact that constitutions are maintained mostly because the cost of leaving a constitutional arrangement is prohibitively high. As the focus of this paper is on how slavery helped enable the South’s secession in a number of ways, such a narrow examination of the topic of constitutionalism is appropriate. By only examining the matter as a type of cost-
benefit analysis, as Hardin does, one can better appreciate the evidence being presented to support the paper’s thesis, something that might become convoluted by engaging in a comparison with Locke or Hobbes.

For Hardin, there are two primary reasons constitutions are traditionally understood as contracts. First, such a description holds explanatory force in relating the creation of a constitution to the term “social contract”. In other words, it is easier to relate to a constitution and why it should be obeyed if it is portrayed as a contract. Second, Hardin writes that there is a “normative force of using contract theory in the analysis of social institutions to give a justification for them”.¹ Put simply, such an understanding gives people a way to justify the existence of various institutions and the services they provide, by seeing them as part of a contract between the government and the people.

But there are fundamental differences between constitutions and contracts which cannot be ignored. Contracts govern exchanges, transactions in which each side gains something that they value more than what they already have. Such transactions result in both parties coming off better than they were previously.² Furthermore, contracts are enforced by an external party or parties who can impose penalties on those found to be in breach of contract. Governments are often the final arbiter in contractual disputes, giving contractual agreements more stability. This stability allows

² Ibid, 106
for “longer term efforts to create values, to specialize”. With stability comes predictability, and predictability allows for complicated efforts to be undertaken that would otherwise be impossible without contracts, such as projects that require considerable capital. Also, penalties for a breach of contract are often spelled out in exacting fashion so as to better ensure predictability. After all, knowing your exact punishment is a better deterrent than a vague threat which might not be enforceable in the end.

Constitutions are very different creatures by comparison. Unlike contracts, constitutions are not exchanges. Rather, they establish the framework of predictability which allows for specialized exchanges, namely contracts, to take place. Hardin describes constitutions as regulating “a long-term pattern of interactions”, thus making it easier to “cooperate and coordinate in particular moments”. Constitutions, by creating the framework for exchanges, allow for complex interactions by providing certainty for all the parties involved in a contract. In short, constitutions are what enable contracts to have the necessary stability to encourage cooperative efforts.

More importantly for the purposes of this paper, constitutions differ from contracts in terms of enforcement. When it comes to constitutions, those parties involved in the establishment and future maintenance of the constitutional arrangement have no external party to arbitrate disagreements. Any conflicts between parties must be resolved by those involved, something that no reasonable contract

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3 Hardin, 106,111
4 Ibid, 101
would allow; the potential for bias would be too great.\textsuperscript{5} Furthermore, unlike contracts which are precise in scope and penalties, constitutions are often gambles because those crafting the constitution often don’t know how things will turn out years later. Hardin highlights this difference by reminding us of the fears of the Anti-federalists, who worried that “the presidency would evolve into a virtual monarchy” over time.\textsuperscript{6} Add this uncertainty on top of the lack of an external arbiter and constitutions look less and less like contracts.

After reviewing all the ways in which constitutions are not like contracts a more important question arises: how are constitutions maintained over time? With little in the way of assurance as to how institutions will develop and no external arbiter to settle disputes, longevity for a constitution seems doubtful. Hardin posits that, regarding constitutions, consent is less important for a constitution’s longevity than acquiescence.\textsuperscript{7} As long as people acquiesce to the coordination system setup by a constitution, stability will be maintained. Hardin draws a distinction between consent and acquiescence, as acquiescence merely requires that one not leave a body politic while consent implies willful agreement with a body politic. You certainly don’t need to agree with something to acquiesce, but you do need to have some agreement if you give consent.

\textsuperscript{5} Hardin, 111
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid, 111
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid, 111
When looking at the U.S., it is important to remember that the U.S. Constitution was ratified by the States, whose governments were organized by the citizens of those states. Thus, consent, though technically delegated by the majority of people, was given to the Constitution. This consent, though, does not naturally pass on to later generations, a fact that Abraham Lincoln observed in his Lyceum Address, decades before the Civil War.

And thus, from the force of circumstances [the American Revolution], the basest principles of our nature, were either made to lie dormant, or to become active agents in the advancement of the noblest of cause—that of establishing and maintaining civil and religious liberty.

But this state of felling must fade, is fading, has faded, with the circumstances that produced it.

I do not mean to say, that the scenes of the revolution are now or ever will be entirely forgotten; but that like every thing else, they must fade upon the memory of the world, and grow more and more dim by the lapse of time.8

The people at the time of the Revolution certainly had more invested in the Constitution, but later generations simply would not have that same attachment. They had not helped give birth to the country in the same way, thus could not be as attached as previous generations. Thus, the idea of mere acquiesce has real merit in this light even for a country founded upon consent.

Looking back to the Founding, though, even this ratification process relied a good deal more on mere acquiesce rather than consent. To prove his point, Hardin points to the fact that certain founders, namely Hamilton, preferred crafting a new constitution rather than trying to amend the Articles of Confederation. The amending

process was seen as impossible as any amendment required universal agreement. Such agreement was highly unlikely, as the various interests, fears, and needs of the different states made such agreement problematic. Hamilton wrote of how crafting a new constitution would prevent states such as Rhode Island from blocking an important amendment that they alone disagreed with.  

To further illustrate this point, Hardin points out that not all of the states ratified the Constitution at once, as Rhode Island held out for two years of the Constitution being in place before ratifying it. This example, while helpful, is not as striking as far as consent is concerned as those states in which a slim majority voted in favor of ratification. Key states such as New York and Virginia only voted in favor of ratification by the slimmest of margins. Those delegates who voted against ratification, who represented their constituencies, clearly favored not giving their consent to the Constitution, yet they remained within the constitutional framework. Their acquiescence was what mattered in the end, not their consent.

Over time, though, people may decide that acquiescing is more costly than attempting to re-coordinate under a new system. For many, the cost of reneging on a constitutional system would be too high. Insufficient numbers of supporters, superior arms amongst those in power, inability to know how such willful disobedience will ultimately pan out, all of these things usually make re-coordination an undesirable option. But if a group of people, sufficiently organized, felt that such uncertainty would

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9 Hardin, 108
10 Ibid, 108-109
ultimately be in their best interest, re-coordination would be a plausible option.\textsuperscript{11} For Hardin, no one ever leaves the State of Nature completely; the cost of self-enforcement is merely increased substantially so as to encourage acquiescence. Furthermore, re-coordination can be for any reason as far as Hardin is concerned, as long as the cause is deemed worth the risk.

For the South, the cause worth risking the perils of re-coordination was slavery. The economic pull of slavery is often credited with providing the South with the necessary impetus to brave uncertainty, and rightly so. The economic power of slavery in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century is undeniable, and such economic power has historically been the cause of many civil wars throughout history. As mentioned previously, though, the purpose of this paper is to examine how slavery as an institution, not just as an economic factor but also as a social institution, also helped reduce the costs of re-coordination. For that reason, a brief explanation of some of the terms and concepts that will appear later is in order.

The first concept that will be explored is social distance and its importance in creating strong, cohesive identities. Social distance refers to how close people feel to one another, how likely they are to relate to other people. Where there is great social distance, there is a lack of understanding. Where there is little social distance, there is more understanding. For the purposes of this paper, the way social distance creates concepts of “us” and “them” through competition shall be explored. The focus on how

\textsuperscript{11} Hardin, 113
such identities are formed will be the Transportation Revolution of the 19th century. This period ultimately created more social distance between the North and South. Mostly this distance came about because both free and slave territories were able to maintain a stronger sense of cohesion. With a stronger sense of self, re-coordination becomes easier if that sense of self is different from those you are currently engaged with in a constitutional system. You have less to compromise on, as you will now have an overwhelming majority centered on what makes your people a distinct people.

The other term that shall be discussed is social capital, a topic most recently brought to mass public attention by the works of Robert Putnam. Social capital in this sense is what essentially reduces the costs for people to work together to accomplish something. This is related to social distance, as where there is little social distance there is greater social capital, and vice versa. In the South, slavery and its maintenance was able to overcome the class divides amongst whites, enabling them to work together towards a common goal. The manner in which slavery was maintained, however, helped create a type of siege mentality amongst southern whites, where outsiders were typically viewed with suspicion and fear. Such was the case even amongst southerners, but they at least had a common goal in the protection of a common institution. With northerners, there was no such common goal. Thus, the very social capital that was built in the South, based on paternalism, intimidation and violence, was ultimately social capital that created social distance between Northerners and Southerners. As such, re-coordination becomes even more likely.
These are brief descriptions of the concepts to be discussed, but they do set the stage for the discussion about to take place. Slavery, as both an economic power and a social institution, ultimately helped render the constitutional agreement held by the states null and void for a time. There was simply too much at stake from a southern perspective to not risk re-coordination. Acquiescence was no longer feasible.
Slavery: Its Growing Power

With equal pleasure I have as often taken notice that Providence has been pleased to give this one connected country to one united people—a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in manners and customs.¹²

The Founders had many reasons to be hopeful that the new Constitution they had created would support an enduring government, of which the homogeneity of the population would be a significant factor. Despite the considerable homogeneity amongst the population, though, war did eventually break out between the states. Slavery was the cause of this violent disagreement between the North and South, providing ample economic and political justification for Southern interests to risk the uncertainty of leaving the Union. So why did the Founders not consider this potential outcome when they created the Constitution? Simply put, many of them believed slavery was not in America’s future.

During the American Revolution, many thought slavery was heading toward its end in the former colonies. Many prominent individuals, including slave-owning southerners such as Jefferson, were speaking out publically against the institution. Jefferson’s first draft of the Declaration of Independence, in fact, decried the institution and blamed England for its presence and continuation in the colonies. This section was excluded from the final draft, but the fact that it was even suggested in the first place by a slave-owner speaks to the sentiments of many of the Founders during the Revolution.

The final draft of the Constitution itself also provides some evidence of this attitude, as slavery is never referred to directly in the document. Furthermore, the constitution called for ending the importation of “persons” by the year 1808, providing considerable evidence that the drafters of the Constitution believed the end of slavery was in sight.  

There was ample evidence to support the idea that slavery was dying in America other than public attitudes. In 1774 both Rhode Island and Connecticut banned the further importation of slaves through the slave trade into their borders. In fact, throughout the northern states slavery was being slowly extinguished, as states such as Vermont, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York had all either abolished slavery or passed laws for its gradual elimination. Such signs of slavery’s decline were not limited to the area’s north of the Mason-Dixon Line either, as they appeared in the South as well. In Virginia the Black Code, those laws put into place concerning slaves, began to fall into neglect and attitudes concerning blacks began to relax. For instance, many slave-owners began allowing their slaves to travel, unaccompanied, between plantations. Also, blacks, free and slave, frequently socialized with poor whites, eating and drinking in the same establishments. Free blacks could even own property and carry arms in the militia in some areas.

