



The American Civil War

The most critical event of the 19th century for the Americans was the Civil War, an upheaval which threw the northern and southern states of the nation against each other. This Great War was waged from 1861 to 1865.

The origin of the Civil War was embedded in the beginning of American history. The South had been established with large farms, plantations, which needed slaves to provide labor force. Cotton was the main crop which was exported at high profits to the English textile industries. Negroes were bought from Africa and shipped in, such as cattle, to the South to work these plantations.

The North, on the other hand, was a region of smaller farms, toiled by the farmers who owned them. These farms produced a wide range of food: wheat, corn, vegetables, fruits, cattle, pigs, and poultry. Beyond the differences of land and labor, the North was also distinguished from the South because an industrial region had appeared along its eastern coast. The towns in the region needed food from the farms therefore extensive railway lines were laid linking the industrial and agricultural areas of the North.

Rivalry between the North and South escalated during the early 19th century as plantation owners in the South and small farmers in the North traveled to conquer the same land to the west. In addition to this manufacturers in the North could not produce their goods as economically as those brought in from Europe, so they were protected from foreign competition by tariffs. These tariffs were taxes on foreign manufactures making their prices higher than similar products manufactured in the United States. With American manufactured goods made artificially "cheaper", they sold better, allowing industry to grow in the United States. Plantation owners, however, resented not being allowed to import at real prices the cheaper European manufactures. They were against paying these taxes which financed American industrialization, in the North.



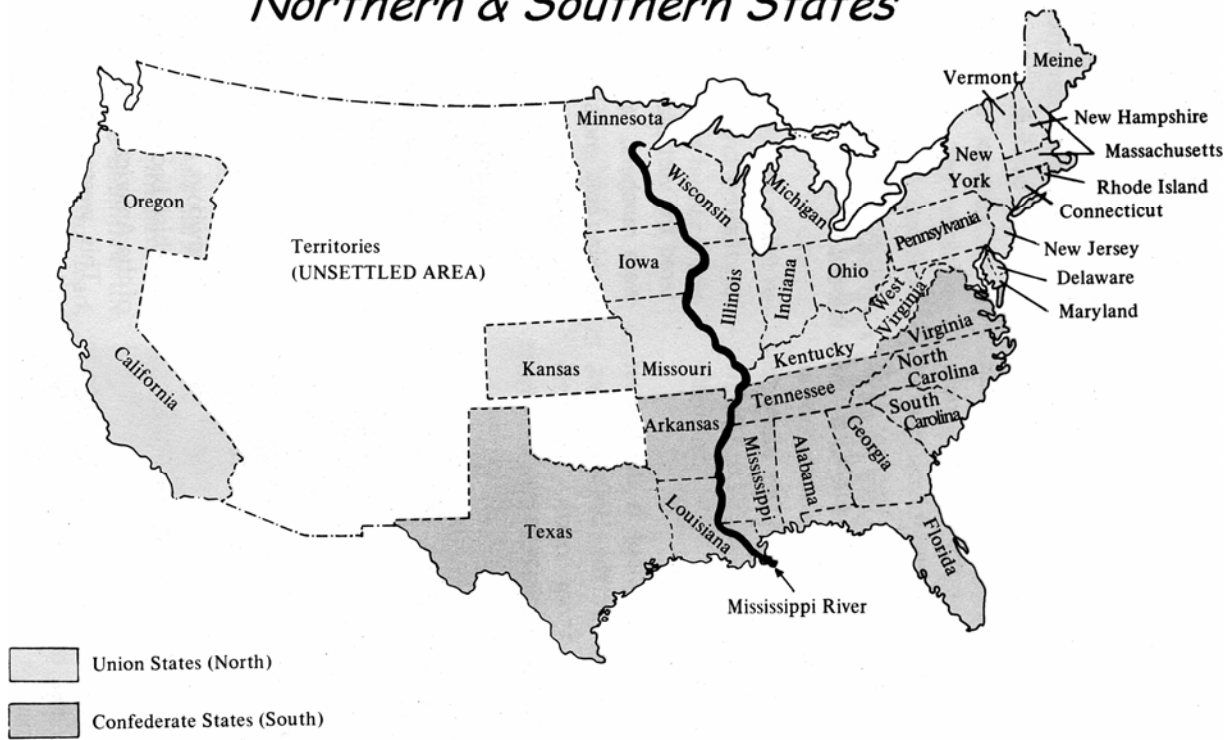
The major conflict between the North and the South, however, was slavery. As the United States increasingly celebrated its freedom and democracy, the existence of slavery seemed to be a political anomaly and moral hypocrisy. The climax of all these conflicts over land, taxes, and slavery happened in 1860.

