

CONFEDERATE MONUMENTS: LESSON 2: HANDOUT 1**THE U.S. CIVIL WAR AND THE ISSUE OF SLAVERY**

In November 1860, Republican candidate Abraham Lincoln was elected president of the United States on a platform committed to stopping the westward expansion of slavery. In response, between December 1860 and June 1861, eleven southern states seceded and formed the Confederacy. The northern states remained loyal to the Union, and four other southern states (Missouri, Maryland, Kentucky, and Delaware) did, as well. Over the next four years, from 1861 to 1865, the Union and the Confederacy waged the deadliest war ever fought on American soil. Although many issues influenced the crisis, the primary cause of the Civil War was the institution of slavery.

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Before the War

The first slaves arrived in the American colonies in 1619, and by the time of the American Revolution, slavery existed in all thirteen colonies.¹ The southern states, however, had significantly more slaves. In the 1760s, slaves made up about 2 percent of Massachusetts' population, while they made up about 60 percent of South Carolina's population.² After the American Revolution, the northern states gradually abolished slavery. In the southern states, however, slavery thrived and expanded. Between 1790 and 1860, the number of slaves in the United States grew from 700,000 to nearly 4,000,000.³

Slavery was a source of tension between the northern and southern states, and the American Constitution contains several compromises over the issue. The Fugitive Slave Clause required states to return runaway slaves to their owners. The Constitution gave the federal government the power to put down slave rebellions, and it prohibited Congress from outlawing the Atlantic slave trade for the next twenty years. The Enumeration Clause, furthermore, determined the number of Congressional representatives each state would receive by counting all free people and "three fifths of all other persons." The Constitution therefore treated each slave as only 3/5th of a person.⁴

Many northerners were mildly opposed to slavery, and they wanted to stop it from spreading into the country's western territories. Trade and manufacturing played a large role in the northern economy, and most northern farms were small and family-run. The northern economy, therefore, did not depend on field workers in the way that the South's did. Even so, most northerners opposed the abolition movement and did not think the federal government could—or should—interfere with slavery in the South. They believed each state

¹ James Horn, *1619: Jamestown and the Forging of American Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 2018).

² "Massachusetts Constitution and the Abolition of Slavery," Massachusetts Court System, <http://www.mass.gov/guides/massachusetts-constitution-and-the-abolition-of-slavery>; Robert L. Einhorn, *American Taxation, American Slavery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 94.

³ "Africans in America," Immigration and Relocation in U.S. History, Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/immigration/african/africans-in-america>.

⁴ Steven Mintz, "Historical Context: The Constitution and Slavery," The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, <http://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/teaching-resource/historical-context-constitution-and-slavery>.

had the right to decide whether or not to own slaves, and they feared that the abolition movement would only increase tensions between the North and the South. In 1840, for example, the Liberty Party (which wanted to abolish slavery immediately) received only 7,000 votes nation-wide.⁵ Racism was widespread throughout the country, and even northerners who were opposed to slavery still thought Black people were inferior to White people. In the 1850s, Indiana and Illinois banned African-Americans from entering their states, and Republican Party leaders like Abraham Lincoln hoped to keep the western territories “open for the homes of free white people.”⁶

In contrast, the South was an **agrarian society**. Southerners grew crops like cotton and sugar on a massive scale, and slavery was central to their economy. In 1860, for example, 49 percent of families in Mississippi owned slaves, and South Carolina was close behind, at 46 percent.⁷ Slaveowners forced their slaves to work in the fields, planting and harvesting crops, and this free labor helped many slaveowners become rich. Even poor Whites who did not own slaves had a stake in maintaining the institution of slavery. They still believed that Black people were inferior, and they worried that, if slavery ended, they would have to compete with Black people. They feared that the loss of slavery would destroy the southern economy and lead to racial warfare between Blacks and Whites.⁸

Enslaved people, meanwhile, fought back against slavery. Denmark Vesey planned a slave rebellion in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1822, and Nat Turner led a four-day rebellion in Virginia in 1831. Countless others resisted slavery by running away, breaking tools, or slowing down their work. Slaveholders responded by passing harsher laws across the South, denying Black people equal rights and education. Virginia, for example, made it illegal to teach slaves to read or write.

The presidential election of 1860 changed everything. America was expanding westward, and many people wondered if slavery would be allowed in the country’s new territories. The Republican Party, made up mostly of Northerners, wanted to ban slavery from the new territories. The Democratic Party, however, believed that new states should decide whether or not they wished to have slavery. The Democrats feared that banning slavery from the territories would lead to the **abolition** of slavery in every state. Everyone was anxious to see which party would triumph. In the end, Republican candidate Abraham Lincoln won the election, winning every Northern state and none of the Southern states.

⁵ Bruce Levine, *Half Slave and Half Free: The Roots of the Civil War*, Revised Edition (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 184.

⁶ Jennifer R. Harbour, *Organizing Freedom: Black Emancipation Activism in the Civil War Midwest* (Carbondale, Illinois: South Illinois University Press, 2020), 38; Abraham Lincoln, “Peoria Speech, October 16, 1854,” Lincoln Home National Historic Site, National Park Service, <http://www.nps.gov/liho/learn/historyculture/peoriaspeech.htm>.