The signs of slavery’s demise in the South were not just limited to a relaxing of attitudes; they also involved economic and political trends as well. Many Upper South

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14 Ibid, 518-520
15 Ibid, 520-521
states created new manumission laws, making it much easier for owners to free their slaves. The state legislature of Virginia passed a new private manumission law in 1782 that even allowed for slaves to buy their own freedom. Similar laws throughout the Upper South led to increasing numbers of free blacks; “By 1790 the free black population in the Upper South had increased to over thirty thousand, by 1810 the free blacks in Virginia and Maryland had numbered ninety-four thousand.” Economically speaking, such laws came to pass because slavery was seen as unsustainable. Many felt slavery would die out because North America seemed to rely exclusively on imported slaves, which was expensive. Further south, in states such as South Carolina, slaves experienced higher mortality rates. These high mortality rates meant importation was heavily relied upon and at considerable cost. The continued importation of slaves just wasn’t economically viable in the long run. The Constitution’s prohibition of slave importation after 1808 seemed to put an end to an economically unsustainable practice and slavery would end with the end of importation.  

Despite all of these indicators, though, there were many other signs that slavery would only continue to grow in the U.S. during the 19th. One of the most important factors that helped to ensure the survival of slavery was the birthrate of slaves. The slave population was breeding just as fast as whites in North America, which meant their numbers were “nearly doubling...every twenty to twenty-five years”. This meant regions such as the Chesapeake, which included Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware, had

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16 Wood, 522  
17 Ibid, 523
an overabundance of slaves, who had lower mortality rates than slaves further south. Furthermore, this excess number of slaves had little to do. Traditionally plantations in the Chesapeake region produced tobacco, which required considerable numbers of slaves to both grow and cure. Tobacco, though, depletes soil quickly. As a result, many planters began shifting towards wheat, a less labor intensive crop that doesn’t have the same impact on soil quality as tobacco. This led to slave-owners hiring out their slaves for work in order to pay for themselves. This only furthered the notion in many people’s minds that slave labor was slowly being replaced by wage labor.\textsuperscript{18}

But there were other ways slave-owners could put their excess slaves to use. In states such as South Carolina rice was the primary staple crop. It was easy to plant and maintain, and profits could be increased simply by having more slaves to plant and harvest. South Carolina had a seemingly insatiable appetite for slaves, as the state reopened the foreign slave trade in 1803 to meet the demand. Between then and 1807, just before the federal requirement for the end of the foreign slave trade set in, over forty thousand slaves were brought into South Carolina. The reason for such demand was that the marshes that were ideal for growing rice were also ideal for diseases. Many slaves died because of rampant disease which is why the mortality rate of slaves was so much higher than further north.\textsuperscript{19}

The shift to cotton production amongst plantation owners in the Deep South further strengthened the demand for more slaves. Thanks to Eli Whitney’s cotton gin, it

\textsuperscript{18} Wood, 510-11, 523
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, 526
became economically viable to raise short-staple cotton. For years cotton production had been limited to the production of the less profitable long-staple variety, as short-staple required considerable effort to produce as the seeds had to be removed by hand. This was a time consuming process that ultimately kept plantations from producing this crop. With the cotton gin, though, ones output was limited only to how much cotton one could have hauled in for processing, as the gin mechanically removed the seeds nearly effortless. The new potential for economic gain led to cotton production moving into the Southwest as well. For years slavery had been somewhat limited to the coasts of the Deep South, where conditions were better suited for rice production. With the shift to cotton on plantations, slave-owners could move west with their slaves. By 1805 “cotton production in the South had multiplied thirty-fold, from two million pounds to sixty million pounds a year”.

All of this helped create demand and seemed to offer a profitable solution to the increasing number of slaves in the Chesapeake region. States such as Virginia and Maryland had been seeing their inhabitants leave for the territories of Kentucky and Tennessee, leading those states closer to population parity between whites and blacks. This caused some concern amongst the white population regarding potential racial conflict in the wake of the rebellion in Saint-Domingue, of which more will be said later. By selling their excess slaves to the Deep South and the emerging territories they could make a considerable profit. Without the same shipping costs of the Trans-Atlantic slave

20 Wood, 528-29
trade they could afford to sell slaves for less and still make a good profit. After the foreign slave trade became illegal in 1808 the potential for profits from slave sales became even greater, as the internal slave trade enjoyed a monopoly. The slave-owners of the Chesapeake, seeing a potential market for their excess slaves, began selling slaves to the Deep South states, creating a domestic slave trade that was much cheaper than continually importing slaves. By the early 19th century, around 20 percent of the slaves from the Chesapeake were sent to the new territories of Kentucky and Tennessee.\textsuperscript{21} Due to the success of the internal slave trade and cotton production, slavery was a lasting and thriving institution in 19th century America, contrary to the predictions of many.

This was in sharp contrast, of course, to the trajectory of the northern economy. In large part because of the boom in cotton production in the 19th century, textile factories began cropping up in the North in greater numbers, helping the cause of industrialization. The War of 1812, which caused discord within the maritime industry of the North, resulted in even more capital shifting to textile factories.\textsuperscript{22} The attitude towards work was also different in the North, where labor was seen as “fit for all social ranks”.\textsuperscript{23} Such attitudes, coupled with the climate and soil quality of the Northern states, meant that slavery marched on to its eventual death in the North.

Looking at the South’s limited experience with factories highlights the unsuitable nature of slavery for industrial work. Initially, slave labor was common in Southern

\textsuperscript{21} Wood, 526
\textsuperscript{23} Wood, 530-31
factories, but as the years went by such practices were proving unprofitable. The price of slaves was increasing every year after the end of the foreign slave trade and the expansion of the U.S. created more demand. This led to higher overhead costs where factory owners used their own slaves. Thus, by the 1850’s southern factories began hiring both free blacks and women.\textsuperscript{24} It just became cheaper to hire wage earners than to have expensive slaves do all the work. This same logic was in use when it came to the labor practices of Maryland and Virginia for mine work. Poor whites, often immigrants, were hired to do the work because it was so dangerous. If a mine collapsed with slaves in it, one lost considerably more capital than if wage earners were in the mine. Fear of losing capital ensured that many dangerous tasks throughout the South were reserved for poor whites and free blacks. They were simply more expendable.\textsuperscript{25}

For the U.S., slavery became the fork in the road where the country would split despite overwhelming homogeneity. Northerners invested their capital into factories to work the considerable amount of cotton coming from the South while southerners invested their capital into slaves to harvest ever increasing amounts of cotton. Many northerners came to resent the three-fifths clause, which they saw as perpetuating the “Virginia Dynasty” of the presidency. After all, the president had been from Virginia for thirty-two years of the first thirty-six years of the country. This was thanks largely to the

\textsuperscript{24} Taylor, George Rogers. \textit{The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860}. Harper Torchbooks. 1968. New York. 292-93
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, 292
three-fifths clause, which cost John Adams his re-election bid in 1800.\textsuperscript{26} For the slaveholding states, ensuring the institution of slavery was perpetuated became an all important concern, one that would prove worth risking the stability of the constitutional arrangement of the country, worth the uncertainty of re-coordinating. They saw the greater population of the North as a threat to slavery, fearing that the increasing population of the North would become enough to make the three-fifths clause a moot point. Such an event would allow the North to impose “economic policies contrary to Southern interests”.\textsuperscript{27} Considering how much capital was being put into slavery, this was no small fear on the part of slave-owners.

As such, the fundamental conflict between these two regions centered largely on the expansion of slavery. If slavery expanded into the territories, opportunities for industry would be lost, as the economy would revolve around slavery instead of free labor. If slavery were not allowed into territories slave states would lose potential markets for the domestic slave trade and slave-owners would not be able to settle new territory where economic opportunities were perceived as more abundant. In the Northwest Territories, where both northern Yankees and southern Butternuts were settling, conflicts arose quickly. Northerners didn’t want to compete with slave for work and southerners wanted the institution to take root.\textsuperscript{28} As the U.S. expanded and new states entered the Union, both North and South began to fear being outnumbered by

\textsuperscript{26} Howe, 150  
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid, 157  
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid, 137
either free or slave states. This fear lead to such measures as the Missouri Compromise and the Compromise of 1850, both aimed at assuaging both North and South that the other one did not have the upper hand. Such compromises couldn’t last forever, though, as the South would eventually see it as being for the best to re-coordinate, to risk open war simply because a president known not to be a friend of slavery was elected.

These compromises may have even given the South more reason to risk re-coordination, as they gave the South more time to invest in slaves, thus further attaching them to the institution, but that question is outside of the scope of this paper. What is certain is that in the years leading up to the Civil War slavery became the all important economic force for the South. Some regions relied on slavery for cotton production while other areas profited by selling their slaves in the domestic slave trade. Regardless of how the slaves were used, the South’s continued adherence to the Constitution became more reliant on its ability to predict the safety of slavery from Federal interference.

The rise of party politics in the U.S. perhaps enabled the South to have a measure of security that helped stave off secession for a number of years. In the 1820’s Martin Van Buren sought to create a strong national party centered on Andrew Jackson. To create such a party, though, one would need to control the federal patronage system, by which party discipline could be controlled through rewards, i.e. appointments to government positions.\textsuperscript{29} With Jackson’s and his fellow Democrats’

\textsuperscript{29} Agar, Herbert. \textit{The Price of Union}. The Riverside Press. 1950. Cambridge. 237-38
electoral victories in the 1828 election, this spoils system was instituted and a strong national party was born under the Democrat’s banner.

The Democratic Party began using conventions to select the presidential nominee of the Party, marking a shift from previous practices where an unorganized group of individuals would select a nominee. This new method of selection ensured that the party stayed strong, as only those agreeable to the majority of the party would be selected to run. Southern states initially had concerns about this method of selection, though, as the nomination process was put into fewer and fewer hands to ensure that the nomination process was diluted by too many competing interests. They found comfort in the fact that convention rules required “two-thirds of the whole number of votes in the convention...to constitute a choice”. This measure was designed to ensure that any candidate chosen would appeal to the most delegates, thus ensuring regional viability, something necessary for a strong national party. It also gave the South an effective veto on any candidate seeking the highest office in the land, as one could not receive the Democratic nomination without the South’s support.

