

American History

SOURCE DISCUSSION

No source is objective or neutral as it has been influenced by a particular point of view to at least some degree. Often secondary sources are conveyed in a less biased tone, although they may still have an agenda (hence why textbooks disagree).

⇒ To mitigate source bias, consult a variety of sources (both primary & secondary)

Civil War

CATALYSTS OF THE CIVIL WAR

CULTURAL DIVIDE BETWEEN THE NORTH & SOUTH

Slavery was largely obsolete in the industrial North, whereas the South was largely agrarian based upon slave labour (most notably cotton – most valuable commodity of the South)

⇒ Others in the South who did not own slaves (were poor) also wished to maintain slave labour because it gave them a higher social standing)

N.B. Those who championed ‘free soil’ in the North were not necessarily opposed to slavery because they believed in racial egalitarianism but rather because they believed slavery undercut such democratic ideals as the right to own property & one’s own labour, ultimately so as to achieve social & economic mobility

⇒ Although Northern states did have a contingent of *Abolitionists* (opposed slavery as cruel & immoral), many of which were Christians whose devout beliefs formed their opposition against slavery (although there were also many devout Christians in the south to which a similar belief was not held)

⇒ Abolitionists were political influential in areas of the North (largely New England)

State’s Rights

WESTWARD TERRITORIAL EXPANSION

Tensions accumulated over whether westward territories newly expanded into would be with or without slavery

⇒ Determined status would have the ability to shift balance of power in the US between the North & South

In the 1850s settlers migrated to Kansas from neighbouring state Missouri (slave-state) and slave-free states from the North which led to such conflict that Kansas became known as ‘Bleeding Kansas’

⇒ Creation of Kansas as both a state & slave free in 1861 led the Southerners to feel increasingly outnumbered

ELECTION OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN (1860)

Lincoln was a ‘free-soiler/labourer’ advocate & believed slavery would eventually cease as long as it did not expand to new territories (although was not necessarily an abolitionist)

Lincoln was a member of the Republican party (relatively new) formed in the idea that slavery should not be expanded into new states/territories

⇒ This led many southern whites to feel threatened by Lincoln

PROGRESSION OF THE CIVIL WAR

After both Lincoln’s election & the declaration of Kansas as a free state, Southern whites planned to secede (break away) from the Union (synonymous with federal govt.)

In **December 1860** (month after Lincoln’s election), **South Carolina was the first state to secede** having a domino effect with six southern states quickly following

⇒ By February 1861, seven seceded states formed confederate states of America (Confederacy) which was eventually formed by 11 states

In **April 1861, civil war officially begun** when the Confederate’s fired on a federal garrison in South Carolina’s federal garrison, lasting four years ending April 1865

THE UNION

Consisted of the federal government, most Northern states & many 'border states'

Led by Abraham Lincoln

Commanded by general Ulysses S Grant (became president in 1869)

⇒ Two other generals before Grant but weren't effective

Advantages:

- Material advantage: Greater industrial capacity with facilities including factories, railroads & transportation networks
- Greater funding capacity to spend on war (govt. & industrial aspect)
- Greater population size

However, did not have the same near-universal support of the Union cause that the South did with many believing slavery should exist and not wanting to be drafted for a cause they didn't agree with (particularly apparent among migrants) which led to some resentment in the North

⇒ Led to NYC draft riots in 1863

NYC Draft Riots: (July 1863)

- Instigators were Irish immigrants and poor individuals who could not afford to pay someone else to fight for them (\$300) which led them to resent richer men etc.
- Rioters acted on this resentment, scapegoating free African Americans in NYC
- Mobs attacked every black person they saw on the street & destroyed homes of African Americans'/Abolitionists as well as Abolitionist Churches, an armoury building & an orphanage for African American children was burnt
- 119 people killed over 3 days of riot

Riots reveal how fractured North was over the Union cause

CONFEDERACY

Consisted of seceding Southern states

Led by Jefferson Davis (politician from Mississippi)

Commanded by general Robert E. Lee

⇒ Both Grant & Lee graduated from WestPoint military academy

Advantages:

- Had greater knowledge of the South (area where much fighting took place)
- Had majority of its white population supporting southern cause – even those who did not own slaves (near-universal support)

1863, was a turning point with **key Union victories** including:

