

TAHPDX: Great Decisions in U.S. History

Teaching American History: A partnership between Portland State University and the Beaverton, Hillsboro and Forest Grove School Districts (funded by the U.S. Department of Education)

HISTORY TOPIC: 1861: The Civil War (Year of Decision)

***Disclaimer:** This is one of twenty-four topic summaries included in the TAH program and is designed to orient readers to the breadth and depth of the subject. These summaries are by no means exhaustive. Each one is a brief overview of a complex historical topic. Because of the informal nature of a summary, they are not necessarily based on primary sources nor do they employ the full range of scholarly techniques, such as foot- or endnotes. This style of presentation is merely one of the varieties of historical writing that readers will encounter as they explore history.*

Abstract: The Civil War is often understood as a simple conflict: North versus South. Yet the outset of the war in 1861 brought a great deal of division and indecision in both sections. In the first place, the nation was not neatly split between North and South. Several slave states had economics and societies that otherwise more closely resembled the North than the South. These states were characterized by a great deal of internal strife. Political divisions existed throughout both major sections of the country. Few Southerners voted for Lincoln, but southern slaves were electrified by the possibility of freedom and many poor whites were reluctant to risk their lives or meager livelihoods for the slave-holding elite. Even prominent Virginians such as Robert E. Lee hesitated to take up arms against the Union. Northern opinion was still more fragmented. Northern Democrats and recent, often highly racist, immigrants commonly opposed the war. In far-away Oregon, the great majority of voters loathed blacks. But the Civil War split the dominant Democrats between defenders and critics of slavery and prompted the rise of the Republican Party. The issue of slavery had long undermined national institutions such as political parties and religious denominations. In 1861, after the Confederates fired on Fort Sumter, few individuals could avoid taking sides in the Civil War.

Support Material: *The 1861: Civil War topic contains the subtopics listed below. Each subtopic includes a narrative with highlighted text [resources] and notations indicating that additional support material is available for viewing and/or downloading including primary documents, maps, spreadsheet data and informative websites. **To access the material go to the TAHPDX: Great Decisions in U.S. History Website and use the links available on the HISTORY TOPICS [1861: Civil War] page or the QUICK NAVIGATION [Alpha List] pages.***

URL: <http://www.upa.pdx.edu/IMS/currentprojects/TAHv3/Home.html> or search "TAHPDX" on the internet.

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Curricula developed for this topic:

- Scheduled for completion in June 2010.

1. Context

The coming of the Civil War can be understood as both a process and a series of events. The process entailed a series of socio-economic changes that gradually, but profoundly widened the social, political and economic differences between North and South. The events were a series of legislation, court decisions, and other specific episodes that both excited and polarized public opinion.

The South and the North developed much different economies in the decades leading up to the Civil War. These differences were rooted in the sections' colonial past but grew during the nineteenth century. The invention of the cotton gin around the turn of the 19th century turn made short-fiber cotton much easier to process and revitalized the southern plantation system by

spreading it into the Deep South. Southern intellectuals such as Thomas Jefferson had regretted slavery in the late eighteenth century and hoped for its eventual end. But, by the 1830s, southern intellectuals almost uniformly embraced and defended it as an economic and moral necessity. Slavery prompted the southern economy to remain focused on the countryside. It discouraged immigration of whites and encouraged a traditional culture of honor and male dominance.

Map Resources: *Cotton Map* 1839-1924 and *Tobacco Map* 1839-1919. Agriculture Maps from the Atlas of the Historical Geography of the United States (Carnegie Institute, 1932).

The northern economy expanded both in agriculture (where increased productivity owed much to improved farm equipment) and manufacturing. This prompted a surge in improved transportation (first canals, then railroads), urbanization, and immigration, particularly from Germany and Ireland. This growth in prosperity fostered a cultural shift toward self-improvement. The north saw a rapid decline in alcohol consumption, homicide rates and dueling and a proliferation of organizations devoted to temperance and other elements of personal and community improvement. This included, by the 1830s, an abolitionist movement that would grow ever more strong even as slavery continued to expand.

Map Resources: *Principal Manufacturing Cities* 1859 and *Railroads* 1850-1869. Agriculture and Industrial Maps from the Atlas of the Historical Geography of the United States (Carnegie Institute, 1932).
GIS Project: *Overland Trails* (ArcView). This project provides a great geographic mapping interface to explore the importance of transportation networks on the economic expansion of the nation. Google Earth project is in process.

These divergent cultures of course reduced the number of politicians who could afford to urge compromise on slavery and related sectional issues. Southern politicians tended to favor low tariffs (to keep the cost of imported goods low) and states' rights (to ensure that the federal government did not interfere with the institution of slavery). They feared that national projects such as banks and transcontinental railroads and banks would simply serve to increase the political and economic power of the North while increasing the taxes they paid.

But Congress nonetheless found itself grappling more frequently with the contentious issue of slavery as the 1800s progressed. The *Missouri Compromise of 1820* [map resource] established a line above which slavery could not exist and established a precedent of balancing slave and free states, so that neither section could gain a majority in the Senate. Thirty years later the *Compromise of 1850* [map resource] allowed California to join the Union as a free state and the rest of the recently acquired Southwest to choose whether to be slave or free. But it also brought slavery home to the North by establishing the *Fugitive Slave Act* [pdf resource] that allowed slave owners to reclaim slaves who had run away to freedom in the North. Four years later the *Kansas-Nebraska Act* [map resource] both forestalled armed conflict and fostered resentments by allowing popular sovereignty in territories north of the Missouri Compromise line. All of these compromises, moreover, occurred in a context in which the apologists for and critics of slavery were becoming more and more suspicious of each other.

