

2 The Civil War, Reconstruction and Jim Crow 1861–1900

POINTS TO CONSIDER

From 1861 to 1865, the Northern states fought to keep the Southern states within the Union of the United States in a Civil War that many believed was fought over slavery. The Northern victory ensured the end of slavery and a period of 'Reconstruction' of the defeated South. Initially, freed slaves gained benefit from Reconstruction, but, after 1877, the North left the South to its own devices and white racists became dominant. They introduced the Jim Crow laws, which kept blacks inferior. This chapter looks at:

- Slavery and the Civil War
- The post-war South and the start of Reconstruction
- The situation of blacks from Reconstruction to segregation
- How Southern blacks responded to their deteriorating situation after 1877
- A summary of American race relations in 1900

Key dates

1820	Missouri compromise
1857	Dred Scott case
1862	Emancipation proclamation
1861–5	Civil War between Southern and Northern states
1865	13th Amendment abolished slavery 'Reconstruction Confederate style'
1866	Civil Rights Act Establishment of Ku Klux Klan
1867	Military Reconstruction Act
1868	14th Amendment said blacks were citizens
1870	15th Amendment said vote was not to be denied on account of race Force Acts
1872	Amnesty Act
1875	Civil Rights Act
1877	End of Reconstruction
1890s	Southern states (e.g. Mississippi in 1890) disqualified black voters
1894–8	North Carolina 'experiment in biracial democracy'
1896	Supreme Court (PLESSY v. FERGUSON) approved 'Jim Crow' segregation laws

Key question
How important were slavery and racism in causing the Civil War?

1 | Slavery and the Civil War

(a) Events leading up to the Civil War

From the early nineteenth century, as white Americans moved Westwards, new land was acquired and new states created. The question of whether to allow slavery in the new states was hotly debated. Many Northerners were opposed to the extension of slavery:

- Some had been turned against slavery by abolitionists.
- Some objected to the presence of non-whites in new territories to which Northerners might want to migrate.
- Some felt that cheap slave labour would make it harder for whites to gain employment.
- Some feared that more slave states would increase the political power of the South within the union.

In 1819 Missouri applied for admission as a state of the union. Northerners said no new state should be allowed in with slavery. Southerners were furious. Northerners appeared to be claiming moral superiority and threatening to decrease Southern influence in Congress. The answer was the Missouri Compromise (1820): Congress allowed Missouri in as a slave state but balanced it with the creation and admission of Maine as a free state.

North/South tensions over whether new territories should become slave states continued. The fact that some states were non-slave states led to the Dred Scott case in which the Supreme Court said that blacks were not US citizens and that Congress lacked the constitutional authority to exclude slavery from new states. This ruling antagonised Northerners.

(i) The Dred Scott case 1857

Dred Scott (c1800–58) was the slave of a Missouri army surgeon. When his master worked in the free state of Illinois and the free territory of Wisconsin, Scott went with him. After they returned to Missouri, the surgeon died (1843) and Scott became the slave of the surgeon's heir. In 1846, helped by anti-slavery lawyers, Scott went to court claiming freedom, as he had resided in a free state and free territory. This case went through the US court hierarchy, right to the US Supreme Court (see diagram opposite). A Missouri state court declared Scott to be free (1850) but the Missouri Supreme Court ruled (1852) against Scott. His lawyers took the case to the federal courts. In 1857, the Supreme Court ruled that black Americans were not citizens, so Scott could not go free. Scott's embarrassed owners freed him anyway. He worked as a hotel porter for 18 months, dying in 1858.

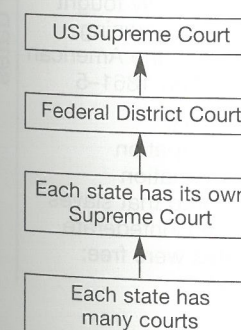
(ii) The outbreak of the Civil War

North/South tension was increased by extremism on both sides. The Republican Party opposed the extension of slavery. To Southerners, the election of the Republican President Abraham Lincoln seemed to threaten the existence of slavery. So, in

Key dates

Missouri
Compromise: 1820
The Dred Scott case:
1857

US Court Hierarchy



1860–1, the Southern states formed a new nation, the Confederate States of America (**the Confederacy**). When President Lincoln raised Northern armies to bring the South back into the United States, the Civil War began. After four years of bitter fighting, the North won.

(b) Was the Civil War a war to end slavery?

(i) Lincoln's views on slavery and race

Lincoln declared slavery 'the greatest wrong inflicted on any people', but had been willing to accept its continued existence in the South. He had spoken in favour of colonisation (see page 14) and the departure of all blacks. 'There must be the position of superior and inferior,' he said in a political debate in 1858. He favoured 'having the superior position assigned to the white race.' He told a black audience that, unalterably and undeniably, 'not a single man of your race is made the equal of a single man of ours.' 'It is', he said, 'better for us to be separated.'