- The Battle of Gettysburg (July 1st 1863 – July 3rd 1863): 51 000 people killed with Confederates eventually retreating

Material advantages of Union were so great that the advantages of the South were eventually overcome

By early **1865** the Union had worn down the Confederates & destroyed much of their supply lines (owing mainly to their material advantages)

⇒ War officially ended in April after Lee surrendered to Grant in a small town in Virginia

FURTHER DETAILS

Average soldier description:

- Age: 26 years
- Height: 173cm
- Weight: 65kg

Most soldiers were white although there were a significant number of African American soldiers fighting on the North side (although they were paid 1/3 less than white soldiers and were racially segregated)

There was a very small percentage of African American soldiers (<1% of total army) in the Confederacy – (were prohibited from fighting in the Confederate states until a month before the war ended)

Women also contributed by serving as nurses & filled positions vacated by men during war time (including labouring on farms, teaching, salesclerks etc.)

SIGNIFICANCE OF CIVIL WAR

Determined the future of the US (whether it would remain united)

War was significant because it affected almost all Americans personally

- ⇒ 620 000 soldier casualties (as opposed to 405 399 in WWII and current wars with enlistment & fought on foreign soil) – new census data suggests 750 000 actually died
- ⇒ 1/4 of all soldiers perished

The invention of more deadly weapons (Winchester, repeating rifle, more powerful canons/artillery etc.) increased casualties in addition to widespread diseases

- ⇒ Medicine/medical procedures on battlefield were not optimal & many of the soldiers that survived had lost one or more of their limbs

WAS THE WAR ABOUT SLAVERY?

In his second inaugural address, Abraham Lincoln claimed “1/8 of the population were coloured slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localised in the southern part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar & powerful interest. All knew that this interest was somehow the cause of the war” (1865)

- ⇒ Conveys general view that slavery was a significant cause of the war, some suggest it was in Lincoln’s interest to pursue slavery as the cause so as for the North to take a moral high-ground – however many academics agree that the war was ultimately fought over the issue of slavery

Succession documents of the southern states clearly stated they were aiming to protect their right for slavery (vote for succession overwhelming majority in Southern states)

Although there are some challenges to this view:

- Lincoln was foremost concerned with preserving the Union

- ⇒ In 1862, Lincoln stated “If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it”

However, one of the core cultural differences between the North & the South (threatening the strength of the union) was the issue of slavery:

- ⇒ “A house divided against itself cannot stand...I believe this govt. cannot endure permanently half slave half freedom” (Lincoln)

1863 (January 1st) Lincoln released the **Emancipation Proclamation** which freed all slaves in the Confederacy (but not technically in the Northern or border states)

- ⇒ Established that the war was being fought to preserve the union and eliminate slavery

In **1865 slavery was abolished** by the 13th Amendment to the US Constitution– repudiated govt. recognition of slavery so that it could no longer exist in the US

- ⇒ “all persons held as slaves shall be forever free”

LEGACY OF CIVIL WAR

NOTION OF STATES RIGHTS

Afterwards, the notion of ‘state’s rights’ became a more salient phrase & was discussed when expressing their opposition to the federal govt. directives particularly on issues related to race

- ⇒ Advocates of states rights frequently cite the 10th Amendment to the US Constitution to affirm their position

During the late 20th century state’s rights were also a way for politician’s to gesture towards race without directly invoking it as after the late 20th C they could not make explicit racial appeals & so had to make coded appeals (such as state’s rights) to signal their stance on racial issues

- ⇒ Invoking of such state rights & antipathy towards federal legislation promoting racial equality echoed civil war
- ⇒ (white south used state’s rights to express their opposition to what they saw as overreach by the federal govt.)

ENDURANCE OF CONFEDERATE BATTLE SYMBOLS

There has been a contingent of Southern whites since the civil war who have continued use of the Confederate flag – defenders maintain that the flag is not racist (conserves/preserves their ancestral heritage)

⇒ KKK & other white supremacist groups have also adopted the flag

⇒ A polarising symbol in the South & continued existence suggests unresolved cultural tensions

In June 2015 9 African Americans were shot in a historic African American Church with photos of the shooter posing with the flag surfacing on the internet – led to discussions over whether the flag should still be tolerated and called for removal of flag from state grounds

2014 California passed a ban on stores selling flag