Several events exacerbated these suspicions. The *Dred Scott Decision* by the Supreme Court in 1857 [**pdf resource**] asserted that black people could not be citizens and that slave owners had the right to take their property into territories whose voters had forbade slavery. The decision buoyed the hopes of southern whites who believed that slavery must expand and mortified northerners who believed that the institution must be contained or eradicated. White southerners, on the other hand, were terrified and outraged by widespread expressions of sympathy in the North for John Brown after he was executed for his attempt to ignite a widespread slave revolt by taking the federal arsenal in Harper's Ferry, Virginia [*John Brown's War*: **pdf resource**].

Web Resource: Further information on the Dred Scott Decision can be found at the Library of Congress' American Memory "*From Slavery to Freedom: The African-American Pamphlet Collection, 1824-1909*" The Slavery Question.

In the early 1800s, skilled politicians such as Henry Clay and Stephen Douglas had succeeded in finding enough common ground between North and South to keep the two sections from coming to blows. But by the election of 1860 the common ground and the willingness to compromise had shrunk dramatically—though most citizens did not yet realize how close to war the nation was at that time.

The election revealed how polarized the nation had become. The Democratic Party split along sectional lines, with Douglas representing the North and John Breckinridge the South. John Bell, candidate of the short-lived Union Party, did well in the border states but poorly outside them. Lincoln did not even run in the Deep South, but he nearly swept the North to collect 180 electoral votes to his opponents' combined tally of 123. But he won barely 40 percent of the popular vote—and less than 1 percent in much of the country.

PDF Resource: 1860 Election Platforms.

Map Resources: 1860 Election Maps: 1860 Election by County (Atlas of the Historical Geography of the United States), Presidential Election 1860-1872 (National Atlas).

2. The Confederacy

Lower South

South Carolina seceded from the Union on December 20, 1860 just weeks after the election and more than two months before Abraham Lincoln took office. Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas all followed by February (the votes in the state conventions were not even close). Texas was the only state to refer the issue to the electorate, which approved secession by a three-to-one margin.

PDF Resource: *States Which Seceded from the Union*. A short synopsis of the states that left the Union with table and map.

A combination of accumulated grievances and wild optimism explains why the Deep South so overwhelmingly approved such a radical step. Ever since the presidency of Thomas Jefferson

(1801-1809), southerners had feared federal power. Most northerners believed that economic and demographic expansion entitled the North to increased political power. Southerners feared that this expansion had emboldened the North to run roughshod over Southern and states' rights, including the right to own slaves. Ironically, the Confederacy was to the Union as the thirteen colonies had been to Great Britain during the American Revolution: liberty and freedom versus tyranny and oppression. Most southerners interpreted Lincoln's victory as further evidence that the North no longer cared a whit about their sensibilities or rights. Members of a martial culture that stressed honor and bravery, they blithely assured each other that "the Yankees were cowards and would not fight." If they did, the South would easily defeat them (James Truslow Adams, *"America's Tragedy,"* p. 153).

Virginia

The voters of Virginia, North Carolina, Arkansas, Missouri, and Tennessee proved to be much more reluctant to secede. Slavery in these states was less common than in the Deep South (Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Georgia and Texas). Greater proximity to the North also meant a fuller and more realistic understanding of its substantial economic and military power, and residents of the Upper South feared, and rightly so, that a war would be fought largely on their soil.

But most whites of the Upper South were not dead set against war. They shared a milder version of the same resentments and fears of the North so common in the Deep South, and an unwillingness to precipitate war was not the same thing as a willingness to countenance a northern invasion of the South. After Confederates opened fire on Fort Sumter on April 12, Lincoln promptly announced that each state that remained in the Union was to provide its share of 75,000 troops. Virginia Unionists had hoped to avoid conflict. They now believed that Lincoln was demanding that they assist him in invading the South. "I have a Union constituency which elected me by a majority of one thousand, and I believe now that there are not ten Union men in that county to-day," concluded one delegate. A month later, in May, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee followed Virginia into the Confederacy. In calling for troops, noted North Carolina's William S. Pettigrew, "Lincoln threw off the mask. . . and revealed his real intention of subjugating the South" (Daniel Crofts, *"Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis,"* p. 315 and 337).

But many residents of western Virginia, where slavery was much rarer, remained loyal to the Union even after Fort Sumter. The federal Army marched into western Virginia in 1861 and did so well that it soon controlled the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad that connected the eastern and western theaters, and West Virginia soon became a separate, and Unionist, state.

Web Resource: *A State of Convenience: The Creation of West Virginia.* A great narrative and online exhibit (with many links to primary source documents) on the interesting and unusual creation of the state of West Virginia from the West Virginia Division of Culture and History.

Robert E. Lee

The son of a famed Revolutionary War hero, Robert E. Lee had graduated second in the West Point class of 1829 and had become one of the nation's leading officers. General Winfield Scott advised Lincoln to make Lee the Union Army's field commander, an offer that Scott tendered April 18, 1861.

This being the case, Lee seemed an unlikely Confederate. He had described slavery as "a moral and political evil" and early in 1861 condemned "talk of secession," an act he believed was unconstitutional. In February he had remarked that he would "never bear arms against the Union, but it may be necessary for me to carry a musket in defence of my native State, Virginia," a set of pledges that he must have realized were mutually incompatible given Virginia's proclivity toward southern sentiments. Indeed, once Virginia had joined the Confederacy, Lee felt compelled to put his considerable talents at its disposal. When Virginia seceded from the Union, Lee's decision was made: "I cannot raise my hand against my birthplace, my home, my children." Like many Southerners, Lee's primary allegiance was to his state, not his nation (this state-focused allegiance would hamper Lee's army and the Confederacy throughout the war). To his sister, whose husband and son backed the Union, Lee asked that that she "think as kindly of me as you can, & believe that I have endeavoured to do what I thought right."