Abraham Lincoln a northern statesman against slavery was elected as president of the United States in 1860. With his election, the southern states withdrew from the United States and established themselves as the Confederate States of America. The war began early in 1861. The battles between the north "Yankees" and the south "rebels" lasted four long years.

Due to help from England and to expert military leadership, the South was able to fight during four years. From the very beginning, however, the victory of the North, with its industry, food supplies, transport system, and larger population was evident. The North also had the unique leadership of Lincoln, an exquisite statesman who combined exceptional qualities of compassion and sagacity. In the beginning of April, 1865, the South at last surrendered. The attempt to secede had failed; the United States remained together as one; and slavery was forever abolished. Just a few days later, on Good Friday, the mighty President was murdered by an actor, John Wilkes Booth, a rebel who resented the defeat of the South.

The period following the Civil War was marked by huge production of stories, novels, essays, histories, and biographies recounting the decisive event. Most of this writing heavily romanticized the war, giving it the exaggerated appearance of a heroic epic. One novelist, however, Stephen Crane, was concerned with narrating the event as realistically as possible. Although, ironically, he had never participated in a battle, in *The Red Badge of Courage*, he wrote a novel which is the most objective account of the Civil War ever written - one of the most perceptive narratives ever related of war itself.

Northern & Southern States



Stephen Crane (1871 ~ 1900)



Stephen Crane
Culver Pictures

Crane was an American novelist and poet, one of the first American exponents of the naturalistic style of writing. He is known for his pessimistic and often brutal portrayals of the human condition, but his stark realism is relieved by poetic charm and a sympathetic understanding of character.

Born in Newark, New Jersey, Crane was educated at Lafayette College and Syracuse University. In 1891 he began work in New York City as a freelance reporter in the slums. From his work and his own penniless existence in the Bowery he drew material for his first novel, *Maggie, a Girl of the Streets*, which he published at his own expense under the pseudonym Johnston Smith. The work was the story of a young prostitute who commits suicide and won praise from American writers Hamlin Garland and William Dean Howells but it was not a popular success. Crane's next novel, *The Red Badge of Courage*, gained international recognition as a penetrating and realistic psychological study of a young soldier in the American Civil War.

Although Crane had never experienced military service, the understanding of the ordeals of combat that he revealed in this work compelled various American and foreign newspapers to hire him as a correspondent during the Greco-Turkish War (1897) and the Spanish-American War (1898).

In *The Red Badge of Courage* he portrayed the fear, the growth, and the maturing of an inexperi-

enced young man in battle, discovering in events of the war not only his own courage but the meaning of bravery, life, and death. The novel's central character is Henry Fleming, a young soldier who volunteers for the Army with no military experience and only romantic ideas of the heroism war can bestow. On the eve of his first battle he tortuously questions himself as to whether he will have the courage to stand firmly against the enemy, in combat. The following day he goes to battle; he stands as a cog in the machine of war, as an organ of the brute animal of war, its noise, commands, danger, blood, and fear. But later the same day, as men begin to fall around him, he becomes frightened and flees.

But there is no place to hide. Neither nature nor his fellow soldiers are able to console him. Thus resigned, he returns to the army. He determines that he must distinguish himself. Because of his inexperience, he always exaggerates. He had earlier fled in terror, now, upon returning, he tries to excel himself in courage. This time he leads a battle, undaunted, as men fall dead around him. But these extremes of action give him sufficient experience finally to estimate himself and his actions maturely.

Fleming is accidentally struck in the head with the butt of a rifle. His "wound" begins to bleed and he interprets it as a "red badge of courage". In the end, after his experiences of cowardice and courage, he discovers that the true significance of his badge is not courage or patriotic sacrifice but freedom from illusion about heroism. In the end he accepts death as a simple fact of life. Death is merely death. It is not something to flee from or to challenge. He therefore obtains enough maturity to become a man.

The following passage from "*The Red Badge of Courage*" shows an early scene in the battle in which Henry Fleming is engaged.

The Red Badge of Courage

Some one cried, 'Here they come!'

There was rustling and muttering among the men. They displayed a feverish desire to have every possible cartridge ready to their hands. The boxes were pulled around into various positions, and adjusted with great care. It was as if seven hundred new bonnets were being tried on.

'Here they come! Here they come!' Gun locks clicked.

Across the smoke-infested fields came a brown swarm of running men who were giving shrill yells. They came on, stooping and swinging their rifles at all angles. A flag, tilted forward, sped near the front.

As he caught sight of them the youth (Henry Fleming) was momentarily startled by a thought that perhaps his gun was not loaded. He stood trying to rally his faltering intellect so that he might recollect the moment when he had loaded, but he could not.

Perspiration streamed down the youth's face, which was soiled like that of a weeping urchin. He frequently, with a nervous movement, wiped his eyes with his coat sleeve. His mouth was a little way open.