This system ultimately allowed the South to ensure that any president chosen to run would be proslavery, or at the very least not an abolitionist. But this alliance between the northern and southern Democrats could not last forever, as regional

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30 Agar, 246-47
31 Ibid, 248-49
32 Also, given the fact that most Southerners identified with the Democrats meant that if you won the Democratic nomination you won the Southern vote, as Southerners had a good idea that you were not an abolitionist.
differences concerning slavery would fracture the Democrats’ national coalition. The shatter point of this coalition proved to be the admission of Kansas as a state in 1857. For years up to that point outright battle had been waged between Free Soilers and border ruffians over whether Kansas would be a free state or a slave state. 1857 was the year where the state constitution would be drafted in Lecompton and submitted to Congress for approval. Proslavery residents, who dominated the state legislature due to rigged elections, recognized that they were outnumbered two to one. They did everything in their power to ensure an outcome favorable to slavery, such as ensuring only proslavery individuals would be in charge of voter registration and ballot areas. Furthermore, they hoped to submit the state constitution to Congress without a public referendum. Such a course of action ran contrary to the Kansas-Nebraska Act which required a referendum to approve any state constitution. Said act was inspired by the principle of popular sovereignty, popularized by northern Democrats, for determining whether a state was free or allowed slavery. Free Soilers, though, refused to vote in such an obviously fraudulent election to determine the delegates, and so all proslavery men went to the convention.33

Senator Stephen Douglas, the one who popularized the idea of popular sovereignty, and President Buchanan, along with other northern Democrats, found the proceedings in Kansas to be disturbing. They demanded that the Lecompton constitution be submitted to the public in a referendum before it be sent to Congress,

contrary to the wishes of the pro-slavery forces. The convention acquiesced, but only submitted the parts of the constitution concerning slavery for a public vote. The problem with this measure, from a Free Soilers’ perspective, was that the version of the constitution with no slavery only prevented future importation of slaves, saying nothing of the slaves already in the territory. This was quite vexing for Free Soilers, who knew full well that other slave states had such provisions in place that were completely ignored by state officials. Again, the Free Soilers refused to vote for what they saw as a lose-lose scenario, and the version allowing slavery was ratified via referendum.

Buchanan, fearing southern secession or revolt within the Democratic Party, changed positions on the Lecompton constitution at this time, and vowed to endorse whatever version came before Congress.\(^{34}\)

Northern Democrats, led by Douglas, could not support the Lecompton constitution that arrived before Congress and hope to survive politically. Douglas, who had presidential aspirations in the 1860 election, knew he would have received the Democratic nomination if he supported the Lecompton constitution. Doing so, though, would have ultimately cost him the election as the proceedings in Kansas were immensely unpopular in the North and Northwest. So while the Lecompton constitution passed through the Southern dominated Senate it failed to pass the House thanks in large part to the lack of support the constitution received from northern Democrats.\(^{35}\)

Two years later as the Democratic convention in Charleston saw Southerners, still upset

\(^{34}\) McPherson, 165-66
\(^{35}\) Ibid, 167-68
with what they saw as a betrayal over the Lecompton constitution, insist upon a slave code for the territories plank. The more numerous northern delegates voted against this plank, as it was unpalatable to northern constituencies. As they planned to do should this happen (which they knew would), the southerners walked out of the convention. They later held their own convention to select a candidate to run against Douglas, who had won the nomination after the southerner’s left the party.\footnote{McPherson, 214-215}

By splitting the Democratic vote, it was all but assured that a Republican would be elected in 1860. This wasn’t an unexpected outcome amongst southerners, nor was it entirely unwanted. Many saw the election of a Republican to the presidency as the beginning of a new era for the South, an independent era. Such an election would allow southerners to secede from the Union in order to protect their property rights, namely their slaves. During the convention, southerners had reminded their northern counterparts that it was their “institutions which are at stake; ours is the property to be destroyed”.\footnote{Ibid, 215} With the dissolution of the Democratic coalition over Kansas, southerners lost the security that slavery would be protected within the Union. Re-coordination became not only less costly in their eyes, but cost saving, as it would help secure all of the capital that had been poured into slavery over the years. All they needed was an excuse, an affront, and the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860 gave them one.

Not all slave states, however, found the costs to be sufficiently low to risk re-coordination. There is strong evidence that those states that did rebel did so in large...

\footnote{McPherson, 214-215} \footnote{Ibid, 215}
part because of their stronger economic attachment to slavery. For instance, Maryland, like Virginia, found itself in a similar position early in the 19th century; it possessed an excess number of slaves. Due to its location, Maryland had no way to expand its borders westward and thus diffuse the black population. Such realities left Maryland with two options for dealing with its large slave population: sell them or free them. The people of Maryland opted, for the most part, to free their slaves. By 1810 20 percent of the slave population had been freed, 50 percent by the Civil War.38 This was not a state that had a heavy interest in perpetuating slavery, so it should come as no surprise that Maryland did not try to secede.

When looking at the proportion of slavery in the states that rebelled compared to the Border States that did not, the data becomes compelling. The Border States had a free black population of more than 21 percent, compared to less than 2 percent in the Deep South. 46 percent of the entire free black southern population resided in the Border States and only 12 percent of enslaved southern blacks lived in the Border States. 55 percent of southern slaves lived in the Deep South. These figures begin to tell us about three distinct regions in the South, what William Freehling refers to as the Upper (Border) South, Middle South, and Lower (Deep) South. What differentiates these regions is their respective attachment to slavery.39

38 Wood, 526
The Border states, which included Maryland, Delaware, Kentucky and Missouri, focused mostly on grain as their primary cash crop as opposed to cotton, which wasn’t suited to the climate in those states. Furthermore, much like their northern neighbors industry was growing at a considerable rate in the Borders states. By the start of the Civil War, they contained more than half of the whole South’s industrial capability. As mentioned before, factories over time were replacing slaves with wage earners throughout the South, so any shift in capital towards industry would have had a negative impact on the strength of slavery in that region. For this region, the possibility of re-coordinating would have had less sway as more capital was being shifted towards industry and not towards the purchase of slaves to work plantations. Thus, they would have less to lose if slavery were abolished. A sampling of the periodicals from St. Louis resembled those of Chicago more so than Charleston in regards to slavery.

Of course the Border States’ proximity to the Union armies cannot be overlooked when discussing re-coordination costs. Such facts surely raised the costs of re-coordination sufficiently high so as to prevent secession. But if one looks at the potential benefits of secession one sees that the lack of attachment to slavery for these regions was an unsuitable impetus to cause secession in the first place. These states had the fewest slaves and had a burgeoning industrial area that benefited wage labor as opposed to slave labor; risking re-coordination for slavery when you are moving along a path contrary to it is not worthwhile.

40 Freehling, 18-19
41 Ibid, 19-20
The Middle States, which include Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Arkansas, each contained elements of both the Border States and Deep South. These elements were based largely on the efficacy of plantation farming and slavery. For instance, plantations were much more practical in Eastern Virginia than in the Appalachian hills of western Virginia. As such, slavery had a much weaker presence in what would become West Virginia during the Civil War.\footnote{Freehling, 17-18} For those living in West Virginia, re-coordination was not worthwhile, as secession would provide few tangible benefits for a people who had no attachment to slavery. In fact, splitting from the rest of the state was a better option, as it allowed them to pursue policies more in line with their own economic realities.

This pattern of attachment revealed itself again in Tennessee, where the Appalachian Mountains cut into the eastern part of the state. As a result, slavery never really took hold in the hills of Tennessee. When the Civil War broke out, Tennessee was sharply divided between East and West, with the East furnishing as many as 31,000 soldiers for the Union armies.\footnote{McDonough, James L. Tennessee and the Civil War. Tennessee History. Ed. West, Carroll Van. The University of Tennessee Press Knoxville. 1998. Knoxville, TN. 156} A few East Tennessee counties even continued to send representatives to Washington. Senator Andrew Johnson of East Tennessee also refused secession and continued to serve in Washington during the war.\footnote{Freehling, 18} Furthermore, those in the east held a convention in Greeneville to try and foster secession from the rest of the
Clearly, this was a region where the benefits of re-coordination were hotly disputed and given the devastation that visited Tennessee one can say in hindsight that those in the east were right.

In these lands split by their attachment to slavery we begin to see concrete evidence that slavery was sufficiently important to risk re-coordination. Areas that had a strong attachment to slavery were willing to risk instability by leaving the Union the Constitution had created while regions less attached were not as willing. Such a pattern can even be seen in the Deep South, the heart of slavery. For instance, a small portion of South Carolina is covered by the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, making the area particularly poor for plantations and slavery. From this area sprang up considerable hostility towards slave-owners further east from time to time, especially during the Civil War. Georgia and Alabama also have significant foothills towards their northern borders and these areas were also hotbeds of dissatisfaction with the Confederacy during the war.46

The Deep South, which includes South Carolina, Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas, did undoubtedly have the strongest attachment to slavery of the three regions. Having more tropical climates suitable for the production of cotton, good soil, and fairly flat land for the most part slavery was able to grow unperturbed. This unchecked growth was only further assisted by the considerable distance between the Free states and the Deep South. This meant that the lax

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45 McDonough, 157
46 Freehling, 18
enforcement of the fugitive slave laws by Free states didn’t affect their capital nearly as 
much as the Middle States and especially the Border States. Thus, they had added 
security that their invested capital would be returned to them. Therefore it is not 
surprising that the most fervent secessionists came from this region.

Furthermore, the sheer number of slaves in the region meant said states would 
have a strong attachment to slavery as 47 percent of the total population of this region 
consisted of slaves. Not only did this statistic lend itself to increased fears of racial 
conflict, of which more will be said later, but it also meant that considerable capital was 
tied to these slaves. The Border States, by comparison, had only 17 percent of its 
population made up of slaves, meaning racial conflict was less likely and more 
importantly less was invested in slavery. The Middle states had 30 percent of their total 
population made up of slaves. While this might not seem like a large figure, it is best to 
remember that these numbers were highly concentrated in certain regions of states, 
thus giving certain areas more reason to fear abolition.

The U.S., while incredibly homogenous ethnically during the course of the 19th 
century, diverged regionally over economic systems, namely the use of slaves. The 
South became more and more attached to the institution while it disappeared 
altogether in the North. So strong was this attachment to the institution that once the 
South felt it could no longer ensure slavery’s safety they decided re-coordination was a 
better option than continuing to operate in the constitutional framework. Staying in the

47 Freehling, 18
48 Ibid, 18
Union simply wasn’t in their best interest. Those southern states with weaker attachments to slavery were not as quick to consider Re-coordination. Tennessee, after all, was the last state to secede.\textsuperscript{49} There was much to risk and less benefit in seeking re-coordination. For the Deep South, though, there was too much to risk by staying. In the next section, we will examine how the transportation revolution of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century helped create cohesive identities in both the North and the South and how these identities affected the costs of re-coordination.