PDF Resource: *General Robert E. Lee*. Biography and excerpts from the letters referenced above.

Not all Virginia military men followed Lee. Several prominent Union officers hailed from the Upper South. But the great majority fought for the Confederacy, which enjoyed a strong advantage in formally trained officers.

Mary Boykin Chesnut

The daughter of a prominent South Carolina family, Boykin Chesnut was born in 1823. Her father, Stephen Miller, rose to political prominence (governor and U.S. Senator) by defending states' rights and slavery. She married James Chesnut, of another prominent family, in 1840. Her husband was more politically moderate than her father and won election to the U.S. Senate in 1858. But he resigned upon Lincoln's election and attended the first Confederate Congress.

Boykin Chesnut welcomed the war for personal as well as political reasons. A highly educated and passionate woman, she believed that the war offered her opportunities for engagement. "My subjective days are over," she confided to her diary early in the war. There would be "no more silent eating into my own heart—making my own miseries." But her knowledge of political and military developments was not matched by opportunities to shape them. "Oh if I could put some of my reckless spirit into these discreet cautious lazy men!" she lamented in 1861. Boykin Chesnut opposed slavery even as she supported the Confederacy. "I wonder if it is a sin to think slavery a curse to any land," she mused in her diary in March 1861. But such sentiments had to be kept to herself in obeisance to her husband's political position and the beliefs of her social set.

Boykin Chesnut was, of course, not a representative white southern woman and suffered few of the privations visited on most southern women during the war. But she was typical in her support of the Confederacy and her exclusion from direct political involvement.

PDF Resource: *A Diary from Dixie, as Written by Mary Boykin Chesnut.* In Mrs. Chesnut's Diary are vivid pictures of the social life that went on uninterruptedly in the midst of war; of the economic conditions that resulted from blockaded ports; of the manner in which the spirits of the people rose and fell with each victory or defeat, and of the momentous events that took place in Charleston, Montgomery, and Richmond.

Poor Whites

Washington County, North Carolina, contained substantial numbers of both slave-holding planters and yeomen farmers. Its citizens strongly opposed joining the Confederacy until after the incident at Fort Sumter. But even after North Carolina joined the Confederacy, many smaller farmers and wage laborers refused to volunteer for military service in the Confederate Army and even expressed affection for the Union. One warned that "the rich people were going to make the poor people do all the fighting." Indeed, in October Unionists won all four officers' posts in militia elections.

Every state save South Carolina in fact contributed at least one white volunteer regiment to the Union. An estimated 100,000 southern whites fought for the Union, not counting those from border states, who contributed another 200,000. That was one third as many southern whites who bore arms for the Confederacy and illustrates that southern whites, especially those who did not own slaves, commonly opposed secession.

Map Resources:

Distribution of Slave-Holders in the United States - Total, 1860 (Source: US Census).

Distribution of Slave-Holders in the United States as a % of Total White Males, 1860 (Source: US Census).

Web Resource: *North Carolina Union Volunteers: The First & Second Regiments.* Hosted by RootsWeb, this site contains narrative about the unionists in North Carolina as well as links to primary source documents (recruitment posters, etc.) and information about the service records of the members of the 1st & 2nd Regiments of North Carolina.

Book Resources:

Wayne K. Durrill. *War of Another Kind: A Southern Community in the Great Rebellion* (Oxford University Press, 1994).

David C. Downing. *A South Divided: Portraits of Dissent in the Confederacy* (Cumberland House Publishing, 2007).

Slaves

The war generated a great deal of excitement among southern blacks. White masters demonized Lincoln and Republicans, sentiments that prompted slaves to follow their masters in exaggerating Lincoln's determination to end slavery. Although years would pass before Union armies neared most plantations in the Deep South, the war immediately distracted and often divided southern whites enough for many slaves to slip away or to at least anticipate

freedom. The year 1861 did not bring emancipation for many slaves, but it ushered in a great wave of expectation and hope, and wherever Union armies appeared slaves risked grave punishments to seek them out. The difficulty of rebellion or escape had long characterized slavery in the South and limited the nature of slave resistance. But the onset of Civil War was changing this equation.

Map Resource: *Density of the Slave Population in the United States, 1860* (Source: US Census).

In August, 1861 Congress passed the *First Confiscation Act*, [**pdf resource**] which rendered all property that supported the Confederacy “subject to prize and capture.” As slaves were, according to law, property, this act created new possibilities for freedom. In 1862, slaves who had fled to the Union lines would make themselves indispensable to the Union war effort and foreshadow the Emancipation Proclamation. However, slaves had to listen to and evaluate the reliability of information they received or overheard about the war as they weighed the dangers and possibilities of staying put or bolting for a chance at freedom.

Some free blacks, who constituted a small minority of the South’s black population, volunteered for the Confederacy. They commonly built fortifications and African Americans in New Orleans formed the “*Native Guards*,” [**web resource**] part of the state militia. But when the Union captured New Orleans early in 1862, the Native Guards promptly switched sides and explained that they had joined the Confederacy in part because they “had not dared to refuse.”

Book Resource: Charles Kelly Barrow. *Black Southerners in Confederate Armies: A Collection of Historical Accounts* (Southern Lion Books, 2001).

3. The Border States

Maryland

Lincoln was determined to have Maryland in the Union, in large part because it bordered the nation’s capital on three sides. But Maryland had voted for Breckinridge, the Southern Democrat, in the 1860 election, and Southern Democrats controlled its legislature. Much of Maryland had long been dominated by tobacco planters. Baltimore, with one third of the state’s population, rioted when Union troops passed through it in April, leaving twelve residents dead and passions inflamed.

