

REVISION NOTES: THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

Underlying Causes of the American Civil War [STEPS]

1. **Sectionalism:** By 1861, the North (populated/ urban/ had as many factories as the South had factory-workers/ believed in 'free labor'/ had Temperance, public education & Abolition movements) was very different from the South (80% agricultural/ cotton/ slavery was the foundation of Southern society although only a quarter of the people owned enslaved people) = both were threatened and hostile.
2. **Tariffs, Nullification and State's Rights:** the 50% 'Tariff of Abominations' (1828) led South Carolina to pass an Ordinance of Nullification and threaten to secede (leave the Union) if President Jackson tried to enforce it.
3. **Expansion into the West:** led to disagreement about whether they should be 'slave' or 'free' states.
 - 'Missouri Compromise' (1820) to balance numbers, and another in 1850, but in 1854 a minor civil war broke out in Kansas ('Bleeding Kansas') between pro-and anti-slavery campaigners.
 - A confrontation developed over the Homestead Act.
 - There was also anger in the South over plans for the first transcontinental railroads.
 - The of new states, destabilised the delicate balance of politics in the Senate.
4. **Power and Politics:** Up to the 1840s, the Southern States held the power in the Senate (with the help of 'dough faces' Presidents; this angered the North. After the 1840, power swung to the North.
5. **Slavery:** most Northerners were racist and did not support Abolition (Lincoln was wishy-washy)/ the South supported slavery because it underlay their supremacy ... but it included ALL the above issues and became a 'shorthand' for defining the two sides.

Events leading to the Civil War

1820: Missouri Compromise: agreed to keep the Senate evenly divided.

1831: Nat Turner's Insurrection: terrified the South.

1848: Wilmot Proviso and the Compromise of 1850: David Wilmot tried to persuade Congress to ban slavery in the West; instead, California was allowed to join the Union as a free state, but a *Fugitive Slave Act* committed the federal government to help return enslaved people who had run away.

1852: Harriet Beecher Stowe published *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

1854: Kansas-Nebraska Act and 'Bleeding Kansas': In 1854, Stephen Douglas, wishing to build a transcontinental railroad through Nebraska, proposed that the inhabitants of new states should be allowed to choose whether to be 'slave' or 'free'. The result was a mini-civil-war in 'Bleeding Kansas', 1854-59.

1856: Republican Party: formed as a pro-North sectional Party.

1857: Dred Scott case: Scott and his family were enslaved people whose owner had moved to the North; the Supreme Court, which ruled against him, saying that African Americans were not citizens.

1859: John Brown tried to start a revolt of enslaved people: In October 1859 he raided a federal armoury at Harper's Ferry in Virginia, and tried to start a slave rebellion.

1860: Lincoln elected President: the Republican candidate; although he promised to allow slavery in the South, he was elected solely by a massive vote from the North: By February 1861 – before he had even been inaugurated – seven Southern States seceded, and formed a 'Confederacy' with their own Constitution.

1861: Fort Sumter Crisis: A federal fort in seceded South Carolina. When Lincoln sent an unarmed ship to re-supply it, before it could get there, on 12 April 1861, Confederate forces bombarded and took it.

Historiography of the Causes of the American Civil War

- a. **Lost Cause theory:** although at the time, all Southern politicians said they were seceding to protect slavery, after the war Southern politicians and historians depicted it as a brave attempt to defend states' rights.
- b. **Inevitability Thesis:** Northern historian James Ford Rhodes depicted the war as a moral issue against slavery, and that a North v South conflict on this issue was inevitable.
- c. **Economic interests:** In 1927, Charles & Mary Beard argued that the war was about the huge financial benefits of colonising the West.
- d. **A Crusade against the South:** In 1941, Southern historian Frank Owsley argued that constant social and economic encroachment from the North had created a 'war psychosis' in the South.
- e. **Slavery:** Most historians now agree that slavery was the issue, though they see 'slavery' as a shorthand for the whole socio-economic system of the South.