\textsuperscript{49} McDonough, 156
The Transportation Revolution and Its Impact on Social Distance

During the 19th century America underwent an incredible transformation as first canals and then railroads sprang up throughout the country. This Transportation Revolution changed the country and its people in profound ways, both economically and socially. Such advancements both greatly reduced the costs and time of traveling, not only helping the nation expand but bringing the nation together in new ways as well. This Transportation Revolution, though, contributed in many ways to the alienation of the South and the North, as it increased the sense of competition between the two regions, further pushing the “us” versus “them” mentality that would dominate the nation by the outbreak of the Civil War. Furthermore, the South and North did not become increasingly economically integrated during this time despite the emergence of new transportation methods. As a result, the costs of re-coordination for the South were not increased thanks to canals and rails.

How transportation raises the costs of re-coordination becomes the next important question in this discussion. Transportation can increase the cost of re-coordination largely because it can reduce social distance between far-flung groups. Social distance is lower when those who are socially close (interact with one another) feel closer to each other. In other words, there is a feeling of a shared identity. Conversely, social distance is higher when people have few interactions with one
another, making them feel more distant from each other.\textsuperscript{50} 51 It is important to note that social distance is not always related to spatial distance (although it can be depending on the circumstances). Rather, it deals with a perception of distance, possibly stemming from a variety of reasons, such as class, economic status, or ethnicity. There are many dimensions of social distance, but for the purposes of this paper we shall be examining social distance and how it helps groups develop an understanding of “who does not belong to their own group”\textsuperscript{52}. As the evidence shall show, those in the South increasingly saw those in the Northeast and Northwest (collectively the North) as the “other” and vice versa.

When it comes to social distance, a sense of alienation between different groups is not always guaranteed. After all, just because two groups are different does not mean that they will necessarily come to view each other as alien. In order for alienation to occur, there must first be competition between different groups for resources. With competition, groups begin to see each other as rivals, as those who would prevent access to essential resources. Whether it be competition for land, political power, or employment opportunities, competition helps groups create and maintain distinctions, distinctions that help create feelings of alienation. Perceiving another group as the “other” in turn lowers the costs of re-coordination, as the possibility of viewing a

\textsuperscript{50} Karakayali, Nedim. Social Distance and Affective Orientations. Sociological Forum. Vol. 24, No.3 Sept. 2009. 540
\textsuperscript{52} Karakayali, 541
constitutional arrangement with an alien group as costly becomes more likely. After all, why compete with a group for resources when you could simply exclude them from the competition through re-coordination? The greater the sense of competition, the re-coordination becomes.

Again, just because there is competition amongst groups doesn’t mean that group interactions will necessarily become hostile. Certain preconditions must be met in order for the relationship to become hostile through competition for political and/or economic power. The first precondition is that “competing groups must be relatively free to pursue the same goals”. Short of some barrier keeping one group from adequately competing for the same things, groups have a higher chance of disliking each other. For instance, in the North blacks were looked on with disdain as rivals for work, whereas in the South, where slavery kept blacks in chains, they were not viewed as rivals to nearly the same extent.\(^53\) \(^54\)

This sort of competition certainly existed between northern and southern states, particularly when looking at the settlement of the territories. Both regions knew that whoever reached a majority in a territory first would control whether the state was a slave state or a free state. The history of this competition for territory dated back to the settlement of the Northwest, as both southern slaveholders and northern settlers flocked to the region, leading to bitterness between the two groups over whether the

\(^{53}\) Karakayali, 546  
\(^{54}\) It is worth noting that in white-belt areas in the South where there were few slave blacks were viewed as competition for jobs and thus were also viewed more unfavorably than in areas with many slaves.
future state would allow slavery. There were powerful interests behind both sides in this region increasingly willing to do whatever it took to ensure a territory was a free state or a slave state.

Northern land speculators wanted the territories to be free, as this increased the value of the land. With free labor, owning land becomes more profitable as permanent settlements are needed to house workers. If slavery were allowed, though, land becomes much less valuable. Slaveholders owned their labor forces and could move them wherever they desired at any time. This is why settlements in the South were widely dispersed, as there was no need for large settlements to house labor.\textsuperscript{55} In 1824 an effort was made in Illinois to amend the state constitution to legalize slavery in the state. The vote was close, but the measure ultimately failed by a vote of 6,600 to 5,000.\textsuperscript{56} As the years went by, such competition only became more bitter and violent, as the events of Bleeding Kansas and later the controversy over the Lecompton constitution demonstrates. Clearly, there was competition between North and South over land and political power. That competition was creating a rift between the two that allowed them to see the other as increasingly alien.

Having the same opportunity to obtain the same things, though, is not the only precondition necessary to create a hostile relationship between two groups. Most importantly, the groups must have a “cohesive and solidaristic” relationship amongst

\textsuperscript{55} Howe, 141
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid, 137
themselves. A cohesive identity helps lower the costs of re-coordination. If a group of likeminded people know there is a significant number of people who would support secession, secession becomes that much easier by reducing some of the uncertainty inherent in re-coordination. If there are many factions within each group, each with their own agendas, it will be hard for a group to present a united front on any one issue. In the case of North and South, such solidarity certainly did exist. In the South, this solidarity came through a commitment to maintaining and extending slavery and also a system of social controls for poor whites, as will be discussed in the next section. The North also remained highly unified not only regarding opposition to slavery but also in custom and manner as well.

Such solidarity came about not just because of social mores but because of the Transportation Revolution which enabled highly cohesive identities to form, identities that were maintained despite great distance between their members. To illustrate this point, it helps to first look at the changes brought about by the Transportation Revolution in order to fully appreciate how a cohesive identity was maintained amongst northerners. At the turn of the 19th century, travel over land was difficult due to few good roads, making overland trade particularly expensive. The presence of the Appalachians, an imposing, natural barrier between the east and west, was the main culprit for this difficulty. These mountains made road construction incredibly expensive and time consuming. Despite these difficulties, though, the U.S. did have an

57 Karakayali, 546
interconnected network of rivers by which goods could be transported. For this reason, many early farms and towns in the U.S. were established within a few miles of a river, so as to bear a harvest or goods to market.\textsuperscript{58}

Still, this method was hardly ideal, as river navigation was limited to bringing goods downriver alone. Upriver navigation was difficult at best due to “swift currents, shallow water, narrow, winding channels, or high banks and forests which broke the wind”. Thus, makeshift rafts were used to bear harvests and other goods to market, which would later be broken down for lumber at the end of the trip.\textsuperscript{59} A further difficulty was obviously the limitations of natural rivers. One could not just settle anywhere, as access to rivers was necessary for transporting goods. Thus, good land was passed over for land that was closer to rivers. Tough overland travel was not just limiting travel, but was limiting settlement as well.

Several developments occurred that greatly changed this picture of American life, the first of which was the canal boom. The canal boom began with the completion of the Erie Canal in 1817. Spurred largely by New York’s governor DeWitt Clinton, the canal stretched from Albany to Buffalo, traveling 364 miles. Before the canal was built, most of the territory between these two cities was wilderness. When the canal was officially opened in 1823 one could now move goods across New York with much ease.\textsuperscript{60} This canal finally allowed people to settle previously untamed areas, as people moved

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{58 Taylor, 56}
\footnote{59 Ibid, 56-57}
\footnote{60 Ibid, 33-34}
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into the areas near the canal in great numbers. With greater reassurance that their own wares could make it to markets without losing profits to expensive overland transportation, settlement in the once wild region became more desirable.\(^{61}\)

Furthermore, the Erie Canal was a financial success well before it was fully completed in 1823. 1819 saw increasing traffic along the completed sections, traffic that helped pay off the project before through toll collection. By 1825 the Erie and Champlain tolls brought in over half a million dollars, and by 1835 New York decided it needed to enlarge the canal to accommodate all the traffic.\(^{62}\)

Many states, impressed with the success of the Erie Canal, launched their own projects. The state of Ohio created a canal to link Lake Erie and Cleveland to the Ohio River and Cincinnati.\(^{63}\) New England built the Blackstone Canal to connect the isolated region around Worcester to eastern Massachusetts.\(^{64}\) The Delaware and Hudson Canal stretched from Honesdale in Northern Pennsylvania to the Delaware River, mostly for the transportation of anthracite, making transportation of the fuel to New York and New England cities considerably cheaper.\(^{65}\) One of the most important and profitable canals built during this time was the Oswego canal, an offshoot of the Erie Canal. This

\(^{61}\) Howe, 216-17
\(^{62}\) Taylor, 34
\(^{63}\) Howe, 218
\(^{64}\) Taylor, 37
\(^{65}\) Ibid, 39
offshoot connected Lake Ontario and Lake Erie, making it so one could travel from New York to as far away as Toledo in a fraction of the time it would have ordinarily taken.  

This shift in transportation had a considerable effect on the lives of the Americans in the affected regions. As mentioned previously, people had traditionally lived close to natural waterways, but canals gave them more options when it came to settling. Furthermore, the canal boom affected the way people interacted with the economy. For instance, in New York those few who had already lived in the wilderness that the Erie Canal would one day cut through lived a more self-sufficient existence, as poor roads plus tolls made overland travel too expensive to plant harvests for markets. With the canals, though, transporting agricultural goods was not only easier but much cheaper as well. This allowed farmers to make better profits on their harvests, which allowed them to buy better equipment, such as iron plows and scythes. Cash also became more widespread in these regions. This allowed for the use of currency in everyday transactions as opposed to the informal bartering system, which had existed in such areas.  

With these changes, people became more consumerist than ever before. Canals allowed the transportation costs of luxury items, such as clocks and fine clothes, to become greatly reduced. Having better access to markets allowed people to become more market driven as well, and less concerned with subsistence farming. Thus, people

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66 Taylor, 36
67 Howe, 216-17
68 Ibid, 220
69 Ibid, 216-17
had more money to buy the things that one could not provide for oneself. This is why farmers became more specialized in the northeast and northwest, as they increasingly grew harvests for sale. This helped the people of the northeast and northwest develop a cohesive identity, as they became more reliant upon one another not just for basic necessities but for things they desired. These two regions are where an interconnected, national economy began to take shape. This interconnectedness also made them more reliant on one another. In short, increasing levels of economic dependence raises the cost of re-coordination. By becoming more dependent on other groups, a group’s ability to leave a coordination system decreases. After all, if re-coordinating means you might not be able to get adequate goods to sustain a population re-coordination is not a sensible option.

When railroads began to appear in 19th century America these effects were only magnified. Railroads, first showing market viability in Europe during the late 1820’s, grew quickly in the U.S. thanks to cheap land and a lack of stringent border concerns, America was able to surpass Europe quickly in railroad construction. By 1840, the U.S. had almost twice as many miles of track laid compared to Europe, putting the U.S. at an estimated 3,000 miles. These railroads provided a way for the relatively limited transportation industry to escape natural restrictions. Canals, for all their benefits, were still limited in where they could be built, needing prodigious amounts of water from

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70 Howe, 567
71 Taylor, 74
nearby water sources to fill the canals. Railroads, though, could be built anywhere investors had a desire to do so.