But Maryland also had important ties to the North. The western part of the state was oriented toward grain farming, and its commerce looked northwards. Lincoln countered secessionist sympathy by suspending the writ of *habeus corpus* for arrested secessionists, meaning that they could be detained indefinitely without facing specific charges. In September Lincoln arrested thirty-one secessionist legislators until a new, pro-Union legislature had been elected. “Are all the laws but one, to go unexecuted,” Lincoln asked rhetorically, “and the government itself go to pieces, lest that one be violated?” Maryland stayed in the Union, and its Union soldiers outnumbered its Confederate counterparts by a margin of two to one.

PDF Resource: *"All the Laws But One: A Writ of Habeus Corpus."* A short synopsis of Lincoln's suspension of the writ of habeus corpus to keep Maryland in the Union (from the National Park Service).
Web Resource: *Civil Liberties in Times of Crisis* (American Bar Association). Contains a short narrative and an interesting set of questions to think about regarding Lincoln's decision to suspend the writ of habeus corpus and what it means to constitutional law.

Missouri

Missouri was in transition at the Civil War's outset. Just one out of eight white families owned slaves, and its economy had become more oriented toward northern markets and manufactures. Yet Lincoln received few votes in 1860 outside St. Louis. Missourians, in the main, wanted to maintain the status quo and avoid conflict. But many of its leaders believed otherwise.

Governor Claiborne Fox Jackson, who had been active in the pre-war Kansas conflicts over slavery in neighboring Kansas [*How Bloody was Bleeding Kansas:* **pdf resource**], labored to deliver his state to the Confederacy by taking control of the St. Louis police department and the U.S. arsenal near Kansas City. Battles between rival militias and mobs soon broke out. Unionist forces won ostensible control of most of the state, but rival guerilla bands attacked each other and civilians throughout the war. Jesse James, who would gain fame as a gunfighter after the war, cut his teeth as a Confederate guerilla in Missouri. Jackson's Confederate government of Missouri was soon in exile, outside the state's borders, and Missouri soldiers for the Union outnumbered their Confederate counterparts three to one.

Map Resource: Phelps & Watson *1866 Historical Military Map* (Library of Congress). Shows the location of the major battles of the Civil War.

Kentucky

Birthplace of both Lincoln and Jefferson Davis (the Confederacy's president) and home of Henry Clay, the great architect of sectional compromise, Kentucky was of both symbolic and strategic importance in the Civil War, as its rivers and railroads provided critical avenues into the South.

Like other border states, Kentucky at first tried to avoid the conflict. A month after Fort Sumter, its legislature resolved that "this state and the citizens thereof shall take no part in the Civil War now being waged." Given the strong level of Confederate sympathy in the state, Lincoln exercised restraint; he did not try to disrupt Confederate recruiters in the state or even shipments of military supplies through the state. Lincoln's patience was rewarded in August, when Unionists dominated the state elections. During that summer Confederate armies had occupied Kentucky, a move that provoked the legislature to resolve that they had been "invaded by forces of the so-called Confederate State" who "must be expelled."

Although Kentucky never seceded from the Union, it was admitted to the Confederacy on December 10, 1862. Many Kentuckians joined the Confederate Army -- roughly two out of five soldiers, including several brothers of Mary Todd Lincoln, the Union's first lady. The war

divided families in Kentucky more than anywhere else. Three of Henry Clay's grandsons fought for the Union, three for the Confederacy. Senator John Crittenden contributed two of his sons as generals, one for each side.

Book Resource: James M .McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (Oxford University Press, 2003). 1988 Pulitzer Prize for History and a New York Times Bestseller, the book includes rare photographs, period cartoons, etchings, woodcuts, and paintings.

Web Resources:

A House Divided: The Lincoln's Confederate Relatives (from the Mary Todd Lincoln Historical Site).
Kentucky and the Civil War. From KET EdWeb Resources, the site has links to many transcripts of diaries, letter, and personal memoirs that illustrate the divisiveness and torn loyalties of Kentuckians during this time.

Andrew Johnson

Born to poor parents in North Carolina, Johnson broke his apprenticeship to a tailor as a teenager and ran away to Tennessee, where he steadily rose as a politician who represented the interests of yeoman farmers, often in opposition to those of elite planters. He served in Congress, the U.S. Senate, and as Tennessee's governor.

Johnson sided with Breckenridge, the Southern Democrat, in the 1860 election, and he owned slaves and supported slavery. But he also believed strongly in maintaining the Union and asserted that secessionists were "traitors." In language that foreshadowed his falling out with Radical Republicans in 1865, after Lincoln's assassination, Johnson blamed the crisis of early 1861 on secessionists and abolitionists alike, "bad men" who "both stand in the same attitude, to attain the same end, a dissolution of this Union; the one party believing that it will result in their own aggrandizement. . . , and the other believing that it will result in the overthrow of the institution of slavery" [pdf resource: *Speech of the Hon. Andrew Johnson, Tennessee, on the state of the Union*, delivered in the Senate of the U.S., Feb. 5-6, 1861].

Johnson's determination to back the Union despite Tennessee's secession made him a logical choice for military governor in 1862 and Lincoln's partner on the presidential ticket of 1864. With Lincoln's assassination after the war, however, his conservatism became manifest, and he clashed bitterly with most congressional Republicans and was nearly driven from his presidential office.

Web Resource: *President Andrew Johnson*. Biography, information and links to speeches on Andrew Johnson from the Miller Center of Public Affairs, American Reference Online Resource.

