

On the Eve of the Civil War: Differences between the Northern & Southern States

Even though they were part of the same country, The North and the South were very different. These differences caused disagreements and eventually led to war.

One of these differences was in the area of economy. The economy of an area has to do with how people make a living and how they spend their money. In the North, the economy was based on industry. They built factories and manufactured products to sell to other countries and to the southern states. They did not do a lot of farming because the soil was rocky and the colder climate made for a shorter growing season. Most people in the North worked in factories or owned their own businesses. They also planted small farms or gardens to help feed their families. Without big farms to run, the people in the North did not rely on slave labor very much.

In the South, the economy was based on agriculture. The soil was fertile and good for farming. They grew crops like cotton, rice, and tobacco on small farms and large plantations. The many large farms and plantations required thousands of workers. Because of this great need, the farmers began to depend on slave labor instead of trying to hire people to work in their fields.

Another difference between the North and South had to do with the new states forming in the western territories. The North wanted the new states to be “free states.” Most northerners thought that slavery was wrong and many northern states had outlawed slavery. The South, however, wanted the new states to be “slave states.” Cotton, rice, and tobacco were very hard on the southern soil. These plants soon took all of the nutrients out of the soil. Without these nutrients the soil would not grow good crops. Because of this, the Southern farmers wanted to move west into the new states and take their slaves with them.

These differences in the areas of economy, slavery, and new states began to divide the northern and southern states. Virginia was also divided. The people who lived in the western counties of the state were against slavery and sided with the North. The people who lived in the eastern counties of the state depended on slavery and sided with the other southern states. This disagreement between the two regions of the state would eventually lead to the formation of West Virginia. The coming war would divide Virginia and the new nation in two.