Another advantage the railroads had over the canals was their speed. Canal boats averaged just two miles an hour, traveling about 24 miles in a day. This may not seem quick by today’s standards, but traveling such a distance was a huge improvement over land travel. Prior to the advent of canals, if one wanted freight shipped from Cincinnati to New York City it would take over 50 days for your cargo to reach its final destination. By canal, the same freight would take just 18 days to arrive. Railroads, though, were even faster than canals. Typically traveling 10 miles per hour, they could travel 120 miles in a day. Transporting the same freight from Cincinnati to New York City would take a train 6 to 8 days. Clearly, the country was becoming much smaller with such changes in transportation.

Railroads overcame canals in importance in the U.S. thanks largely to how cheap they were for transportation. As mentioned previously, land for railroads was purchased for little, so those savings could be passed on to customers. Furthermore, railroads in the U.S. used wood for fuel, which was a considerably cheap fuel source given the great abundance of trees in the U.S. Railroads also avoided other heavy costs that European railroads could not, such as building fences along the rails to keep livestock off the tracks. Instead, cowcatchers were designed and installed to reduce any damage.

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72 Taylor, 138
73 Ibid, 138-39
livestock might inflict on the trains. All of this made the railroads potentially much more affordable, not to mention dynamic, than canals. As a result, several states tried to enact strict regulations against railroads that competed with state funded canals. For instance, New York State “required railroads paralleling the Erie to pay tolls equal to those assessed on the canal and forbade the carrying freight by such railroads except during the winter, when canal traffic was suspended”.

All of these innovations helped reduce the cost of transportation throughout the northeast and northwest, making the people in these regions a more cohesive whole. A greater sense of an “Us” was developing between these two regions as people became more connected in this emerging national economy. Social distance was being reduced gradually as farms moved away from being merely self-sufficient towards becoming commercially minded. This shift towards commerce thanks to the Transportation Revolution ensured that Americans felt closer to each other despite the real distance between them. Such a cohesive sense of self was not just a result of economic integration though. Railroads, in order to beat competition with river travel by steamboats and canals, drastically reduced fares for passenger travel. In the 1850’s the Hudson River Railroad charged as little as one cent a mile for passengers. This allowed not just freight to be shipped around the country in an inexpensive manner but people as well.

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75 Taylor, 75
76 Ibid, 144
This is not to say, though, that Americans were traveling in large numbers from Massachusetts to Illinois on holiday. Rather, people from the northeast were flocking to the northwest for settlement thanks largely to easier and inexpensive travel. The early canals, which connected the two regions, allowed settlers from the east to move in by water instead of crossing the Appalachians. So if people weren’t traveling a lot for personal enjoyment, but rather for settlement, how is social distance reduced? After all, once two groups separate there is a greater likelihood that they will become socially distant as a result of different emerging needs and cultures. So why did the northeast and northwest have reduced social distance in the long run? The answer lays in the increased speed that news and traveled.

Information is a powerful thing, capable of uniting people, making them whole rather than separate parts. As new patterns of developing, storing and distributing information become available, new social interactions and structures become available as well. Put simply, as the ability to communicate information over greater distances increases, the larger the sphere is that helps define an “us”. With the changes in transportation during the 19th century, it became possible for people in the northeast to be socially connected with the people of the northwest and vice versa. Settlers in Ohio could write letters to relations in Massachusetts and expect a quick response. People in Illinois could learn of events back in New York, such as parades, days after they

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77 Howe, 218
78 Ibid, 564
happened instead of weeks, perhaps months. This meant that such news, whether through personal communiqués or news media, seemed as though they were not some far off events happening to distant strangers. Rather, they were nearby events happening to people, possibly family you keep in touch with, who provided most of your meat or grain.

During this time, the northeast and northwest became a more cohesive “us” because of the Northwest’s proximity to the slave states. This proximity made it easier for many slaveholders to settle in the Northwest Territories, bringing their slaves with them in the process. Such actions helped galvanize the northeastern settlers who opposed slavery, as it presented them with obvious competition. With the increased speed of news, people back in the northeast were made aware of tensions in a way that was impossible before the advent of the Transportation Revolution. Slavery wasn’t something far away affecting someone else; it was something close by affecting your brother’s family in Ohio or land values in Illinois. Because of things like canals and railroads the far-flung Free states, despite varying levels of proximity to the slave states, were able to maintain a low level of social distance and thus were able to feel the effects of competition with proslavery settlers, thus helping them maintain a high level of cohesion.

Furthermore, decreased travel time also ensured that northerners and southerners would also find themselves competing with one another for land. As mentioned previously, decreased travel time for people mostly benefitted settlers,
making settlement of faraway lands considerably easier. This meant that geographic proximity to virgin territory was no longer the main factor in deciding whether a territory would be a free state or a slave state. The battle over Kansas is a perfect example of this. With slave states in greater proximity to the territory, with two slave states on its eastern border no less, Kansas became populated with a majority of Free Soilers thanks in large part to improved transportation.

A lot has been said of why the northeast and northwest became more cohesive as the years went by. This showed us how two regions, despite separation by significant geographic distance, were able to build and maintain a cohesive identity. Now the South must be examined to see why the same level of cohesion did not grow between slave states and their northern neighbors. Slavery is, not surprisingly, the root cause of this divergence. Granted, there was always going to be some sense of competition with the Free states simply because of slavery. But that doesn’t explain why the South was not benefiting from reduced social distance with the North due to increasing economic integration. This economic integration did not happen on the same level as in the North, though, largely because the South did not experience the Transportation Revolution to the same extent as the North. Perhaps if the Transportation Revolution had connected the North and South economically the difficulties of this competition could have been overlooked and the Civil War have been put off for even longer. Slavery, unsurprisingly, lies at the heart of why social distance wasn’t reduced between North and South through economic integration.
It is important to note that the South did indeed construct rails during this period. From 1820 to 1860, the southern slave states contained a little over a third of the nation’s rails. The difference is that these rails, for the most part, connected southern cities and states as opposed to linking North and South. There were exceptions, of course, as one could travel from New York to North Carolina almost continuously by rail, with only a few areas where one would need to take some other form of transportation for a time. This line, however, was not used primarily to ship freight; it primarily carried passengers. Earnings from passenger transportation earned this rail four million dollars while freight only brought in two million for the year 1859.

As discussed previously, people were not taking holidays around the country in mass numbers during this period, so these figures most likely represent people traveling locally to visit relations within their own state. This hypothesis seems more likely given the increasingly xenophobic attitude of southerners toward Yankees and foreigners, particularly in the years up to the Civil War, of which more will be discussed in the next section. So while such a rail theoretically could have served as a solidifying force nationally, it most likely only reduced social distance within southern states rather than nationally.

The rails in place in the South would have allowed for the same broadening of social identity that the North experienced. For the South, though, that identity would

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80 Taylor, 79
81 Fishlow, 269
82 Ibid, 270
have been tied up in slavery and the threat of a closer northern threat. Southerners, despite not being geographically close to the territories, would have felt closer to the conflicts in the territories than they would have otherwise if not for improvements in transportation. Thanks to the rails, a slave-owner in South Carolina could feel closer to a slave-owner in Kansas and thus express moral indignation at a perceived abrogation of his fellow planter’s rights to own slaves.

The building of rails in the South, though, was limited for several reasons. When the Transportation Revolution began with the Canal Boom, venture capital was scarce in the United States. This was a significant problem facing developers, as the capital necessary for a proper canal “was seldom less than a million and might be five times that sum”. 83 This meant that anyone hoping to build a canal would have need of borrowing significant amounts of capital. Many companies turned to the Federal government for aid in their construction efforts, only to find their requests ultimately stymied by southerners such as Nathaniel Macon and John Randolph. Southern members of both the House and Senate opposed internal improvement measures being funded by the Federal government, viewing such actions as an enlargement of Federal power over the economy. 84 Such a power, over time, could extend to slavery in their minds. “If Congress possesses the power to do what is proposed in this bill [fund a canal] they may emancipate every slave in the United States.” 85

83 Taylor, 48  
84 Howe, 221-22  
85 Ibid, 222
As a result, companies sought, and often found, their funding from the state governments. In many cases this funding ensured that the state involved would own and operate a canal. Even in those instances where a private company owned the canal, public financing was still used to get the projects started.\footnote{Taylor, 49} In the South, though, such funding was harder to come by. Plantation owners, who held political power if not political office in the South, preferred low taxes by the state and by extension low activity. This helped them maintain the appearance of a Patrician who acted as a benefactor not just to slaves but to poor whites as well. Thus, it was harder for Southern states to appropriate the funding through taxes for internal improvements. Furthermore, in 1819 the cotton bubble burst. After the War of 1812, the U.S. became the leading supplier of cotton for the British Empire, with cotton exports totaling 39 percent of all U.S. exports.\footnote{Howe, 131} By 1819, though, Britain had recovered from the Napoleonic Wars and was able to once again produce most of its foodstuffs. The demand for cotton, spurred on by those same wars, began to rapidly exceed demand in European factories. This sparked a series of events that left many states in serious financial debt, seeming to confirm the suspicions of many southern critics of public funding for transportation.\footnote{Ibid, 142} Better to invest in slaves than in transportation.

The Southern experience with railroads also reinforced this way of thinking. The Panic of 1839, which spanned from 1839 to 1843, had a devastating impact on rail

\footnote{Taylor, 49} \footnote{Howe, 131} \footnote{Ibid, 142}
construction throughout the country. The capital necessary for tasks such as laying rail
dried up, leaving many railroad companies in debt. The South experienced the same
problems when it came to rail construction. Over 90 miles of completed tracks fell into
disuse as the rail company that owned them went bankrupt. These tracks were not even
taken over by another company, instead being scuttled for the scrap iron. Those
railroads that were still under construction in the South were often left uncompleted
and were poached for the iron as well. ⁸⁹ This left the South decidedly less economically
integrated with the rest of the country because there were fewer rails connecting the
South and the North. As a result, there was less potential to build a sense of cohesion
with the North.

Economic hardships were not the only reason a truly national rail system failed
to materialize, one which possibly could have served as a solidifying force between the
North and South. One obstacle in the way of such a goal was the lack of standard gauge
system for the railroads. Different gauge sizes meant continuous rail travel would be
next to impossible, as trains could not transfer to new lines. This helped railroad
companies keep monopolies on their rail’s route. As a result, the further one wanted
freight shipped by rail the more costly it would be as goods would need to be
transferred repeatedly to other lines. ⁹⁰ Such measures certainly had an impact on the
desire of slave-owners to ship their cotton north from the Deep South by rail.