4. The North

Abolitionists

The great majority of enfranchised (white male) abolitionists had voted for Lincoln in 1860, and the great majority of abolitionists, man and woman, black and white, believed that the South should not be allowed to secede from the Union. They shared the concerns of most northerners

about the necessity of keeping the United States united. But they, of course, also believed that the war could and should end slavery. Large numbers of dedicated abolitionists had been trying to end slavery for thirty years by the outset of the Civil War, and they were frustrated that the number of slaves had risen rather than fallen, that southern apologists for slavery had become more obdurate rather than more compassionate, and that several key political decisions (such as the *Fugitive Slave Law of 1850* [[pdf resource](#)] and the *Dred Scott Decision of 1857* [[pdf resource](#)]) had strengthened rather than weakened slavery. Even radical pacifists such as William Lloyd Garrison [[pdf resource](#): "*The War - Its Cause and Cure*," May 3, 1861] therefore celebrated the Civil War as an opportunity "to remove the cause which had brought us to our doom," to at last eradicate the "execrable system" of slavery once and for all.

Book Resources for William Lloyd Garrison and The Liberator:

Cain, William E. (ed). 1995. *William Lloyd Garrison and the Fight Against Slavery: Selections from The Liberator*. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's Press (The Bedford Series in History and Culture).

Garrison, Wendell Phillips. 1885. *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879: The Story of His Life, Told by His Children*, vol. I-4. New York: The Century Company.

Web Resources for William Lloyd Garrison:

Information on William Lloyd Garrison, including current commentary, can be found at the "Africans in America" PBS website.

A useful website discussion and classroom issues and strategies regarding Garrison can be found at Georgetown University's Heath Anthology of American Literature.

Abolitionists agreed with general northern opinion in regarding succession as treason. They differed from the majority in asserting from the outset that the goal of the war was not simply the restoration of the Union. Nothing short of the eradication of slavery throughout the nation would suffice.

African Americans

Northern blacks who had the resources and inclination to participate in the abolitionist movement and those who did not agreed that slavery was a brutal institution that the federal government should end. Many sought immediately to enlist in the Union Army, though they were refused until later in the war. Jacob Dodson, of Washington D.C., wrote the Secretary of War that "I know of some three hundred of reliable colored free citizens of this City, who desire to enter the service for the defence of the City." A group of blacks in New York City began drilling in anticipation of being called into the armed services, but the chief of police ordered them to disband or risk attack from poor whites. African Americans who wished to take up arms repeatedly heard that "this is a white man's war" ([pdf resource](#): *Quintard Taylor, African American Experience, 1619-1890*, quotes can be found on pgs. 199 and 206).

Some African Americans agreed, pointing out that blacks should not "offer ourselves to be kicked and insulted," by offering to risk their lives for a nation that snubbed them. A black newspaper in New York City disagreed. "We do not affirm that the North is fighting in behalf of the black man's rights, as such—if this was the single issue, we even doubt whether they would fight at all," it conceded. "But circumstances have been so arranged by the decrees of Providence, that in struggling for their own nationality they are forced to defend our rights," and

blacks should be ready to take up arms as soon as the government allowed them to (Editorial, Anglo-African, Sept. 14, 1861. Library of Congress: Civil War Desk Reference).

Web Resource: *The Fight for Equal Rights: Black Soldiers in the Civil War* (The National Archives, Teaching with Documents). Teaching resources, links to related information and primary documents.

Frederick Douglass

The leading black public figure of his generation had long labored as an abolitionist and had broken with the Garrisonian wing of the movement over the issue of pacifism in particular and political engagement in general. Douglass, therefore, had elected not to assist John Brown in his raid at Harper's Ferry on pragmatic (he foresaw that the attempt would not work) rather than ideological grounds, and he had backed Lincoln in the election of 1860 as the best of several less-than-ideal options. He immediately seized on secession as an opportunity to end slavery. "To fight against slaveholders, without fighting against slavery, is but a half-hearted business," he advised. "War for the destruction of liberty must be met with war for the destruction of slavery."

Douglas argued that African Americans should be allowed to fight for the Union. This was partly a matter of pragmatism; the Union needed all the soldiers that it could get. But Douglas also believed strongly that military service by blacks would ensure that the conflict became a war of liberation, not simply a battle to keep the South from seceding. "Let the slaves and free colored people be called into service, and formed into a liberating army," he wrote weeks after Fort Sumter, "to march into the South and raise the banner of Emancipation among the slaves." Douglas's patience was eventually rewarded, as Lincoln both accepted black soldiers and ended slavery, and Douglas won appointment to some federal posts after the war. [**pdf resource (quotes):** Douglass Monthly, May 1861 "*How To End The War*"]

Web Resources for Frederick Douglass:

Biography of Frederick Douglass: Library of Congress American Memory "Frederick Douglass Papers" website (includes biography and access to transcripts from his writings).

An easy-to-use electronic scanned copy of Douglass' autobiography is available at Documenting the American South.

Republicans

Although northern and southern Democrats alike strove to equate Republicanism and abolitionism, the equation was a false one. Republicans, to be sure, disliked slavery, and most wished to see its geographic expansion halted and looked forward to the day when it would be eradicated. But opposition to slavery was but a part of a much larger program of national development that included higher tariffs and other measures to stimulate manufacturing, public subsidies to railroads, and more generous land grants to pioneer farmers. Republicans favored enterprise, and their opposition to slavery owed at least as much to concerns over its impact on the economy and to white labor as to its impact on slaves.

