

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

Tariffs and the American Civil War

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Resources

If you can read only one book

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year.
Taussig, Frank William	<i>The Tariff History of the United States</i> . New York/London: G. P. Putnam's sons, 1888.

Books and Articles

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year. "Title," in <i>Journal</i> ##, no. # (Date): #.
Freehling, William W.	<i>Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816-1836</i> . New York: Harper & Row, 1966.
Magness, Phillip W.	"Morrill and the Missing Industries: Strategic Lobbying Behavior and the Tariff, 1858-1861," in <i>Journal of the Early Republic</i> 29, no. 2 (2009): 287-329.
Palen, Marc-William	"The Civil War's Forgotten Transatlantic Tariff Debate and the Confederacy's Free Trade Diplomacy," in <i>The Journal of the Civil War Era</i> 3, no. 1 (2013): 35-61.
Luthin, Reinhard H.	"Abraham Lincoln and the Tariff." <i>The American Historical Review</i> 49 no.4 (July 1944): 609-29.
Northrup, Cynthia Clark, and Elaine C. Prange Turney, eds.	<i>Encyclopedia of Tariffs and Trade in US History</i> , 3 vols. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003.

Organizations

Web Resources

URL	Name and description
https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/06/05/the-great-civil-war-lie/	Palen, Marc-William. "The Great Civil War Lie." <i>New York Times – Opinionator</i> , June 5, 2013, discusses the effect of the Morrill Tariff on initial British sympathy for the Confederate cause.

Other Sources

Scholars

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Topic Précis

Tariffs are a tax levied on imported goods and were the dominant source of the federal government’s revenue in the 19th century. Tariffs were also used for protectionist purposes, benefitting largely northern manufacturing businesses and effectively raising the costs to southern agricultural exporting industries. Tariffs also spawned corruption and political favoritism for some industries over others. Tariffs played an important role in the early development of secessionist constitutional theory. But as an object of antebellum national political discussion, tariffs occupied a distant secondary place behind slavery. Yet tariff arguments continuously attracted the attention of Congress from its first meeting in 1789 until the Secession Winter session of 1860-61. The last great antebellum tariff battle, the Morrill Tariff of 1861, was adopted only two days before the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln, and largely defined the dimensions of American international trade policy for the next fifty years. Following the War of 1812, Henry Clay developed the idea of the American System consisting of an integrated economy where tariffs excluded European producers, and federal investments in a vast network of internal improvements—roads, canals, harbor facilities, and eventually railroads—would supplant the trans-Atlantic trade with a new pattern premised on internal economic autonomy. High tariffs under the American System were implemented in 1824, and raised even further in the 1828 ‘Tariff of Abominations,’ as it was described by Southern free-trade advocates. In 1833, the Compromise Tariff was introduced gradually reducing tariffs over a nine-year period. Congress swung back from a relatively free trade position with a partial restoration of tariffs with the 1842 Black Tariff. President James Polk began reforming tariffs in 1846 with

moderate rate reductions. These reforms also standardized assessments onto a fixed *ad valorem* schedule in which tariffs were assessed as a percentage of the import's declared value, replacing the old discriminatory system of specific duties on specific goods. In 1857, there was a further uniform reduction in tariff rates. Then the Panic of 1857 saw yet another reversal of course when federal revenues declined significantly. Work began on the Morrill Tariff in 1859. In the 36th Congress no party held a majority and tariff supporting Republicans faced off against anti-tariff Democrats in a 44-ballot stalemate over the selection of the new speaker of the House of Representatives. In early 1860, the Morrill tariff passed in the House not only raising tariff rates but replacing Polk's *ad valorem* system with the reintroduction of a specific duties-based system. The vote was almost strictly on north-south sectional lines in the House but the Senate tabled the measure where it languished until early December 1860 when it was reintroduced. With southern delegations of seceding states no longer in Congress to block the measure, the Morrill Tariff was signed into law by President James Buchanan in March 1861. British opinion at the time favored free trade and the Morrill Tariff was detested in Britain. This development lent unexpected sympathy to Confederate efforts to secure British support early in the war, but was eventually eclipsed by the Emancipation Proclamation after which British public opinion swung behind the Union. For the northern government's diplomacy, the Morrill Tariff had been a shortsighted strategic blunder. It unintentionally alienated an otherwise natural anti-slavery ally for what could, at best, be described as short term economic favors to a few politically connected firms and industrialists. The Confederacy eagerly exploited this misstep in its unsuccessful quest for diplomatic recognition, yet in doing so also elevated the tariff cause from its role as an ancillary complaint to a centerpiece of Lost Cause historiography. What started as a lesser secessionist grievance, only to be adapted into a somewhat diversionary diplomatic tactic with Britain, returned as a rationalized "memory" in the postbellum sorting of the war's physical destruction and slavery's moral baggage. Whereas antebellum tariff battles saw the country pivot between competing regimes of protection and relatively free trade, the Civil War inaugurated a semi-permanent political ascendance of the tariff's industrial beneficiaries in the Gilded Age. Traditional free trade constituencies in the absent and then politically weakened south, along with the agricultural west, were unable to regain the upper hand until the Woodrow Wilson administration. As a result of its settlement in 1861 and its wartime entrenchment, the tariff remained the dominant topic of American economic policy until the eve of the First World War.
