

## **American History: The Civil War and Reconstruction Periods**

While there may be many causes to the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, the main underlying reason for it was slavery. Prior to the Civil War, the United States of America was geographically divided into the North and the South. Such division is basically caused by slavery. The North have abolished slavery while the South have opted to retain it.

This disagreement on slavery has divided the nation and its political leaders.

Northern leaders have abolished slavery within their territories as early as 1787 while the Southern leaders have allowed slavery to occur in their territories. Thus, Northern leaders have been clamoring for the South to end slavery; however, Southern leaders have remained firm in its stand to retain slavery. The disagreement between North and South on the issue of slavery was further aggravated by the political concerns involving slavery such as the voting rights of the slaves.

During the Constitutional Convention, an argument on the voting rights of slaves erupted between the representatives of the North and the South. Northern states representatives argued that if Southern slaves are considered as mere property by their Southern masters then slaves should not be allowed to have a voting right. The Southern leaders rejected this argument. Hence, a compromise was made. Representatives from both the North and the South agreed on a three-fifths compromise where every five votes of Southern slaves will be equivalent to three free men votes. This compromise was included within the US Constitution at the time.

The three-fifth compromise soon became an issue of political power. Southern leaders felt that they are not well-represented in the nation's political affair. They felt that while there are more people in the South, they were only a few political representatives from that area because

of the three-fifth compromise. The Southern leaders felt that if a state no longer felt itself represented in the nation's political affair, then such states would have the right to disassociate or secede itself from the Federal Government.

Thus, began the political conflict that lead to the Civil War. When Abraham Lincoln was elected president in 1860 the long debate political issues such as relative powers of the federal government as opposed to the powers of the state government, and the abolition and retention of slavery reached its climax when known anti-slavery proponent. By the time of Lincoln's inauguration, seven Southern states seceded from the Union and formed the Confederate States of America: South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas. Another four Southern States soon followed: Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina. President Jefferson Davis led the Confederate States of America while President Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Army lead the United States of America (the Union). The Confederate States of America was led by President Jefferson Davis while the Union was led by President Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party who continues to opposed slavery and reject any right of secession.

The Civil War commenced on April 12, 1861 when Confederate forces attacked a federal military installation at Fort Sumter in South Carolina. For four years, the armed forces of the Confederate States of America and the United States of America (the Union) fought bloodily. The Union was preserved and the Confederate was dissolved.

While the Civil War has been bloody and claimed many lives and ruined the nation's economy, the historic event will forever be known as a momentous event in American history. Historians consider the Civil War as a story of great heroism and triumph. The Civil War was not only about the political power or leadership; it is more about fighting against slavery.

The conclusion of Civil War marked the beginning of the new era of the United States. The eleven Southern states which have seceded from the Union were admitted back. Union and Confederate leaders have agreed on the issues federal authority and state authority. The Civil War has resulted to the birth of the democratic federal government of the United States of America. It resulted into the unity of the member states and their respective leaders. It paved the way to the creation of a federal government that respects the political, social and economic uniqueness of its member states. In the same way, member states and their respective leaders accepted the governing authority of the federal government of the United States. While member states may exercise a certain degree of autonomy in administration and governance, their respective leaders knew and accepted the authority of the federal government over the state government.

Aside from creating a federal government that oversees the governance of its united member-states, the Civil War has also resulted into freedom of million of African-Americans. The end of Civil War did not only preserve the United States of America, Civil War has freed four million African American slaves, and has released America from the oppressive weight of slavery. The Civil War marked the ending of the conflict between the North and the South and the beginning of a democratic political system. More importantly, the Civil War gave hope to the millions of African American slaves.

The ending of the Civil War gave hope to the slaves from the South. The African Americans who used to be at the mercy of their wealthy masters having found themselves free and thus, they not only have their freedom but also their hope for equality. However, before the African Americans can attain their much hope equality America must reconstruct itself from the ravage of the Civil War. Thus, the reconstruction period begun.