Course of the Civil War

- a. **War in Virginia, 1861-3:** At first, the South held off Union attempts to invade Virginia (eg the battles of Bull Run, Antietam), but a Southern invasion of the North by General Lee was defeated in the Battle of Gettysburg.
- b. **Anaconda Strategy, 1862-3:** ie to strangle the South; the Union Navy blockaded Southern ports, killing their trade, General Grant conquered the Mississippi Valley after the long siege of Vicksburg – the South was surrounded.
- c. **Emancipation Proclamation, 1863:** Lincoln made the war about slavery. 215,000 Black soldiers and sailors fought for the Union.
- d. **Total War and the March to the Sea, 1864:** The North declared 'total war', destroying towns, farms and railroads as it advanced. General Sherman's 'March to the Sea' split the South in two. .
- e. **Appomattox, 1865:** Lee's army was surrounded and surrendered; the Southern States surrendered.

The Home Front in the North during the War

The war did not impact directly on the North, apart from a few raids and General Lee's Gettysburg campaign, but mobilising for the war had a huge effect:

1. Economic Results in the North

- The North's economy thrived supplying the Army, creating a 'Second Industrial Revolution' = Industrial Corporations/ stock exchange/ railroads/ labour movements = the 'Gilded Age', 1870-90.
- Pacific Railway Act for the first transcontinental railroad (1862 - completed in 1869) = trading links with the homesteaders, farmers and cattle-ranchers in the West.
- The Morrill Tariff (1861) to protect Northern industries; the National Banking Act (1863) created a national paper currency ('greenbacks'); the Homestead Act (1862) encouraged westward migration; the Morrill Land-Grant Colleges Act (1862) established colleges for agricultural and technical education.
- 2.1 million men served in the Union Army (roughly 50% of males of military-age). The shortage of labour led to innovation and machine-production (eg the McCormick reaper in farming).

2. Social and Political Results in the North

- Lincoln suspended *habeas corpus* (1861) and arrested troublemakers = accused of trying to become a dictator.
- The Conscription law (1861) was hated and led to the 1863 New York Draft Riots. 100,000 fled to Canada, and 118,000 found substitutes, so only 50,000 Union soldiers were conscripts.
- The Emancipation Proclamation (1863) created an opposition from Democratic 'Copperheads'; their leader, Congressman Clement Vallandigham, was arrested and exiled.
- The influx of Black Americans from the South led to racial tensions. The New York Draft riots of 1863 attacked the Colored Orphan Asylum, lynched Black residents, burned homes, and drove them out of the city.
- The influx of immigrants led to an increase in hostility to immigrants, who were seen as taking jobs; there were anti-immigrant riots in Cincinnati (1862) and Philadelphia (1863).
- Wages fell behind inflation, leading to strikes, and the National Labor Union (1866)
- With 620,000 Union soldiers dead, widows wearing black became common
- Veterans returned home with physical and psychological scars = The National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (1865) and the Grand Army of the Republic (1866).

3. Northern Women in the War:

- 500 women disguised themselves and fought as men; others worked as spies or nurse on the Union hospital ship *Red Rover* and in field hospitals; in 1864, the Army appointed Clara Barton as 'lady in charge' of the front-line hospitals in Virginia.
- Other women worked the farms while their husbands were away – one of the consequences of this was a rapid increase in the use of labour-saving farm machinery.
- In 1863, the Women's Loyal National League, the first national women's political organization in the US, was formed to campaign for abolition.
- In 1866 the American Equal Rights Association was formed to campaign for equal rights for all citizens, especially votes for women.