Their primary concern in 1861 was to see that the South accepted the results of the election of 1860. The Union must stand. Behind this determination stood a growing list of resentments. Most northerners believed that southerners exercised more than their fair share of influence over national politics despite the North's growing population and economy. Southerners had constituted the great majority of presidents, and they seemed to feel entitled to a sort of veto over any national legislation and to expand slavery wherever they wished. Most northerners saw themselves as seeking to move the nation forward into economic expansion and opportunity and moral improvement. Obstructionist southerners seemed stuck in a cruel, outmoded past of slavery and inherited privilege.

PDF Resource: *The 1860 National Election Platforms* (Democrat, Republican, Constitutional Union Parties). The differences in focus and language of the various statements reflect the division and competition that was growing within the political system during the Antebellum and Civil War periods.

PDF Resource: Ulysses S. Grant. *Reasons to be Republican* (1880). Transcript of a speech. Although given some time after the Civil War, the speech reflects the Republican sentiment and, in particular, the party's animosity toward the Democrats.

Abraham Lincoln

Lincoln's views on slavery and African Americans continue to be debated by historians today. Most agree that Lincoln believed that slavery was immoral, that he consistently wished to work toward its reduction and eventual abolition. Though concerned with the well being of slaves and black people more generally, he opposed "racial amalgamation" and believed that white people were superior to black people. He was also an astute politician who more often followed than led public opinion. He believed that abolishing slavery early in the war would simply drive the Upper South into the Confederacy and increase division in the Union. Hence Lincoln, in September 1861, revoked General John C. Fremont's decision to free Missouri slaves owned by secessionists. Lincoln wished to end slavery, but preserving the Union and winning the war came first.

Historians wonder if Lincoln might not have done more to avoid war. Early in 1861 he underestimated the depth of white southerners' antipathy to his election. But it is not clear that a better understanding of secession would have much changed his course of action. He did not assume the Presidency until after the crisis had become acute, and once he did he made it clear that he was not willing to throw the election out or simply give the South whatever it wanted as the price of peace. His inaugural address of March 4 pledged to leave slavery and even the fugitive slave law intact, but he also asserted that "the Union of these States is perpetual" [**pdf resource:** *Lincoln's First Inaugural Speech*, March, 1861].

Web Resources for Abraham Lincoln:

American President: Abraham Lincoln from the Miller Center of Public Affairs (biography and other information about Lincoln's presidency including links to primary documents).

Abraham Lincoln Papers from the Library of Congress (substantial collection of primary sources).

Abraham Lincoln Quotes. The site also has numerous pages (use the <jump to> function) with additional information about Lincoln, his life and presidency.

Democrats and Copperheads

Northern opponents to Lincoln and the Republican Party continued to voice concerns about the possibility of war after the election. Few of these people were overtly pro-Confederate. They instead focused on the importance of peace and often conflated concern over slavery with a willingness to shed white blood for slaves. They tended to be strict constructionists and doubted that the federal government really had the power to force states to stay in the Union.

The firing on Fort Sumter galvanized northerners behind Lincoln. Federal troops had been killed. “The change in public sentiment here is wonderful—almost miraculous,” noted a New York merchant. “It seems as if we never were alive till now; never had a country till now,” added a woman from that city. Anger toward the Confederacy and expectation of a quick and easy Union victory made southern sympathizers (known as “*Copperheads*”) [**pdf resource**] rare and quiet. The Union's stinging and bloody loss at Manassas in Virginia was not enough to encourage a strong movement for peace in the war's first year. Most northerners persisted in believing that the Union would soon bring the Confederacy to its knees and, if anything, were frustrated that there was not more fighting [see book resource (quotes): McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*, Oxford University Press, 1988].

Lincoln's broad use of executive power concerned some, but the draft and the resentments it engendered lay, like other expressions of war weariness, in the future.

Web Resource: Herman Belz, *Lincoln's Construction of the Executive Power in the Secession Crisis* (Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association).

Immigrants

Immigrants, especially those from Ireland, were often wary of the war. The Republican Party did not simply wish to contain and eventually eradicate slavery. It also expressed concern with behaviors closer to home, such as drinking and urban amusements more generally. In broad terms, the Republican Party advocated the cultivation of virtue and self-restraint, the Democratic Party the preservation of freedom. Like white southerners, immigrants in general and Catholics in particular tended to view the Democratic Party as a safeguard against meddling or even tyrannical Republicans. In 1861 the Union Army remained a volunteer force, and war-time taxes were not yet pinching. But Democratic Mayor Fernando Wood of New York City charged that Republican leaders “will get Irishmen and Germans to fill up the regiments and go forth to defend the country under the idea that they themselves remain at home to divide the plunder that is to be distributed.” The local federal marshal wished to arrest Wood for this statement, but Wood was re-elected rather than imprisoned.

PDF Resource: *Mayor Fernando Wood of New York* (biography, Harper's Weekly Cartoon, and Speech on the Secession of New York City).

PDF Resource: *Immigrants in the Union and Confederate Armies*.

Book Resource: Jennifer L. Webber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North* (Oxford University Press, 2006). Information about some prominent Copperheads and immigrants opposed to the Republicans.

5. Native Americans

Cherokee

The Cherokee had a long and complex relationship with white southerners. Those southerners had pushed them out of their home lands in the southeast and forced them to Indian Territory across the Mississippi in the 1830s. But before and after that date the Cherokee—whose leaders included many people with white ancestry—had been more willing than just about any Indian nation to adopt the English language, Christianity, and white forms of ranching, agriculture, and even gender roles. Some had black slaves.