⁸⁹ Fishlow, 6-7
⁹⁰ Ibid, 270
Furthermore, it was not as though the South had no other alternatives when it came to shipping goods. For southerners, there was always the option of shipping things by sea. In fact, southern states relied primarily upon shipping goods via the ocean because such transportation was cheap and convenient, particularly for the Deep South states. Ocean transportation was often cheaper because many of the shipping charges, such as loading charges and commissions, were fixed prices no matter how far the freight would be shipped. Railroads, by contrast, often charged different rates depending on how far something was going to travel. Given the lack of a national transportation system, freight would need to travel along different rails, leading to increasing costs along the way. For this reason, all of the cotton New England received from the South came by seafaring vessels prior to the Civil War.⁹¹

Transporting goods by sea did not lend itself to the South developing a sense of cohesion with the North. Shipping cotton to the North by sea was not far off from shipping cotton to Europe. In fact, Europe was a more important market for southern cotton than the North, as two-thirds of the cotton crop was exported to the more established textile factories of Britain.⁹² While the Northeast and Northwest were becoming more integrated economically, the South remained economically independent because of its shipping methods. From this divergence of economic interests we see the South becoming a cohesive “us” compared to a northern “them”. As the north continued to industrialize, members of Congress, led by Henry Clay, increasingly sought

⁹¹ Fishlow, 270
⁹² Howe, 273
protective tariffs to ensure their products would have an advantage over foreign goods. Spurred by the Panic of 1819, protectionists sought to reduce British economic hegemony and also to insulate the U.S. from the turbulence of foreign markets in what would be called the American System.\textsuperscript{93}

Such measures, designed to promote domestic industry, had little appeal to southerners because they had no interest in protecting domestic industry. Initial efforts to start textile factories in the South proved short lived, as slave-owners felt they could make higher profits if their slaves simply worked the fields. With most of that slave-produced cotton going overseas, southern politicians naturally preferred free trade principles over protective tariffs. Their capital was tied up in slaves and not factories after all. They were right when they saw protective tariffs as being damaging to said investment as well. Such tariffs raised the price of coarse textiles, used to clothe slaves, which in turn led to decreasing demand for Southern cotton abroad. This in turn led to higher costs in maintaining slaves, as their coarse textile clothing now cost more.\textsuperscript{94}

While such tariffs may have been good for U.S. business, they were not so beneficial to southern slavery.

Here we see how Southern slave states began to develop a sense of cohesion around slavery as an institution. They were the ones who were disadvantaged by tariffs, as the costs of maintaining their sizeable investment in slavery increased. Free trade obviously benefitted them, as they had no significant textile or manufacturing interests.

\textsuperscript{93} Howe, 271-272
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid, 273
of their own to protect. They wanted to be able to trade with whoever they wanted with little interference. The tariffs essentially put the South at odds with the North over the direction of the country, which in turn created greater social distance between the regions. Evidence of this can be seen by examining the importance of the Northwest and South as markets for goods made in the Northeast. Up to 1839, the South was by far more important than the Northwest as a market for goods from the Northeast. By the 1850’s, though, the West had surpassed the South as an important market for consumption.  

Within this conflict over tariffs, both of the elements necessary to create cohesive, and hostile, identities were present. First, the North and South were competitors over for the political power to shape the economic trajectory of the nation, either in favor of slavery or wage labor, in the territories. Second, both North and South had the same access to political system to shape the trajectory of the nation as a whole. Over time, this competition created cohesive identities for each region, identities that increased the social distance between the two regions. With increased social distance between two regions, the costs of re-coordination are diminished. If you cannot sympathize with the ones you are in competition with, why bother competing in the first place? Re-coordination would seem less perilous for the Southern states, as they would have no one who voiced opposition to the ideals of slavery and free trade. Given the

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95 Fishlow, 275
amount of cotton sent overseas the costs of re-coordinating to avoid competition would have been considerably higher had the South sent most of its cotton north instead.
Slavery and Social Capital

With both North and South responsible for creating an “us” vs. “them” mentality it would be easy to conclude that both were equally responsible for the Civil War. Such a conclusion, though, ignores the social impact of slavery on the South, and how this impact also greatly reduced the cost of re-coordination for the South. True though it may be that these divergent economic paths may have led to dissolution of the Union eventually, in the years leading up to the Civil War it wasn’t the North where secession was oft discussed in earnest. While many northerners certainly felt that the South should just leave, the idea of the North re-coordinating, of leaving the Union, was still foreign to them. It was slavery’s impact on society in the South that ensured that re-coordination wasn’t a foreign concept.

As discussed in the previous section, the South was able to develop a cogent identity thanks in part to economic interests. This identity is what led increasingly to the greater social distance between North and South. Another, more important, factor in the creation of this identity was slavery itself. The presence of chattel slavery, based entirely on race, created a stratified hierarchy in the South, with blacks at the bottom as slaves and whites at the top as patricians. This hierarchy, while encouraging stability, helped sow the seeds for class conflict and ultimately it was slavery that ensured those seeds never reached fruition.

To illustrate this point it is important to examine the social hierarchy of the South beginning with the top of the hierarchy, the “patricians”. These self-styled
“patricians” were the slaveholding elite of the South. The stratification of society was justified by these wealthy men using Enlightenment theory to reconcile such a hierarchy with republican, egalitarian principles. It was argued that in a republic only the best men should rule, while lesser individuals deferred to their superior judgment. Such a sentiment was fully compatible with slavery. It was commonly held at the time, not just in the South either, that virtuous leadership required financial independence. For Southerner’s, slavery was that mechanism that allowed a man to have the financial independence necessary to live a life of leisure, free of mundane concerns such as manual labor of any sort, where virtue could be honed.  

Such sentiments were only reinforced by the fact that blacks, as the 19th century progressed, were increasingly viewed as an inferior people, naturally suited for slavery. In fact, having blacks as slaves was viewed as the most humane thing to be done for blacks by many southerners. “Our slaves, they often claimed, permanently work for paternalistic masters, while wage slaves temporarily work for selfish capitalists”. Slavery wasn’t a bad thing for slaves, as they lived under selfless patricians who engaged in a sort of noblesse oblige towards the slaves, providing them with things they could not otherwise provide for themselves.

Of course, such sentiments brought about certain difficulties that slaveholders needed to address. For instance, as the above quote demonstrates, slaves were seen as better off than “wage slaves” because they had someone who actually cared about their

96 Freehling, 39-40
97 Ibid, 44
well-being. The writings of George Fitzhugh, a 19th century supporter of slavery, went so far as to call for “universal social subordination”, where all inferior individuals would be completely subordinate to their superiors. Logically, then, shouldn’t all “wage slaves” be made actually slaves so they might live under a more hospitable condition?98

Such a hierarchical society cannot easily avoid this question, especially in a country where democratic and egalitarian principles had been present since the founding. Many poor whites in slave states, for instance, were disenfranchised based on property qualifications centered on slavery. Such a state was justified with the ideas of deference and leadership that were built up by the hierarchy of a slave society.99 Poor whites, the same as slaves, were expected to defer to their “betters”. This occasionally led to tensions along class lines in the South, particularly among “white belt” regions where few blacks, both free and slave, lived. The tensions usually arose because of the practice of hiring out slaves for labor, as white laborers did not want to compete with slaves for work.100

The manner in which slaveholders dealt with such tension sometimes only helped fuel resentments, particularly in these “white-belt” regions. In state legislatures, where many slaveholders and those friendly to slavery unquestionably held sway, those speaking out against slavery in any way, even in terms of the competition of slaves with poor whites, were pushed aside. Furthermore, those friendly towards slavery “often

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98 Howe, 482
99 Freehling, 40
100 Ibid, 49
imperiously demanded that other [white-belt] democrats yield” to their superior leadership and experience. While such actions might be harsh, the slaveholders knew that such men, having no dreams of owning slaves and no reliance on slaveholders, didn’t see the same need for the social hierarchy. Thus they were not to be trusted or treated with the same respect due to other legislative members.

Such tension could not exist on the surface of a slave society without threatening the stability of that institution. Slaveholders needed the support of poor whites, needed them to ignore the obvious contradictions of such a society. If not, the social distance between slaveholders and poor whites would become increasingly greater over time, and a cohesive identity would be impossible. Such hierarchies allow “humans to deal in a routine and predictable manner with strangers and acquaintances outside their primary group”. While this certainly helps with stability, it does not help reduce social distance. After all, it would seem that it would be difficult for poor whites to form a common identity with someone perceived to be one’s better.

So rigid were these divides that they could be compared to ethnic stratification, despite the fact that both slaveholders and poor whites were both Anglo-Saxon in ancestry for the most part. Such systems of ethnic stratification are often based on a type of “moral order” where the dominant group believes their advantages come from natural differences. As mentioned previously, the entire social hierarchy of the South

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101 Freehling, 49-50
102 Alba & Nee, 31
103 Ibid, 33
was built upon the idea that the most virtuous would lead. This virtue became something that was heritable, that was connected to a family, as Southern slaveholders practiced at being nobles. All the advantages that they received were earned by their superior moral standing, rewards for living a virtuous life. Poor whites were another breed whose position in the world was based upon personal failings rather than circumstance.

Comparisons to ethnic stratification might seem farfetched, particularly as the two groups primarily being discussed are both white. Robert Putnam, though, says that perceived diversity isn’t just a result of skin tone. “Diversity itself can only be conceived in terms of socially constructed identities”.104 So long as the social hierarchy of the South created and maintained distinctions between poor whites and the slave-owning elites, diversity would be present. Said hierarchical system as described could only ensure that social distance remained significant as it “created and sustained” rigid classifications for people. Even with common interactions between members of different groups, even over the course of years, “feelings of apprehension and reserve” would still exist.105

Social isolation would become more prevalent, as recent studies by Putnam have shown that perceived diversity or differences trigger social isolation, even amongst members of the same ethnic group or race. As illustrated previously, social hierarchies

105 Alba & Nee, 32
like the one just described create a type of diversity, one based upon class where the
differences between people are emphasized. In areas with high instances of social
isolation, people have less confidence in local government and local leaders.\textsuperscript{106} Such a
lack of confidence would undermine the entire hierarchy that slavery was centered
upon. A cohesive identity would become all but impossible. Without such an identity,
the collective action needed for re-coordination would become that much more costly,
perhaps prohibitively so as people would become increasingly isolated from one
another. Without a cohesive identity, re-coordination would have been highly unlikely.

While the antebellum South was not able to completely do away with these class
tensions, a cohesive identity did form amongst Southern whites of all classes. This
happened because southern whites of all classes were able to create social capital
amongst themselves. Social capital is what essentially reduces the costs for people to
work together to accomplish something.\textsuperscript{107} Where there is considerable social capital,
there is also low social distance, as social capital enables people to identify common
goals. This in turn helps people create common, cohesive identities. Social capital helps
ensure that re-coordination costs remain high amongst groups since social capital
reduces social distance between people.

