

# The War Between the States—A Civil War

One of the best examples of the impact that the Industrial Revolution had on societies can be seen in a war that took place between the Northern and Southern States of America. The American Civil War does not have any major impact on world history, but it is perhaps one of the best examples of the clashes of agrarian society and industrial societies, especially in what both societies typically require from their government.

## Slavery

In the 1800's, the Southern States of America were primarily agrarian, which meant that their society was based on agriculture. The Southern States were also some of the last places in Western Civilization that continued to allow slavery. The British had outlawed the Atlantic Slave Trade years earlier, and the American states had followed suit, making it illegal to buy slaves from Africa or other parts of the world and import them into America. However, due to continued pressure from the Southern States, laws were passed that allowed slavery to continue to be legal in the United States as long as they were already in America.

The slaves in the south were the driving engine of their entire economy. As the Northern states continued to industrialize, the entire institution of slavery came into question in the United States. Since the population of each state determines how many votes each state gets in the House of Representatives, Southern states argued that slaves should count as a person, while Northern states argued they should not. The two opposing groups comprised and began to count each slave as 3/5ths of a person. Decisions about whether an escaped slave in a state where slavery is outlawed should be considered free, or stolen property also began to fill up federal courts. Additionally, as new states joined the Union, Northern and Southern States argued about whether these states would allow slavery or not. Southern States insisted that every time a state where slavery was illegal joined the United States, that a state allowing slavery also be allowed to join, maintaining a 50/50 split in the Senate. Some Northerners, known as abolitionists, began to push for slavery to be outlawed by the United States government, which threatened to collapse the Southern economy. While this is seen as the primary issue which caused the American Civil War, it was more of a symptom of a much larger issue, known as *States' Rights*. It is probably most accurate to say that for the Southern states, the war was about the right to own slaves, while for the Northern States, the war was not about slavery at all, but rather the idea that the federal government's power should be higher than each individual state's power.

## The United States

It is said every time we give the full title of the United States of America, but often we take for granted that our country is actually a group of 50 different governments, which all work together, and have given up certain powers, in order to ensure that they are able to work together to be even stronger. Each state government gives up the right to make certain laws to the federal (or United States) government. Obviously, there are and always will be issues that come up that are good for most, but not all of the individual states. It is in these states' rights that one can come to appreciate the different needs that an agrarian society has compared to an industrialized one.

While the North was industrializing, there was no way that they could produce goods as cheaply as Great Britain. By the 1850's, Britain was well into their industrial revolution, while the North was just beginning. This meant that it was cheaper for Southern States to buy their goods from England. The Northern States began to pass taxes, known as protectionist tariffs to artificially make British goods more expensive than Northern goods. For example, a railroad tie might cost a factory in New York \$30 to make, but a factory in England only \$20. The Northern States would then pass a law which charged an extra \$15 tariff on all imported railroad ties. This law was obviously good for the Northern states, because it allowed their factories to be competitive, but it was also obviously bad for Southern states, who could have purchased the tie cheaper from England.

Aside from laws which protected their ownership of slaves, Southern States were normally in favor of as few laws as possible being passed by the United States government. They wanted each state to be able to make its own laws. On the other hand, the North wanted the United States government to have as much power as



possible, in order to make laws that protected and encouraged economic growth among their states, and continued to encourage the industrial revolution in America. In many cases, these laws were a disadvantage to the agrarian South.

## Civil War

By 1860, the debate over how much power the federal government should have boiled over to the point that the Southern states decided to secede from the United States and start their own country, called the



Confederate States of America. They saw this as a natural right, since they had voluntarily joined the United States of America, they could just as easily un-unite themselves. This was exactly the line of thinking that came from John Locke's social contract during the revolt against Great Britain 80 years earlier. In their new constitution, the Confederacy made sure to write that slavery was legal, so that any state wishing to join their new country would have to accept slavery.

The Northern States, calling themselves the Union, could not afford for the Southern States to leave. The tariffs meant to force Southern States to buy Northern goods no longer existed, meaning that Northern factories lost many of their customers. The Northern states then set about to bringing the rebel states back into the Union, by force if necessary. This led to a prolonged war between two groups of states, known today as the American Civil War.

Ironically, the nature of each society would again play a defining role in this conflict. The agrarian Confederacy lacked factories needed to mass-produce cannons, guns, uniforms, and ammunition. Since agrarian societies also don't need a strong infrastructure with extensive railroad networks, they also had difficulty moving supplies to where they were needed. The North, on the other hand, had a much larger population and industrial output. Despite these advantages, it would take 4 more years of fighting before the Confederacy would surrender, and the states would all re-join the United States.

### The United States of America: Industrialized

With an agrarian society dependent on slavery no longer an option in the South, they had no option but to begin to use industrialized methods of farming. With Northern states dictating policy and laws in the United States, protectionist tariffs enabled American industry to continue to develop. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in less than 35



*The industrial output of Northern Factories were a major factor in the Union's eventual victory during the American Civil War.*

#### Reading Comprehension Questions

1. What was the major factor that made the Northern and Southern economies so different prior to the Civil War?
2. How was an industrialized economy an advantage in warfare?
3. Since the Civil War ended slavery, why didn't every American get to experience their rights?

Write about it.

Explain how mass production would change how armies fight in war.

years and despite having fought the most devastating war in its history, America was fully industrialized and prepared to assume a much larger significance in world events.

The most enduring result of the American Civil War was the immediate end to slavery in America. Unfortunately, since for most Northerners slavery was not the primary motivation for the Civil War, providing equal rights to all Americans regardless of color was not a high priority. Most Northerners were more concerned with punishing the Southern states for the Civil War than trying to fix the racial prejudices and inequities created by slavery. It would be another century before the civil rights granted to former slaves by the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment would actually be experienced by people of all races in America.