But astute Confederate leaders realized that they could not take the support of the Cherokee for granted, that they would need to appeal to the self-interest of selected leaders and of the nation as a whole. The Cherokee were still divided in 1861 by those who had backed and those who had opposed removal in the 1830s. Stand Watie, the leader of a group of Cherokee slaveholders, raised three hundred men in the summer of 1861 to protect the Cherokee from federal invasion. John Ross, the Cherokee's principal chief, feared that Watie might usurp his position and that severing relations with the United States would lead to losing the millions of dollars of Cherokee funds that the federal government controlled. Ross therefore advocated neutrality. But Watie's growing power and the Confederate victory at Bull Run (Manassas) convinced Ross to sign a treaty in which the Confederacy assumed the treaty obligations of the United States to the Cherokee and pledged to protect them from invasion in return for the Cherokee supplying a regiment of soldiers that would fight in Indian Territory.

But by the end of the year some Cherokee were deserting rather than fight Creek Unionists. Early in 1862 many Cherokee switched sides, and Ross declared his support for the Union after being captured by Union troops. In 1863 an anti-Watie faction abolished slavery. Three of Ross's sons eventually fought for the Union. Watie, by way of contrast, killed or captured nearly 100 Unionist Creeks in a battle late in 1861 and carried out effective raids against Union supply lines and sympathizers throughout the war. He surrendered well after Lee had. The war between North and South brought a civil war among the Cherokee, too.

Web Resource: *History of the Cherokee*. Contains narrative (from the Cherokee perspective) about the Cherokee involvement in the Civil War and many links to images, maps and transcripts of the various letters and treaties of this time period.

Delaware

The Delaware had lived along the eastern seaboard when Europeans arrived there. By 1861, most lived in eastern Kansas, where the arrival of land-hungry whites made for a precarious existence.

Most Delaware perceived the Civil War as an opportunity to impress the federal government with their loyalty. Some 170 out of 201 men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five volunteered for the Union Army. For example, Black Beaver, had, like many of the Delaware, served American fur traders and its military. By 1861 he was in his fifties. He warned the Union army of a Confederate advance and then guided that army to safety in Kansas, an act that

prompted Confederate soldiers to seize his substantial property, destroy his ranch, and put a bounty on his head. When Black Bear died nearly thirty years later the United States had still not compensated him for these losses, and two years after the war the Delaware were again forced to move westward, this time to Oklahoma.

PDF Resource: *The Delaware: Warriors for the Union* (by Deborah Nichols and Laurence M. Hauptman). A good synopsis of the Delaware experience during the Civil War as well as information about Black Beaver.

Catawba

The Catawba of South Carolina were experienced accomodationists by 1861. They had tracked down and returned black slaves and fought for the United States in the American Revolution. Nevertheless, land-hungry whites had gained most of their remaining land, and by the Civil War the remaining 100 or so Catawba in the Carolinas depended on a hilly tract of 630 acres and day labor for their precarious livelihoods.

After Fort Sumter, however, just about every able-bodied male (a total of nineteen) among the Catawba enlisted in Confederate regiments. They were drawn, as were many poor soldiers, by the enlistment bounty of \$50.00, but the Catawba demonstrated a strong commitment to the Confederacy, with a high proportion of dead and wounded. This fidelity no doubt reflected both their dependency on and identification with white southerners and their warrior tradition.

6. Gender

Masculinity and War

All wars share in common the need to mobilize soldiers. This would eventually prove to be a grave problem for both North and South, as both sides resorted to highly unpopular drafts as the war dragged on. But both sides had little trouble raising large numbers of eager recruits at the war's outset in 1861.

Several factors facilitated enlistment. As in most wars, both sides were confident of quick and relatively bloodless victory. Early companies were organized on a community basis, so friends and family went off to fight together as a form of solidarity that was as much a product of community as sectional solidarity. "I go because I feel it to be a duty," explained a New Hampshire chair maker. "If I should stay safely at home, I know that in after years, I shall feel ashamed to confess that I have left others to do my duty for me." [*H.S. Baker Correspondence: pdf resource*] Both sides emphasized ideology. Confederates believed that they were fighting for their rights, that they were the true heirs of the American Revolution. They also feared attack. After all, the Confederacy was essentially asking to be left alone; that is why Lincoln's call for troops, his clear plan to invade the South, aroused such antipathy among southern whites who had until that point equivocated over secession. Unionists were of course fighting for the Union and against anarchy. They often perceived themselves as defenders of the Constitution

and established law, and as the war proceeded more and more white northern soldiers agreed with their black counterparts that the war was ultimately a battle for freedom and to end slavery.

Few on either side anticipated a bloody conflict. The South, especially, featured a martial culture which celebrated valor on the battlefield. Their ministers assured them that their cause was holy, that God was assuredly on their side. The Confederate nation's motto was "*Deo Vindice*," [**web resource**] which translated as "With God as our avenger." *President Jefferson Davis's first message to the Confederate Congress* [**web resource**] concluded by speaking of their "firm reliance on that Divine Power which covers with its protection the just cause, . . . our inherent right to freedom, independence, and self-government." But northern men, also, believed that God was on their side, that the United States was, if not divine, at least divinely sanctioned. They, too, grew up reading romantic tales of military heroism. We know in retrospect that the Civil War was one of the first modern wars, that thousands of Confederates would be mowed down in *Picket's Charge* [**web resource**], for example, without getting close enough to even see the enemy. But all that lay in the future in the spring of 1861, when enlistment held out the promise of honor and glory.

Video Resource: *Glory* (1989). Based on the letters of Colonel Robert G. Shaw. Shaw was an officer in the Federal Army during the American Civil War who volunteered to lead the first company of black soldiers. Shaw was forced to deal with the prejudices of both the enemy (who had orders to kill commanding officers of blacks), and of his own fellow officers. The film was nominated and won numerous awards for acting and cinematography. Available on DVD.