There are two types of social capital, bonding and bridging, both of which were
at play in the South. Bridging capital is what enables people who are different in some

\textsuperscript{106} Putnam, \textit{E Pluribus Unum}, 147-49
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid, 138
way to come together in some significant way. Such capital was important for creating a cohesive identity amongst southern whites, as it enabled whites of all classes to see beyond their differences, to see a common goal. Prominent slaveholders held picnics and barbeques, inviting people of all classes, in a show of egalitarianism and solidarity with fellow whites. Furthermore, the economic realities of slavery helped bridge the gap between wealthy slaveholders and the middle-class.

Doctors treated plantation slaves. Merchants marketed plantation staples. Editors sold proslavery newspapers. Bankers financed slave purchases. Proslavery clerics preached at slaves and slaveholders. The village bourgeoisie stood resolutely behind rural seigneurs. The slave economy created bridging capital between slaveholders and non-slaveholders because both groups could see their economic interests tied to its continuation. Without slavery, many non-slaveholders could conceivably lose money or even their livelihoods. This bridging capital helped reduce social distance between different classes of whites. The central importance of slavery for the economy also ensured that any individual seeking political office had to speak favorably on slavery.

More lawyers than planters achieved political prominence in the Old South. Nothing would have changed if planters had held every office. In black-belt areas, anti-abolitionist speeches paved the way to political success. Political prominence paved the road to legal success.

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109 Freehling, 48
110 Ibid, 48
Again, slaveholders and non-slaveholders found common ground, a bridge between the two that allowed them to work together in a mutually beneficial arrangement. Slavers ensured that politicians would be favorable towards slavery, and politicians ensured that they were successful not only politically but professionally as well, thus helping to reduce social distance once again.

Poor whites as well found themselves tied to slavery. Slaveholders often supported poor whites economically, playing benefactor to their impoverished neighbors. With settlements in the South widely dispersed, sending harvests to market was expensive for farmers, sometimes even prohibitively so. For this reason poor whites often sold their produce to plantation owners who would in turn sell the produce for a profit. Plantation owners were more than happy to help, seeing such actions as part of the Patrician duty. This duty was not limited to just buying produce but extended to allowing poor whites to use their cotton gin or even putting them on their payroll.111 Again, slavery helped bridge the gap between the two groups as both could recognize the benefits of slavery upon their lives regardless of whether one owned a slave or not.

The importance of bridging capital is not to be understated for creating a cohesive identity. Bridging capital is what “generates broader identities and reciprocity”, allowing people to empathize with others who may be different. These new, broad identities are how people reach out to other groups, find common ground where there

111 Freehling, 41, 46-47
was none before.\footnote{Putnam, \textit{Bowling Alone}, 23} As a result, this bridging capital did much to deconstruct the rigid distinctions between whites of different classes by helping to reduce the perception of diversity between whites. Without bridging capital of any kind, the class tensions mentioned earlier would have been a serious barrier for any sort of collective action amongst southerners.

While these examples certainly demonstrate how differences were overcome through bridging capital it is impossible to ignore the limitations of such capital, particularly with poor whites. While poor whites may have understood that they too were connected to slavery, such a connection could also serve as a reminder of the difference between them and slave-owners. The institutional structure of slavery created the “rules of legitimate social action within which individuals and organizations compete for control over resources”.\footnote{Alba & Nee, 36} The norms created by the institution of slavery often served as reminders of the considerable gap that existed between the elite slave-owners and poor whites. For instance, slave-owners looked down upon manual labor, seeing it as beneath the scope of a proper white man, fit only for slaves. Poor whites, though, made their living from such work.\footnote{Freehling, 47} Such attitudes could, and did, lead to tension between the two groups, as they portrayed all who engaged in labor as inferior. So while bridging capital was important for easing class tensions it does not completely
explain how a cohesive identity was able to form between wealthy slave-owners and poor whites.

To explain how this cohesive identity was fully formed the bonding capital then present in the South needs to be examined. Bonding capital is what ties people who are alike together in a significant way.\textsuperscript{115} Whites in the south were able to find common ground simply because they were white and slaves were black. This is what tied them together. Class didn’t matter if the most important part of the economy, slavery, made whites naturally superior to blacks. By focusing on the racial inferiority of blacks as the justification for a stratified society, the class lines were blurred somewhat. Blacks, as a matter of fact, were naturally ill-suited to the type of freedom that whites enjoyed.\textsuperscript{116} Whites need not worry about their own freedom, as slavery was merely reserved for those of an inferior racial stock.

Such ideas were not always prevalent in the South. In the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century, talk of the eventual end of slavery was common in the South, even amongst prominent slaveholders. Jefferson, like many other prominent patricians, felt slavery tended to direct whites to being unbalanced and tyrannical. Better that blacks should be sent both to Africa or the Caribbean, so whites could avoid corruption and white laborers could

\textsuperscript{115} Putnam, \textit{E Pluribus Unum}, 143, B, 22
\textsuperscript{116} Freehling, 44
migrate to the South. From such ideas sprang the ideas of conditional termination and diffusionist theory as ways of bringing about the end of slavery.

This would not always be the case, as eventually such calls were replaced by talk of slavery as a “positive good”. South Carolina was the first state where such sentiments took hold, later extending throughout the South as the 19th century continued. Senator John C. Calhoun of South Carolina became the most famous proponent of slavery as a positive good in 1837. Addressing the Senate on the issue of banning slavery in the District of Columbia, he dismissed the Jeffersonian position of gradual emancipation and put forth that the perpetuation of slavery was the best option.

I hold that in the present state of civilization, where two races of different origin, and distinguished by color...are brought together, the relation now existing in the slaveholding States between the two, is instead of an evil, a good—a positive good.

Such sentiments arose in response to Romantic ideas which spoke of inherently wise, human instincts present in all people. Slaveholders argued against such ideas, saying that blacks were not a part of this natural human instinct, that blacks were better off not having to live on their own.

Despite such rhetoric concerning the racial inferiority of blacks as a justification for slavery, class tension still existed between slaveholders and non-slaveholders, as mentioned previously. The logical argument of men such as Fitzhugh does not go away completely just because of a racial basis for slavery. More was needed to solidify the

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117 Freehling, 125  
118 Ibid, 122-23, 125  
119 Howe, 480  
120 Freehling, 40
racial identity of southern whites. This extra component came with the fear of a race war. The bonding capital created by the racial hierarchy was further enhanced by fears of a possible race war stemming out of a slave revolt. Such fears became prevalent after the slave uprising in Saint-Domingue at the end of the 18th century. The slaves in that French colony rose up and overthrew the slave society, eventually establishing the Republic of Haiti. During the course of this revolution, however, many former slaves engaged in indiscriminate violence against whites, who had been the predominant slaveholding group.¹²¹

Southern slaveholders came to fear that this would come to pass in the U.S. as well. These fears only increased as the years passed and the number of slaves in the U.S. increased. Fear of a race war proved to reach across class lines, creating a cohesive identity for southern whites based on race and not class. Events such as Nat Turner’s Rebellion and the Denmark Vesey conspiracy only furthered the fears of whites of a race war. As these fears grew, the southern identity only grew stronger as whites bonded around their racial identity against a common racial threat.

Paramount to preventing this common racial threat was prevention. If slaves were simply treated properly (not to be confused with treating them kindly) race war could be avoided. This meant, for the most part, ensuring that no one spoke ill of slavery regardless of whether they were from the South or were outsiders. As a result, a system of violence and intimidation was established which could keep whites in line with

slavery using both legal and “extra-legal” means. For instance, the 1830’s saw a significant increase in the volume of abolitionist mail delivered to South Carolina, the only state at the time to call for the unconditional perpetuation of slavery. The postmaster, Alfred Huger of Charleston, refused to deliver the pamphlets, as he believed they would foment insurrection amongst the slaves. Whites, hearing of the pamphlets and the postmaster’s actions, formed a mob and broke into the office and burned the pamphlets.

This caused a stir in the North, where many felt it was the postmaster’s duty to deliver the pamphlets as a federal employee. President Jackson did not share these sentiments. He not only wanted the pamphlets locked up in the post office but also wanted the names of anyone who came to demand their mail taken and posted publically. Amos Kendall, the postmaster general, softened this approach by only instructing Huger to lock up mail that the “circumstances of the case justified”. Of course, the implied threat of exposure of being soft on slavery ensured that no southern white went to demand that mail.\textsuperscript{122} \textsuperscript{123} Whites of all classes could bond in their vigilance of who demanded said mail, and could bond in socially isolating those who did so. Thus we can see that class lines were blurred with bonding capital generated in defense of slavery.

Events such as this marked a change in the political discourse of the nation, as southerners began calling for northern states to “outlaw” anti-slavery appeals and to

\textsuperscript{122} Freehling, 291-292
\textsuperscript{123} Howe, 430
extradite “fanatics”, namely abolitionists, to the South for trial.\textsuperscript{124} South Carolina, once the only state to speak of slavery being perpetuated indefinitely, now had more company as most debates on slavery in southern legislatures centered on who was “soft on slavery”. Politicians increasingly tried to paint each other as soft on slavery, implying they were not loyal to the institution and by implication not loyal to the South. Such contests, with each nominee trying to show they were firmer in their support of slavery, were exacerbated by the two-party system that emerged in the 1830’s. Both parties, in order to ensure victory was not stolen by an organized opposition, had to show they were the ones most committed to slavery. Such organized politics left little room for the kind of reflective thought inherent in the Jeffersonian approach to slavery and the rhetoric concerning slavery became more intractable over time.\textsuperscript{125}

This need to show ones commitment to slavery was not limited to just southern politics, but bled into national politics as well. Martin Van Buren, seeking the presidency in 1836, had to ensure the South supported him in order to win the election. In pursuit of this end, supporters of Van Buren introduced the “gag rule” to Congress. Said rule forbid “even the discussion of petitions addressing the subject of slavery either in the District [of Columbia] or anywhere else”. Such a measure ensured Van Buren would capture the Southern vote.\textsuperscript{126} The fact that a northerner such as Van Buren had to show

\textsuperscript{124} Freehling, 292
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid, 295
\textsuperscript{126} Howe, 509
such a commitment to slavery to receive southern votes demonstrates that the terms of the discourse had changed; the only way to get southern support was to protect slavery.

Back in the South, when simple intimidation did not send to ground those who were “soft on slavery”, violence ensured the safety of whites. Much of this violence consisted of tarring and feathering individuals, which was potentially fatal for the victim, and lynching’s, which were always fatal. These attacks were usually reserved for foreigners and northerners, whose commitment to slavery was suspect because they did not hail from the South nor own slaves. Such violence was more common in the years leading up to the Civil War. Violence, though, was not limited to just outsiders but was employed against southern whites as well. Ensuring that southern whites who were not firm in their commitment were weeded out was perhaps even more important, as their presence could have a more profound impact than some outsider merely passing through. Even the hint of being lax in commitment was often enough to bring about violence.