⁷ “Ratio of Slaveholders to Families, (1860), Nineteenth Century Documents Project, Furman University, <http://www.history.furman.edu/~benson/docs/shf60.htm>.

⁸ Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 38.

Lincoln's election angered the Southern states. Before he was inaugurated, seven states decided to **secede** from the United States to form the Confederate States of America. South Carolina was the first state to secede, with Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas following shortly after. Lincoln, like many northerners, believed secession was unconstitutional, and he feared that it would destroy America's democratic government. If a state could secede any time it disagreed with the outcome of an election, he argued, then the country—and its democracy—would not survive.⁹ As he explained in the Gettysburg Address, the crisis was a test of "whether that nation [America], or any nation so conceived and so dedicated [to democracy], can long endure."¹⁰ Confederate leaders hoped to secede peacefully and co-exist with the Union, but they underestimated Lincoln's determination to hold the Union together.

During the War

The Civil War began at Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861. Fort Sumter, located in South Carolina, was a **sea fort** maintained by the United States Army. Confederate forces in South Carolina demanded that Fort Sumter surrender to South Carolina. When their demands were not met, they attacked Fort Sumter. The Confederates outnumbered and overpowered the Union soldiers. The battle **galvanized** people on both sides. President Lincoln called for the enlistment of 75,000 men to strengthen Union forces. Meanwhile, four other states joined the Confederacy (Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee). The war was now in full force.

While slavery was the primary cause of the Civil War, there were other issues at play that lead to the battles between states. Honor was a huge part of Southern culture. Many of the poor White southerners who were either **conscripted** or who chose to fight in the war did not personally benefit from slavery. However, many felt disrespected by the North's treatment of their culture and values. Also, many Southerners felt more allegiance to their respective state than their country. These factors motivated them to fight for the Confederacy even if they did not completely agree with or benefit from slavery.

Many Northerners, on the other hand, wanted mostly to **preserve** the Union. In Lincoln's words, they considered the Union the "last best hope of earth"—a beacon of political freedom and economic opportunity in a world dominated by kings and emperors.¹¹ For many, it did not matter if enslaved people were freed. In July 1861, Congress passed a resolution declaring that they were fighting to "defend and maintain the supremacy of the Constitution and to preserve the Union," and they had no intention of "interfering with the rights or established institutions [like slavery] of those [Southern] States."¹²

⁹ "Lincoln on Secession," Lincoln Home National Historic Site, National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/liho/learn/historyculture/secessiontableofcontents.htm#:~:text=The%20secessionists%20claimed%20that%20according,1>.

¹⁰ Abraham Lincoln, "The Gettysburg Address," Speeches and Writings, Abraham Lincoln Online, <http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/gettysburg.htm>.

¹¹ Abraham Lincoln, "Annual Message to Congress – Concluding Remarks," 1 December 1862, Speeches and Writings, Abraham Lincoln Online, <http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/congress.htm>.

¹² "Crittenden Resolution," Teaching American History, <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/crittenden-resolution/>.

Still, racism continued to be a main factor in White southerners' decision to fight in the war. Many poor White southerners strongly believed in the idea that White people were better than Black people. The majority of White Northerners also believed that White people were superior to Black people. Northerners were more concerned with keeping the country together than the rights and freedom of Black people.

For the next four years, the North and South battled each other. The battles were constant and vicious: *"The American Civil War was to prove one of the most ferocious wars ever fought."*¹³

On January 1, 1863, after two years of war, President Lincoln issued the **Emancipation Proclamation**. The Emancipation Proclamation abolished slavery only in the Confederate States. However, the Confederate states were not part of the Union, and they did not have to follow the Union's laws. If an enslaved person escaped from a Southern state and made it to the North, they were granted "free" status. Enslaved Black people in border states like Missouri were *not* freed. The Emancipation Proclamation now made freeing enslaved people a central goal of the Civil War. This really angered the Confederacy and confirmed their original fears that President Lincoln would try to free those who were enslaved. They hoped that this declaration would lead to more young men joining the fight against the Union but it did not.

In the beginning, young men on both sides were happy to fight. With time, this excitement died down and the North and South struggled to keep soldiers within their ranks. After a few years, war destroyed the South's economy due to Northern **blockades**. With time, the Confederacy could not withstand Union advancements. Union General William T. Sherman's armies caused major damage and destruction to Georgia. General Ulysses S. Grant's troops had taken control of Virginia, and the Confederacy at last surrendered. After four long years, the war was officially over on May 9, 1865.

After the War

The Thirteenth Amendment, ratified on December 6, 1865, abolished slavery throughout the United States. The Union victory brought the country back together, but all states experienced loss because of the war. Roughly 750,000 people died in the war.¹⁴ That amounted to eight percent of all White men aged 13 to 43: six percent in the North and eighteen percent in the South. It was by far the deadliest conflict in American history.

The Civil War left the South in shambles. The once-rich region experienced great poverty compared to the North and West United States. The South also lost much of the political power that had been tied to its plantation economy. This would later change with the

¹³ Adapted from John Keegan, *The American Civil War* (New York, NY: Vintage Civil War Library, Random House, 2010).

¹⁴ . David Hacker, "A Census-Based Count of the Civil War Dead," *Civil War History*, Vol, 57, No. 4, December 2011).

enactment of Black codes and Jim Crow laws. Despite the **unification** of states, there would be an invisible divide between the North and South that would continue for generations.