The Home Front in the South during the War

Economic Impact in the South

- **Destruction:** The fighting, especially the Union's 'Total War' (eg Sherman's 'March to the Sea') destroyed towns, railroads and farms. The Union troops 'lived off the land' confiscating crops and livestock.
- **Labour shortage:** Maybe 800,000 men served in the Confederacy (80% of white males of military-age) + many enslaved people ran away. This reduced agricultural production, especially cotton (the South's most profitable cash crop), leading to economic collapse.
- **Anaconda Plan:** wrecked the Confederacy's trade = no revenue from Cotton, and shortages of imports, including food and manufactured goods.
- **Inflation:** To pay for the war, the Confederate government simply printed money = 9000% inflation!

Civilians in the South during the War

- Much of the South was a war zone: all the above directly impacted on civilians.
- The Confederate government:
 - passed a Conscription Act (1862) – all males aged 17-50 were drafted by 1864)
 - imposed a 10 percent 'tax-in-kind' (1863) on corn, wheat, and sweet potatoes
 - passed an Impressment Act (1863) it gave itself the right to buy supplies at half price.
- Other problems faced by civilians included:
 - Shortages of food, clothing etc. There were bread riots in Richmond in 1863
 - Siege conditions (eg starvation, shelling in Vicksburg, where refugees lived in caves dug out of the hillside)
 - Communities dealing with occupation by Union soldiers
 - Displacement and refugee status
 - Emotional toll from loss of loved ones
 - Emotional impact of being cut off from loved ones
 - Women having to do without menfolk or enslaved servants
 - Women having to managing farms/ plantations/ their workforce
 - Women involved in nursing and aiding the war effort
 - Hundreds of women disguised themselves and joined up as soldiers; others served as spies
 - Men unable to fight faced social pressure/ some were sent petticoats
 - Free Blacks faced heightened racial violence and suspicion.
- Especial hardship faced soldiers' wives: a Confederate soldier earned \$11 a month; by 1864 a chicken cost \$15 = letters begging their husbands to come home/ 10% of the Confederate Army deserted.

Civil War: Results

- Congress became stronger; the President and the States lost power.
- Civil Rights for Black Americans
- 13th Amendment (1865) ended slavery/ 14th Amendment (Civil Rights Act) guaranteed citizenship/ 15th Amendment granted African American men the right to vote
- Overruling President Johnson, the Reconstruction Act (1867) appointed military governors with Union troops to rule in the southern states until they had rewritten their constitution.
- **Reconstruction successes**
 - 80% of Black males registered to vote.
 - In 1870 Hiram Revels became the first Black Senator; Joseph Rainey the first of seven Black Congressmen. 2,000 formerly enslaved Black Americans served at every level of government.
 - Black families, divided by sale, were re-united/ thousands of Black Americans married.
 - Freedmen's Bureau: provided food, clothing, shelter, medical facilities, schools and teachers.
 - More than 1,000 Black Schools and hundreds of Churches were built.
 - Reconstruction administrations in the southern states built public schools, strengthened labourers' rights, and outlawed racial discrimination in public transportation.
- **Compromise of 1877: failure of Reconstruction**
 - Northerners were hated as 'Carpetbaggers' (because they carried their possessions in a cheap bag made from carpet), as were 'Scallawags' (southerners who supported the Union).
 - There were complaints (some justified) about corruption & speculation.
 - Beatings, lynchings, assassinations – against Black people and white Republican officials by the KKK, White League and the Red Shirts.
 - In 1872 the government stopped funding the Freedmen's Bureau after criticism and a wave of violence towards Bureau schools and teachers.
 - The Democrats took advantage of a disputed Presidential election to make the Compromise of 1877, which secured the withdrawal of federal troops and gave 'Redeemer Democrats' political licence in the South.