By the end of the Civil War, the United America must work together to resolve the issues that caused the Civil War, foremost among them is the issue of slavery. From 1865 to 1877, the United America worked towards the integration of the African-American freedmen into America's political, economic, legal and social system. Thus, the U.S. Constitution was amended: the XIII amendment abolished slavery, the XIV extended federal legal protections to citizens regardless of race, and the XV abolished racial restriction on suffrage. Furthermore, the Civil Rights Acts of 1866 ensures freedom of the African-American Freedmen and as well as promotes the equality among African-Americans and the White Americans.

While freedom may have been easily given to the African-Americans, equality remained to be elusive. The opening of the Civil Rights Act states that all persons born in America are citizens of the United States, and such citizens of every race and color have the same right in every state. However, by 1877 the African-Americans' hope for equality was crushed as the Southern Whites gain back their power, consequently, disenfranchising the freed African-Americans.

While African-Americans were no longer considered slaves and they have the freedom to find a work they like and move to another state, the African-American Freedmen never had the chance the live equality with the White Americans. The growth of the fruits of the Civil War was impeded. While it is true that African-Americans had freedom to sign contracts, to sue, to give evidence, to inherit and to vote.

The problems of equality remained. The African-Americans who used to be wage slaves are now free to look for other jobs. However, they have to face many social issues particularly racial segregation. While the White Americans are receptive to the idea of abolishing slavery, they were not ready to welcome the African-Americans into their social fold. Thus, laws were

created to segregate the White Americans from the Black Americans. One of the infamous laws on racial segregation is the Jim Crow Laws. These laws while acknowledging and respecting the freedom granted by the Constitution to the African-Americans clearly draws a separation lines for the White Americans and the African-Americans.

The African-Americans can enforce contracts, inherits, sue, be parties, give evidence, purchase, lease, and sell real and personal properties; however, they cannot be in the same place as the White Americans. The Jim Crow Laws clearly states the separation of people according to their race or skin color. Southern legislators created Jim Crow laws to flaunt their superiority over the African-Americans Freedmen who used to be their slaves.

The Jim Crow Laws excluded African-American citizens from virtually all public accommodations such as hotels, libraries, theaters, public markets and swimming pools. This exclusion and segregation emphasized subordination and inferiority of African-American men and women to the White Americans. The Jim Crow laws are manifestations that the South is not ready to loose its slaves and treat them as an equal.

The passing of Jim Crow laws and other racially discriminating laws is an indication that Southern whites used a powerful combination of economic control, political domination, criminal justice administration, and mob violence to assert their supremacy. The social system they fastened upon the land defined privilege, citizenship, and freedom by one's whiteness. Indeed, the Jim Crows laws are obviously racially segregating and teeming with racial inequality.

While there are some African-Americans who opted to remain in South and work in the farm, some African-Americans have moved to the urban cities to look for jobs. During that time the Northern area was emerging as an industrialized region. This better working condition have

inspired many African-Americans migrate to the city, specifically in the Northern region to have the right to receive wage as determined by their work and by the law. Moreover, Northern workers have the freedom to choose the type of work to do. These rights to choose and to earn money have attracted scores of immigrants from within the United States and from Europe. Eventually, urban cities began to emerge from these industrialized areas.

Aside from living within the confines and mandates of the Jim Crow laws, the African-Americans had to compete with European immigrants for job opportunities. As Europeans belong to the White race which was considered as the superior race in America, the European immigrants had better access to work opportunities. Immigrants were easily absorbed into the socio-political strata of America. The African-Americans who because of their skin color and race remain wage slaves. Better socio-economic opportunities are granted to the immigrants and to White Americans. Thus, even the European immigrants had better lives than the freed African-Americans.

While the Civil War did mark the abolition of slavery in the United States, it failed to ensure racial equality. During the post-Civil-War era, the African-American slaves of the South were finally freed from the oppressive cycle of slavery. However, the African-Americans have to compete for acceptance within the social, economic and political system of the United States which is dominated by White Americans.

The Reconstruction period fell short of its promises to address the issues that have led to the Civil War. Even the Constitutional Amendments established during the early part of the Reconstruction era failed to live ensure racial equality. Freeing the millions of African-Americans from slavery may have been the greatest effect of the Civil War; however, the Civil War failed to address the issues of racial discrimination, racial segregation and racial inequality.

## References

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