

No, slavery didn't build America.

The issue of slavery in the United States was ultimately decided by the Civil War (1861-1865). It was a showdown between the free North and the slave South, amongst other things. It was also one of the first "total wars" seen by the West in a very long time.

As Warfare in the Western World: Military Operations from 1600 to 1871, describes it:

"The final year of the Civil War witnessed the full bloom of total war. No western state in centuries had waged a military contest more comprehensively than did the Union and Confederacy. Determined national efforts the world had seen: during the Napoleonic Wars the Spanish and Russian people had fought relentlessly against the French invaders; and in 1813 the Russians had pursued the retreating French for nearly a thousand miles. Yet neither the Spanish nor the Russians had mobilized their populations and economies as systematically as did the North and South."

If we are to judge who or what "built" America, we must honestly look at the legacy and the strength of each. The reality is that the slave-holding South lost the Civil War. Why? Why, if slavery built America, was it not able to provide the strength needed to the South to be able to crush the North? And what did the North have that made it so great without the aid of slavery?

For that, history indicates rather obviously that the South was an agrarian economy while the North was an industrial economy. From *America: A Narrative History* by George Tindall and David Shi we learn,

"By 1840 many thoughtful southerners reasoned that by staking

everything on agriculture the region had wasted chances in manufacturing and trade. After the War of 1812, as cotton growing swept everything before it, the South became increasingly dependent on northern manufacturing and trade. Cotton and tobacco were exported mainly in northern vessels. Southerners also relied on connections in the North for imported goods. The South became, economically if not formally, a kind of colonial dependency of the North.”

That isn't the description of strength that one would think would come from a region employing the “peculiar institution” that America supposedly was built upon. Instead, it would appear that a region dependent upon enslaving others ended up enslaving itself to a free North.

Turning back to *Warfare in the Western World*, we find statistics that show just how dramatic the differences in populations and economic power were between the free North and the slave South.

“But in a longer struggle the North's advantages were substantial. With a population of 20 million, the Northern states obviously possessed a much larger military manpower base, but their industrial capacity was far greater as well. In 1860 the North had over 110,000 manufacturing establishments, the South just 18,000. The North produced 94 percent of the country's iron, 97 percent of its coal and – not incidentally – 97 percent of its firearms. It contained 22,000 miles of railroad to the South's 8,500. The North outperformed the South agriculturally as well. Northerners held 75 percent of the country's farm acreage, produced 60 percent of its livestock, 67 percent of its corn, and 81 percent of its wheat. All in all, they held 75 percent of the nation's total wealth.”

That final statistic combined with the North's victory in the Civil War should be sufficient to dispel the idea that America was built on slavery. Keep in mind, too, that not all of the

wealth in the South was generated by slaves. Free men in the South also worked their own fields and industries.

The truth is, America was primarily built on the industry of free people. Slavery was a terrible thing that went against the founding ideals of the country. Nonetheless, we do not need to create false narratives to know it was wrong and to have sympathy for both those who lived through it and for those who carried the scars forward.

Indeed, it does damage to one's cause to push a false narrative that cannot stand up under scrutiny and calls in to question any other statements one makes as well as the agenda for making them.