He got one glance at the foe-swarmling field in front of him, and instantly ceased to debate the question of his piece being loaded. Before he was ready to begin - before he had announced to himself that he was about to fight - he threw the obedient, well-balanced rifle into position and fired a first wild shot. Directly he was working at his weapon like an automatic affair.

He suddenly lost concern for himself, and forgot to look at a menacing fate. He became not a man but a member. He felt that something of which he was a part - a regiment, an army, a cause, or a country - was in a crisis. He was welded into a common personality which was dominated by a single desire. For some moments he could not flee, no more than a little finger can commit a revolution against a hand.

Presently he began to feel the effects of the war atmosphere - a blistering sweat, a sensation that his eyeballs were about to crack like hot stones. A burn-

ing roar filled his ears.

There was a blare of heated rage mingled with a certain expression of intentness on all faces. Many of the men were making low-toned noises with their mouths, and these subdued cheers, snarls, imprecations, prayers, made a wild, barbaric song that went as an undercurrent of sound, strange and chantlike with the resounding chords of the war march.

There was a singular absence of heroic poses. The men bending and surging in their haste and rage were in every impossible attitude. Rifles, once loaded, were jerked to the shoulder and fired without apparent aim into the smoke or at one of the blurred and shifting forms which, upon the field before the regiment, had been growing larger and larger like puppets under a magician's hand.

The men dropped here and there like bundles. The captain of the youth's company had been killed in an early part of the action. His body lay stretched out in the position of a tired man resting, but upon his face there was an astonished and sorrowful look, as if he thought some friend had done him an ill turn. One man had been grazed by a shot and blood streamed widely down his face. He clapped both hands to his face. 'Oh!' he said, and ran. Another grunted suddenly as if he had been struck by a club in the stomach. He sat down and gazed ruefully. In his eyes there was mute, indefinite reproach. Farther up the line a man, standing behind a tree, had had his knee joint splintered by a ball. Immediately he had dropped his rifle and gripped the tree with both arms. And there he remained, clinging desperately and crying for assistance that he might withdraw his hold upon the tree.

At last an exultant yell went along the quivering line of men. The firing dwindled from an uproar to a last vindictive popping. As the smoke slowly eddied away, the youth saw that the charge had been repulsed. The enemy was scattered into reluctant groups. He saw a man climb to the top of a fence and fire a parting shot. The waves had receded, leaving bits of dark debris upon the ground."

DISCUSSION

1. What was the relationship between slavery the Civil War?
2. What was the handicap the North had in the Civil War?
3. What was Stephen Crane's intention by writing *The Red Badge of Courage*?
4. How does the passage above appear to be a realistic portrayal of war?
5. Does Henry Fleming appear as a conventional hero in the passage above?

Did you know that

in addition to being a novelist, journalist, and short-story writer, Crane was also an innovator in verse techniques? His two volumes of poetry, *The Black Riders and Other Lines* (1895) and *War Is Kind and Other Poems* (1899), are important early examples of experimental free verse.



Abraham Lincoln (1809 ~ 1865)

It was Lincoln who set down in simple words the truest statement America has of the trials and griefs and triumphant faiths of the time. These brief selections from his speech and writing simply and honestly, yet with the profound wisdom and nobility of a truly great nature.

"The Gettysburg Address"

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania
November 19, 1863

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate -- we can not consecrate -- we can not hallow -- this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Source: The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Vol. VII, edited by Roy P. Basler.

“Letter to Mrs. Bixby”

In the fall of 1864, Massachusetts Governor John A. Andrew wrote to President Lincoln asking him to express condolences to Mrs. Lydia Bixby, a widow who was believed to have lost five sons in the Civil War. Lincoln's letter to her was printed by the Boston Evening Transcript. Later it was revealed that only two of Mrs. Bixby's five sons died in battle (Charles and Oliver). One deserted the army, one was honorably discharged, and another deserted or died a prisoner of war.

The authorship of the letter has been debated by scholars, most of whom now believe it was written instead by John Hay, one of Lincoln's White House secretaries. The original letter was destroyed by Mrs. Bixby, who was a Confederate sympathizer and disliked President Lincoln. Copies of an early forgery have been circulating for years but are not genuine

Executive Mansion,
Washington, Nov. 21, 1864.

Dear Madam, --

I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant General of Massachusetts that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle.

I feel how weak and fruitless must be any word of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save.

I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

Yours, very sincerely and respectfully,

A. Lincoln

Source: Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, edited by Roy P. Basler.

DISCUSSION

1. Which passages from the texts above show Lincoln's humility, his consideration of others, his insistence on the right, his devoutness?
2. How does Lincoln express his heavy sense of responsibility as commander in chief?
3. In his “Letter to Mrs. Bixby”, which feelings does Lincoln express which many people had experienced but few had found words for?