Women and War

Women often encouraged men to fight in the Civil War. Southern men who did not enlist might receive a petticoat from a local woman, and young Northern women sang, "I am bound to be a Soldier's Wife or Die an Old Maid." There were exceptions, particularly as the war progressed. Women increasingly feared, with good reason, that husbands, sons, and brothers who marched off would never return.

The war often affected women more directly. As in all wars, wives of soldiers shouldered duties that had been considered outside their sphere. They were also exposed to extreme hardship, particularly in the South in the war's second half. Other women sought service. "Organizations of women for the relief of sick and wounded soldiers, and for the care of soldiers' families, were formed with great spontaneity at the very beginning of the war," recalled *Mary Livermore* [**web resource**], a prominent Christian philanthropist, abolitionist, and suffragist in nineteenth-century Chicago. Respectable southern women, raised to avoid public service, were more reluctant to volunteer as nurses, as it seemed to compromise "the dignity which belongs to my sex and position" (Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*, University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

Web Resource: *Women Were There*. An account of many women who served -- openly and clandestinely as "men"-- in the Civil War with links to further information.

Web Resource: *Known But To God: Women Soldiers in the Civil War*. An online article by Richard Hall that chronicles the experiences of many women fighting in the Civil War.

7. Oregon

Context

Relatively few Oregonians fought in the Civil War, and the conflict's decisive battles occurred thousands of miles from its borders. Nonetheless, the war had a major impact on the state and radically changed its political trajectory.

Most of Oregon's settlers had roots in the Upper South, had lived there themselves or were descended from people that had. This meant that they had some experience with slavery, though few had actually owned slaves. They were therefore apt to be *Jacksonian Democrats* [**web resource**], people opposed to both slaves (on the grounds of racism) and slavery (as slaves made it difficult for poorer whites to make a good living). This antipathy to slavery did not prompt much interest in the Republican Party, however. Most Oregonian's had a wide libertarian streak. They distrusted and opposed big government, reformers, banks, corporations, cities, and taxes.

Map Resource: *Place of Birth of Oregon Residents in 1850* (based on the U.S. Census).

Democratic Party Splits

The quickening of sectional tensions late in the 1850s worried Oregonians. The Supreme Court's Dred Scott Decision of 1857 asserted that slavery was legal in the territories and played a major role in prompting Oregonians to seek statehood (so that Oregonians could decide whether to become a slave state or not), which Congress granted in 1859. But statehood could not buffer Oregon from the Democratic Party's sectional split. Joe Lane, by far the state's most popular politician, defended slavery and was selected by the Southern Democrats as their nominee for vice president. Many other Oregon Democrats also believed that the federal government had no right to restrict the rights of slave holders. The Confederate point of view resonated with Oregonians' anti-government sentiment. But other Democrats argued that Oregonians had the right to exclude slavery on the basis of states' rights. The ideals of self-determination and property rights were at odds in this instance and split Oregon's Democrats down the middle in the 1860 election. The two halves of the party polled more than 9,000 votes between them, but neither could top Lincoln's 5,343. Many decades would pass until Oregon Democrats would recover politically from the Civil War.

Web Resource: A good account of the sectional divisions in Oregon during the 1860 elections can be found in Chapter 5 of *A Peculiar Paradise: A History of Blacks in Oregon, 1788-1940*.

The names of Oregon counties illustrate this historic shift. Counties established before the Civil War bear the names of Democratic leaders: Jackson, Douglas, Marion, Polk, Linn, Benton, and Lane. Those established during or after the Civil War were often named for Republican heroes: Lincoln, Grant, Sherman, and Baker. The appearance of Union County made the point still more explicitly.

Map Resource: *Oregon Counties through Time* (names and dates).

The War

The war itself discredited Southern Democrats in Oregon. The great majority of Oregonians backed the Union. Joe Lane returned home to effigies and insults and withdrew to his farm near Roseburg. Oregon contributed an officer to the Union cause, Senator Edward Baker, who died at Ball's Bluff very early in the war. Most of Oregon's Union volunteers ended up serving at posts in the Pacific Northwest so that regular soldiers stationed there could be transferred eastward, where the action was.

Map Resource: *Pacific Northwest Military Outposts during the Civil War*.

Oregon did have pockets of Confederate sympathizers, however, particularly in and around Jacksonville and the southern Willamette Valley. Portland attracted a cosmopolitan population which included some pro-Confederates. These differences prompted some quarrels but no armed battles. The federal government suspended the publication of several Democratic newspapers in Oregon during the war. In addition, Oregon would prove to be very resistant to federal attempts to integrate blacks into the nation's political and social fabric after the war.

The Civil War brought no military conflict to speak of to Oregon and did not much disturb white residents' racist thinking. But it transformed its political landscape and cleared the way for such Republican programs as banking and incorporation that would spur the state's postwar development and integrate it much more fully into the national economy.

8. Conclusion

Major and protracted wars kill and maim masses of people and transform nations' politics, societies, cultures, and economies. But most people at the outset of 1861 anticipated neither the scope nor the duration of the coming conflagration. They instead focused on long-nurtured resentments, fears, and hopes, along with what they perceived to be the interests of their families and their communities—which they defined in local, state, sectional, ethnic, or national terms. A complex blending of circumstances, desires, and beliefs shaped the ways in which individuals and groups responded to the unprecedented dangers and possibilities of 1861.

Web Resources for the Civil War (general):

Harper's Weekly Original Civil War Newspapers. A website with links to pages in Harper's Weekly for the years 1861-1865 (<http://www.sonofthesouth.net/leefoundation/the-civil-war.htm>).

Civil War Photo Gallery (from the American Civil War website).

Map and Google Earth Project: *1861: The Civil War* (Year of Decision) [in process].

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