

American Civilization



*American Civilization: Civil
War*

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I American Civil War

The Civil War is the central event in America's historical consciousness. While the Revolution of 1776-1783 created the United States, the Civil War of 1861-1865 determined what kind of nation it would be. The war resolved two fundamental questions left unresolved by the revolution: whether the United States was to be a dissolvable confederation of sovereign states or an indivisible nation with a sovereign national government; and whether this nation, born of a declaration that all men were created with an equal right to liberty, would continue to exist as the largest slaveholding country in the world.

1. Causes of Conflict

- The sectional strife between the South and the North.
- The emergence of the Republican party.
- Rights of States.
- Westward expansion.

2. Prelude for the Conflict

The Civil War started because of uncompromising differences between the free and slave states over the power of the national government to prohibit slavery in the territories that had not yet become states as illustrated below

See "Sectional Dispute"

3. The Outbreak of the War

Though Abraham Lincoln's victory in the election of 1860 as the first Republican president, on a platform pledging to keep slavery out of the territories, caused seven slave states in the deep South to secede and form a new nation, the Confederate States of America. The event that triggered war came at Fort Sumter in Charleston Bay on April 12, 1861. Claiming this United States fort as their own, the Confederate army on that day opened fire on the federal garrison and forced it to lower the American flag in surrender. Lincoln called out the militia to suppress this "insurrection." Four more slave states seceded and joined the Confederacy. By the end of 1861 nearly a million armed men confronted each other along a line stretching 1200 miles from Virginia to Missouri. Several battles had already taken place--near Manassas Junction in Virginia, in the mountains of western Virginia where Union victories paved the way for creation of the new state of West Virginia, at Wilson's Creek in Missouri, at Cape Hatteras in North Carolina, and at Port Royal in South Carolina where the Union navy established a base for a blockade to shut off the Confederacy's access to the outside world.

4. The Armed Confrontation

The real fighting began in 1862. Huge battles like Shiloh in Tennessee, Gaines' Mill, Second Manassas, and Fredericksburg in Virginia, and Antietam in Maryland foreshadowed even bigger campaigns and battles in subsequent years, from Gettysburg in Pennsylvania to Vicksburg on the Mississippi to Chickamauga and Atlanta in Georgia. By 1864 the original Northern goal of a limited war to restore the Union had given way to a new strategy of "total war" to destroy the Old South and its basic institution of slavery and to give the restored Union a "new birth of freedom," as President Lincoln put it in his address at Gettysburg to dedicate a cemetery for Union soldiers killed in the battle there.

For three long years, from 1862 to 1865, Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia staved off invasions and attacks by the Union Army of the Potomac commanded by a series of ineffective generals until Ulysses S. Grant came to Virginia from the Western theater to become general in chief of all Union armies in 1864. After bloody battles at places with names like The Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor, and Petersburg, Grant finally brought Lee to bay at Appomattox in April 1865. In the meantime Union armies and river fleets in the theater of war comprising the slave states west of the Appalachian Mountain chain won a long series of victories over Confederate armies commanded by hapless or unlucky Confederate generals. In 1864-1865 General William Tecumseh Sherman led his army deep into the Confederate heartland of Georgia and South Carolina, destroying their economic infrastructure while General George Thomas virtually destroyed the Confederacy's Army of Tennessee at the battle of Nashville.

Reminder

Keep in mind that the Emancipation Proclamation turned the course of the war in favor of the Union

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By the spring of 1865 all the principal Confederate armies surrendered, and when Union cavalry captured the fleeing Confederate President Jefferson Davis in Georgia on May 10, 1865, resistance collapsed and the war ended. The long, painful process of rebuilding a united nation free of slavery began. Northern victory in the war preserved the United States as one nation and ended the institution of slavery that had divided the country from its beginning. But these achievements came at the cost of 625,000 lives--nearly as many American soldiers as died in all the other wars in which this country has fought combined. The American Civil War was the largest and most destructive conflict in the Western world between the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 and the onset of World War I in 1914.

II Practice

Objectives

1. assessing learning outcomes,
2. providing students with prompt feedback.

Double check the "Prelude for the Conflict" section (i.e. audiovisual support) and complete the following activities

Exercise : Choose the correct answer

"Bleeding Kansas" was a direct result of the doctrine of:

- judicial review
- imperialism
- containment
- popular sovereignty

Exercise : Choose the correct answer

As a result of the Emancipation Proclamation,

- all enslaved people in the Union and the Confederacy were declared free
- nearly 200,000 free Blacks and escaped enslaved people joined the Union Army
- Maryland seceded from the Union
- African Americans in the United States received the right to vote

Exercise : Choose the correct answer

The principle of popular sovereignty stated that

whenever a new area was settled, all United States citizens were required to vote on the slave status of that area

slavery would not be permitted in any area after 1848

the president, after meeting with public interest groups, was to decide on whether enslaved people would be allowed in a given territory

settlers in the Western territories, not Congress, would decide whether to allow slavery in their territories

Exercice : Choose the correct answer

The Compromise of 1850 resulted in all of the following EXCEPT:

the admission of California as a free state

a policy of letting newly admitted states decide their status on slavery

the establishment of a stricter law for the recovery of escaped enslaved people in free states or territories

a direct repeal of the Missouri compromise

Exercice : Choose the correct answer

The Missouri Compromise showed that the issue of slavery

was easily dealt with in the political process

would remain divisive for the foreseeable future

was essentially divided along the lines of "rich" versus "poor"

could never be solved

III Quiz:

For Reflection

Since the American civil war was about preserving the USA rather than abolishing slavery, how would you explain its contribution in ending the southern institution of slavery in America ?