This violence was not unchecked, though, as formal and informal rules existed governing how such mobs should operate. First, someone would need to be labeled as a dissenter, essentially charging them with holding opinions counter to the safety of slavery. For southern slaveholders, any dissenting opinion on slavery was potentially

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127 Freehling, 100
“incendiary”, a testament to the strength of the fear of a race war. After all, no matter how well segregated southern society might be slaves can still overhear things.128

When it came to finding evidence against potential dissenters, often the testimony of slaves was needed. Now this created a problem for the protectors of slavery, as blacks, regardless of whether they were free or slave, were not permitted to testify against whites in a court of law. To get around this legal conundrum, whites established “quasi-despotic courts” to deal exclusively with the testimony of blacks against whites. Said courts were headed by “reputable community leaders” which the mob would appoint to be judges in the case.129 Given how the local economy and social advancement rested on support of slavery, it is not unreasonable to expect that these judges were plantation owners or at the very least strong supporters of slavery. These mobs, in addition to having the power to appoint judges to these kangaroo courts, had carte blanche to gather evidence in any manner they saw fit. “Neighborhood patrols could legally maraud anywhere, including inside slave cabins, to investigate insurrection”.130 If a slave needed questioning, torture was often implemented to gain testimony. Killing a slave in questioning was not out of bounds either, as preventing a slave rebellion was all that mattered.

With such a system in place, violence ordinarily reserved for blacks could legally fall upon whites as well. Between 1830 and 1860 around 300 whites were lynched in the

128 Freehling, 99
129 Ibid, 99
130 Ibid, 99
South. The worst recorded mob violence against whites occurred in 1835. There had been a scare that a slave insurrection would occur on July 4th. Under torture, slaves named several whites as the culprits for such a conspiracy whose alleged guilt was suspect at best. This touched off a veritable witch-hunt, as more and more blacks were tortured to procure more names. By the end, seven whites were lynched based on this testimony and many more slaves and free blacks died either from interrogation or lynching as well.\textsuperscript{131} Events like these reminded whites of all classes the possible repercussions of even appearing soft on slavery, as the seeds of doubt could be planted amongst ones neighbors.

Such episodes, despite the violence and uncertainty, helped create bonding capital between poor whites and wealthy slave-owners. “Nothing better solidified a folk neighborhood than rich and poor united to tar and feather some alien threat to the public safety”.\textsuperscript{132} By uniting to combat foreign and domestic threats, southern whites found common ground that blurred class lines. Such violence in the service of the public interest, though, was limited in jurisdiction. The idea of paternalism in southern society could not allow foreigners, even southerners from nearby townships, to pass judgment on one of their own. So strong was this sentiment that there are accountants of two competing mobs fighting each other; one mob trying to take an alleged dissident

\textsuperscript{131} Freehling, 110-11  
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid, 99
from another town and another mob fighting to prevent one of their own from being taken.\textsuperscript{133}

One could say that such incidents could only undermine a cohesive identity in the South, creating social distance between the slave states. After all, if towns could resort to fighting over the execution of maintaining slavery, then cooperation between the far-flung slave states seems unlikely. While this seems to be a perfectly reasonable argument, it fails to take into account a few points. First, the southern communities were united in the belief that foreign meddling was something to be avoided, even if that foreign body was merely another township. Second, that despite wanting to maintain local control, they still all faced the same threat, potential race war. Thus, they were bonded in that should the need arise they could count on each other to help put down a rebellion. They just wanted local autonomy when it came to prevention.

This of course points to how social distance was created and maintained between the North and South. The southern slave communities, who were not fond of any sort of outsider meddling, perceived the North as hostile to the very fabric of southern society. They weren’t committed to slavery; they didn’t even have slaves, relying instead on “wage slaves”. Worse yet, abolitionist agitators resided in the North. To a southerner, it appeared that the most inflammatory rhetoric against slavery was coming from a region where the threat of racial warfare was not omnipresent. These outsiders were seen as agitators, as fomenters of racial unrest. It was feared that if

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid, 103-106
slaves commonly heard abolitionist rhetoric they would be whipped into a violent, animal frenzy.

For this reason, many slave states made anti-slavery comments seditious; such talk could spawn a slave rebellion. It is worth noting that such laws were often narrow in scope, affecting only those who were members of an abolitionist society.\textsuperscript{134} The moral condemnations of abolitionists helped poor whites and slaveholders bond in another way. Abolitionists often characterized all southern whites as “ethically inferior”. From an abolitionist’s point of view, any white who allowed slavery to continue was morally reprehensible. By failing to draw a distinction between those who owned slaves and those who merely lived in a slave state, abolitionists essentially helped poor whites and slaveholders reinforce the bond between them.\textsuperscript{135}

In such a scenario, there was no chance for bonding capital to be created between North and South; there was merely a chance for animosity to develop. All of this serves as an illustration of the unintentionally negative effects of bonding capital. While bridging social capital can enlarge out identity, “bonding social capital bolsters our narrower selves”\textsuperscript{136} The bonding capital generated by racial slavery ultimately narrowed the scope of any identity that southerners could form. They could not identify with any group who did not have the same alien threat to the public safety.”\textsuperscript{137} The threat of race war helped white of all socioeconomic backgrounds bond together,

\textsuperscript{134} Freehling, 107  
\textsuperscript{135} Freehling, 44  
\textsuperscript{136} Putnam, \textit{Bowling Alone}, 23  
\textsuperscript{137} Freehling, 99
helping to create a cohesive identity, as they came together to combat a threat that touched all white men. Furthermore, this violence and intimidation reached across class lines, as both rich and poor were targeted by such mobs. The chance for a truly national identity amongst both the North and South was impossible as long as such bonding capital created by slavery was present in the South.

The impact of this bonding capital can be illustrated by looking at how each of the three southern regions, Border, Middle, and Deep, would have experienced this bonding capital. Fears of race war would have varied again depending on a state's number of slaves. The Border States would have had the least to fear, as fewer blacks lived there. In Maryland and Delaware, it was debated publicly whether removing freed blacks from the state, an important action in the minds of many whites throughout the South, was even necessary Civil War. This debate, in a region with the highest percentage of free blacks, illustrates how fear of a racial conflict was less severe in this region. As a result, there would have been a stronger possibility for bridging social capital to be created with the North, and social distance would have been less. As discussed in a previous section, the Border States had much more in common economically in many ways with the North than they did with the South. This would have served as bridging capital, allowing them to create broader identities that included the North.

138 Freehling, 104
139 Ibid, 131
The Middle South experienced middling levels of this same social experience, so the violence and intimidation would have been greater than in the Border States. They did, however, have a healthy fear of race war despite a smaller number of slaves compared to the Deep South. States such as Virginia, after all, used the argument that selling slaves to the Deep South would help them avoid the calamity of having too many blacks in the state. Potential conflict lay at the heart of the domestic slave trade, so they would have had common cause with the Deep South in trying to avoid a racial war. Add to this the economic incentives of said domestic slave trade and increased solidarity with the Deep South thanks to the Transportation Revolution and re-coordination seems a fitting choice for the Middle South.

The Deep South is, of course, where the commitment to maintaining slavery and the social hierarchy would have been strongest. The number of blacks in proportion to the whites helped create a rather paranoid people in the Deep South; fearful of anything that might set off the tinder that they had created throughout the southern plantations. It is in the Deep South that the sentiments of secession bubbled up long before the states such as Virginia and Tennessee were willing to consider them, with events such as the Nullification Crisis originating in the Deep South, namely South Carolina. For them, the jump to secession was easiest as they had the most to lose by abolition and had the most to fear from race war. The Deep South may have seceded sooner, had the cost of re-coordinating not included leaving the Middle South and Border South as well.
Slavery played a curious role in the South. Due to its basis on race, slavery allowed whites of all socioeconomic backgrounds to bond around a common identity and threat. This bonding capital allowed for class tensions, which could have been potentially crippling for any sort of collective effort, to be pushed to the background. The cost of this, though, was a narrower identity, one centered on the maintenance of slavery and being white. This narrow identity created barriers between the South and North, barriers that could not be bridged by anything other than the North declaring its un faltering allegiance to slavery. Thus, the cost of re-coordinating was greatly reduced due to the impact of slavery on the social capital of the South.

**Closing Comments**

The Civil War was a conflict that divided a people of similar language, religion and ancestry. Slavery was what caused this war. It was slavery that started the South down a path that only a war could dislodge it from. Slavery became the all-important linchpin of the southern economy, as it allowed forever increasing profits from cotton and other goods. Further north, where cotton wasn’t viable, the domestic slave trade became a central part of the economy. With the international slave trade closed, these states had a monopoly when it came to the sale of slaves. As the nation expanded and those moving west wanted to bring slaves into the territories, conflict arose with Free Soiler settlers.
The Transportation Revolution also saw an opportunity for the South to become more integrated with the North gone unheeded. Instead of investing in new innovations such as the railroad, the South poured more capital into slavery. Attempting to integrate into the emerging national economy was not of interest to most southerners. What the transportation revolution did do, though, was enable far-flung peoples to maintain a level of cohesion not possible before the 19th century. The problem with this, though, is that this increased connection merely polarized the two regions, making the competition for new territory seem as though all had a stake in it. In previous times, before the advent of the railroad, neither free states nor slave states may have been able to maintain the type of strong cohesion necessary for re-coordination.

Most importantly, the siege mentality of southerners made re-coordination all the more likely. With the constant fear of race war looming over them and an obsession with stemming the tide of foreign agitators the likelihood of re-coordination became all the more likely. Staying within a coordination system where half the states were opposed to slavery would be a dangerous proposition, not just economically but physically as well. If slaves continued to hear the rhetoric of abolitionists, who also claimed the mantle of Americans, then a race war may have been inevitable. This fear allowed southerners of all socioeconomic backgrounds to come together, to prefer the uncertainty of re-coordination than the threat of race war.

In closing, the economic incentives of a slave economy could certainly be seen as adequate for leading the South to secede. After all, cotton was bringing in considerable
profits thanks in large part to slavery. But the social effects of slavery ensured that the costs of re-coordination were especially low by the time the South left the Union. Slavery helped create both literal and figurative barriers between the North and the South. Literally slavery diverted capital that could have been used for transportation improvements, improvements that could have helped the South become more integrated into the national economy. Figuratively, slavery created an identity for southerners that looked on all outsiders as potentially dangerous. Even slave-owners from other towns were not to be trusted entirely. Such an identity created a type of arms race where politicians had to outdo each other in their commitment to the peculiar institution. This shared identity and the mentality that arose out of it, was the foundation of the South’s decision to secede, to re-coordinate. Without such an identity, the collective effort of such an undertaking would have been impossible.
Bibliography


