

## The Civil War's Impact on America

The Civil War affected many aspects of American society both immediately and in the long term. Instantly, it affected the South economically and with the formation of racial segregation, but the effects of the war would nevertheless also lead to events nearly a hundred years later, most notably, the Civil Rights Movement. The war, which was fought from 1861 and lasting until 1865, was started when eleven states separated from the United States after feeling threatened that their way of life with slaves would be destroyed. It eventually led to the Emancipation Proclamation, the liberation of slaves in areas occupied by the Union, stating that “all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, ..., shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free” (Lincoln 157). These words would change America forever.

Straightaway, the results of the Civil War had many impacts on the South leading to a new era of discrimination against African Americans (“Civil War and Reconstruction”). After the abolition of slavery, the South’s economic structure was forced to change. The South had relied heavily on their highly lucrative cotton industry, which had been successful mainly because the slaves were not paid, so with no more slaves, the plantation systems were taken away and the land hacked into smaller plots (“American Civil War”). Former slaves now had the ability to attain land which greatly angered the whites, and so it was made impossible by establishing state laws which slyly defied the federal ones (“Civil War Draws to a Close”). The economic changes caused the relationship between African Americans and whites in the South to change drastically. Before, it had been full-control for whites, with slaves to succumb to them completely. Solomon Northup, a former slave, documented that he never got sleep on

account of how late he had to work and how early he had to rise so as to meet the needs of his owner. Many whites in the South struggled with accepting African Americans as equal after the end of slavery. As a result, they were ashamed to be seen as friends with them (Eddlem). For example, Henry O. Flipper, a black cadet from the South, described how a white classmate was friendly with him in order to borrow his textbooks, but did not want to be associated with an African American, so he scratched out Henry's name on the book. This affected Henry quite deeply. The social troubles in the South led to the structure of Southern society to be adjusted. White southerners resisted the new Reconstruction laws regarding the the status of African Americans, and they were convinced, especially after their defeat, that they must maintain their white supremacy (Sonneborn). This led to the formation of Black Codes, also called Jim Crow laws, to suppress African American freedom, and prevented them from sharing public facilities with whites ("Black Codes"). Consequently, African Americans could not receive the same education, respect, or benefits as whites, and therefore their social status was still at the bottom. They were forced to live in separate neighborhoods from whites, and had to leave any white neighborhoods by sunset (Sonneborn). Yet, it was in a Reconstruction act that declared "that all persons within the jurisdiction of the United States shall be entitled to the full and equal enjoyment of the accommodations, advantages, [and] facilities" and that this was "applicable alike to citizens of every race and color, regardless of any previous condition of servitude" (U.S Congress). So it was that the Black Codes in the South managed to surpass what the federal government said.

In the long-term, the Civil War affected America with the Civil Rights Movement almost a century afterwards. The Civil Rights Movement, a movement to fight for racial

justice, set out to change the American view on African Americans, achieving landmark civil-rights laws such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which finally removed the Black Codes (“Civil Rights Movement”). The movement impacted America greatly, for had it not happened, in some parts of America, perhaps even today, people of other races would still not receive the same education or benefits from public facilities as whites, and in addition, would most probably not have the opportunity to partake in America’s government. This attribute, the fact that the citizens of America have a voice in their government and the ability to take part in it, is a defining characteristic of America and what it stands for as a free, fair country today. The Civil Rights Movement moreover, helped by civil rights leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks, taught Americans what it meant to be American. It brought about reflection on what the Founding Fathers strongly reinforced: the idea of every human having Natural Rights. The Civil Rights Movement left a mark on America’s history, that dark as it was, would ultimately help in achieving the dream of full justice and equality as a dream for America as a whole.

Nevertheless, the more significant impact, which affected America more was the changes in the South due to the war and the abolition of slavery. Without the direct consequences after the abolition of slavery, African Americans would have had a different path to freedom. Whilst it can be seen that the Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement are parallel in the idea that they were fighting for African American equality, one can also see the Civil War as the beginning to the African American journey to freedom, and the Civil Rights Movement as more of the end, when African Americans managed to attain their full basic rights. It is then, in turn, that one may become

conscience of the fact that had the Southern whites reacted differently and accepted African Americans as equal, then African Americans would not have had such a long fight to freedom. In other words, if the actual impacts in the South after the war were different, the Civil Rights Movement might never have happened.

To conclude, the Civil War had two major effects which contributed to African American history: first, segregation and discrimination of African Americans in the South because of the reaction to the end of slavery, and second, the Civil Rights Movement which ended the racial separations in the South. America today is characterized - and continues to characterize itself - based on the events of its past. The impacts of the Civil War led to the creation of discriminative laws and then a long time of oppression for African Americans, but ultimately provided them with the opportunity not only to obtain their well-deserved freedom, but to do so in a way that would make an impressive difference on America. The African American fight is a lesson. It is a lesson that reminded Americans that each and every person has “certain unalienable rights”, their rights to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (Jefferson). It is a lesson about the defining features of America, the land of the free and the home of the brave.

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