Economic & Social Results in the South [ESMIE]

- **Economic ruin:** The Cotton Industry was damaged/ plantation-owners ruined (= changed to sharecropping)/ Confederate bonds worthless/ White incomes fell by 40%/ sharecroppers trapped by debt.
- **Segregation:** Jim Crow laws overrode the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments; Segregation was legally upheld by the Plessy v Ferguson (1896).
- **Motherhood & apple pie:** After the war, a conservative ideal of the 'Southern Belle' reemerged, emphasizing motherhood, family honour, subservience to her husband.
- **Identity:** The 'Lost Cause' cultural movement romanticized the war and created hatred and a sense of victimhood among white Southerners.
- **Education:** To keep Black Americans illiterate (and unable to vote) Black schools were underfunded, overcrowded and second rate. Power consolidated on a white elite, which maintained racial inequalities.

Slavery

- 3.5 million people in the USA in 1860 were enslaved Black people. Not all Black people in the South were enslaved; some 400,000 'free Blacks'
- Three quarters of Southerners did not hold any enslaved people. Only 3% of southerners (the 'slavocracy') owned more than 20.
- Cash crops produced by enslaved labour (especially cotton) were vital for the South & one-eighth of US GDP.
- Slavery was the cornerstone of white society and supremacy in the South and an essential element of the South's antebellum identity.
- With the growth of the abolition movement in the North, slavery became a political controversy and a major cause of the Civil War

The Experience of Slavery

- In the 25% of homes with enslaved people, they did the work – men on the farm/plantation, women as maids.
- Not all slave-holders were cruel, but enslaved people had no redress for punishment, violence, sexual exploitation or sale.
- No civil rights – could not strike a white person; make contracts, buy or sell goods; own a gun; leave the plantation without permission.
- The health of enslaved people was poor. On rice plantations, malaria was rampant and child mortality was generally around 66%
- White paranoia about slave rebellion resulted in vigilante militias. The killing of a slave was not murder, and the rape of an enslaved women was treated as trespass.

Black Americans during the Civil War

- 'Contrabands': 1-in-7 enslaved people ran away to the Union Army: put in camps with 25% mortality and commandeered to do non-fighting tasks. Freedmen and Missionary Societies brought some relief.
- Freedmen's Bureau created 1865: gave freed enslaved people the right to lease 40 acres of confiscated land, with an option to buy it after 3 years. Provided aid to the destitute. Set up schools.
- USCT (United States Colored Troops): First Black regiment: South Carolina Volunteers (1862). Lincoln allowed enlistment in 1863. 180,000 served ... but segregated, lower pay, white officers, and given non-combat duties (Fort Wagner an exception). Captured Black Union soldiers were shot as runaways.
- The Confederate Army also used Black people as labourers, and in 1865 enlisted some Black soldiers.
- Some progress on Civil Rights: 13th Amendment/ Segregation on public transport and 'Black laws' abolished in the North/ John Rock was the first Black lawyer to act before the Supreme Court (but Northern attitudes remained racist – eg New York Draft Riots/ discrimination in housing & jobs)

Black Americans after Reconstruction [HER LEFT]

- **Historiography:** Until the 1960s, the 'Dunningite' school of historians saw Reconstruction as an oppression of the South/ the 1960s saw it as introducing significant legal freedoms which provided the basis for the 1950s/'60s Civil Rights Movement/ modern historians see it as a well-intentioned failure.
- **Equality?** Jim Crow, segregation, restriction of movement, second rate schools.
- **Rights?** *United States v. Cruikshank* (1876) negated the 14th Amendment/ *Plessy v Ferguson* (1896) declared segregation legal (though nb Black Churches)
- **Land?** The 1877 Compromise restored the former slaveocracy to their lands and federal soldiers displaced freed Black people who had been given plots (though nb Exodusters & cowboys)
- **Education?** Freedman's Bureau funding ended 1870 (though States were required to provide public schools).
- **Freedom?** 13th, 14th & 15th Amendments overridden by poll taxes, property requirements and literacy tests/ sharecroppers became debt-obliged to the landowners (though nb the right to have a family)
- **Terror!** When the troops were withdrawn in 1877, white supremacist groups terrorized Black communities.