

The American Civil War

The American Civil War, which began with the attack of the Fort Sumter on 12 April 1861 and climaxed with Confederates' complete defeat in April 1865, is considered to be one of the bloodiest battles in the history of the U.S. (Catton, 1984). During this time, at least six hundred thousand men lost their lives. Eleven Southern states who fought for the abolition of slave trade wanted to withdraw from the U.S. Under the leadership of Jefferson Davis, they established the Confederate States of America and engaged in battle with the Union. The opponents of the Confederacy received support from all the free states as well as the five border slave states. The Civil War literally divided the country into two halves; the large armies traversed enormous distances and fought with relentless determination.

During the 1860 presidential election, the Republican Party, which had been campaigning for the abolition of slave trade, won the elections. The victory of the Republican Party that was under the leadership of Abraham Lincoln made the Southern states of Mississippi, South Carolina, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas announce their secession from the United States even before President James Buchanan left office (Griess, 2002). However, both the outgoing and the incoming presidents questioned legitimacy of the secession considering it to be a form of revolution.

After years of disagreements that existed between the North and the South, the battle began at Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861. The Confederate forces under the command of Robert E. Lee were the first to attack the Union's forces. In turn, Lincoln responded by commanding every state to provide the volunteer military forces.

However, this move worsened the situation, as four other Southern states announced their secession intentions. As two factions strengthened their military power, the North united the border states in the beginning of the battle, and they built a naval blockade. On September 22, 1862, the Lincoln administration made the first Emancipation Proclamation: it made abolition of slavery in the Southern states a major objective of the Civil War and deterred the intervention of the European nations.

The Southern forces were mainly successful in the East. However, as the War continued, they were defeated at the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863, which made their advance to the north unrealistic. In the West, the Northern forces took charge of the Mississippi River after they captured Vicksburg, Mississippi. The Confederate forces were then divided into two different units. Since the Union forces were more numerous and better equipped with resources, they managed to defeat the Confederates several times. For example, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, the General-in-Chief of the Union forces, won the battles of attrition against the Confederacy. Furthermore, the Union forces under the command of Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman took control of the city of Atlanta, Georgia on November 15, 1864 and marched to the sea before the year ended. The bloody Civil War ended when the confederacy conceded their defeat to the Union on the historic day of April 9, 1865.

It is possible to list at least five causes that led to the beginning of the Civil War: these are the long-term economic and social differences that existed between the North and the South, opposition of states and federal rights, the battle that existed between slave and non-slave proponents, growth of the abolition movement, and the election of Abraham Lincoln as the sixteenth President of the U.S. (Stamp, 1991). The American

Civil War is considered one of the earliest true industrial battles: both massive armies made use of railroads, steamships and other dangerous weapons when fighting against their enemies. The forces endorsed total war practices, which foreshadowed the First World War in Europe. This war led to the loss of many soldiers and civilian citizens – almost each American lost either a relative or a friend during the War. It is calculated that the Union lost ten percent of all males aged between twenty to forty-five years. On the other hand, the Confederacy lost nearly thirty percent of all males aged between eighteen to forty years (Griess, 2002).

The Civil War was devastating; however, unexpectedly, it had its positive outcome that can be noticed in our days as well. After the War, the opposing states grew closer together, and the United States of America became truly united. Most importantly, the opposition of views on slavery that the North and the South held since the enactment of the Constitution in 1787 was resolved after the War. The confrontation finished with abolition of slave trade in the U.S. Since the Union assumed victory in the War, it led to the preservation of the territorial integrity of the nation and reinforcement of the responsibility of the federal government. The differences that led to the War decisively shaped the reconstruction period that took place up to 1877.

Reference List

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