Lincoln opposed the extension of slavery to new states, but was willing to protect it where it existed. He did not want to alienate his supporters in the slave states of Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri and Delaware, which fought on the Northern side. 'We did not go to war to put down slavery', he told Congress in December 1861. One infuriated abolitionist said Lincoln was 'a wet rag' on the slavery issue, 'halting, prevaricating [delaying], irresolute [indecisive], [and] weak'. In September 1862, however, Lincoln issued his Emancipation Proclamation.

(ii) The Emancipation Proclamation

Generations of black people felt grateful to the President who issued the **Emancipation** Proclamation. However, that proclamation was so cautious that Britain's Prime Minister described Lincoln's government as 'utterly powerless and contemptible'. The proclamation said slaves in Confederate States were free, but allowed slavery to continue in the slave-owning Union states and in any other state that had been occupied by Union armies or that would return to the Union before January 1863. In practice, the proclamation did not liberate a single slave, suggesting military rather than idealistic motivation. The London *Spectator* said the proclamation's philosophy was 'not that a being cannot justly own another, but that he cannot own him unless he is loyal to the United States'. So why had Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation?

- Some **Radical Republicans** believed slavery was immoral and made a mockery of the Declaration of Independence. Lincoln agreed with them.
- Most Republicans blamed slave owners for the Civil War, and many believed that if slavery was not abolished, North/South divisions could not be resolved and the bloody Civil War would have been pointless.

The Confederacy

When the Southern states left the Union, they became the Confederate States of America, known as the Confederacy for short. Supporters of the Confederacy were called Confederates.

Emancipation

In this context, freedom from slavery.

Radical

Republicans

Members of the Republican Party who were most enthusiastic about ending slavery.

Key question

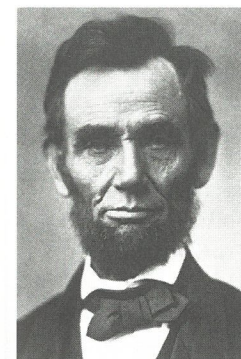
What motives lay behind Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation?

The North successfully fought the slave-owning South in the American Civil War: 1861–5

Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation declared that slaves in the Confederate States were free: 1862

Key terms

Key dates



Profile: Abraham Lincoln 1809–65

- 1809 – Born in a log cabin in Kentucky
- 1831 – Moved to Illinois; worked as store clerk, postmaster, surveyor
- 1834 – Elected to Illinois state legislature
- 1837 – Became a lawyer
- 1842 – Married Mary Todd, whose Kentucky family owned slaves
- 1846 – Elected to the House of Representatives
- 1856 – Joined new Republican Party. Increasingly focused on the slavery issue
- 1860 – Elected President in November
 - In December, the first Southern state seceded (withdrew) from the Union of the United States
- 1861 – The Confederate States of America established in February
 - Confederate forces fired on a federal fort in April. Lincoln declared the South in rebellion; issued a Call to Arms
- 1862 – Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation
- 1864 – Re-elected President
- 1865 – Confederacy surrendered. Lincoln assassinated by actor and Confederate sympathiser John Wilkes Booth

Lincoln is important in any history of American race relations because he began freeing the slaves with his Emancipation Proclamation of 1862. Subsequent generations of blacks revered him as the Great Emancipator, but historians argue over the relative importance of political calculation and genuine idealism in his actions, and over the extent of his racism. He was certainly vital to the defeat of the pro-slavery Confederacy, after which the South and race relations would never be the same again.

- It was thought that once Lincoln committed the North to emancipation, the Confederacy would find it impossible to receive help from foreign nations such as Britain any more.
- Army commanders had a problem with the half a million refugee slaves who came to Northern army camps situated in Southern states. By law, the slaves should have been returned to their masters, but that seemed inhumane (their masters would punish them) and unintelligent (their masters would use them to help beat the North). Evading the issue by calling slaves 'contraband of war' was tried in 1861–2, but Radical Republicans preferred outright condemnation of the institution of slavery, as that would give the North the moral high ground in the war.
- Military necessity was probably Lincoln's main motive. The North was struggling in 1862 (for example, the defeat at the Second Battle of Bull Run). This proclamation aimed to hamper the Southern war effort. In 1863, Lincoln wrote that

black soldiers were 'a resource which, if vigorously applied now, will soon close the contest. It works doubly, weakening the enemy and strengthening us.' Nearly a quarter of a million blacks served in the Northern army, entering it just when the North's forces were becoming dangerously depleted.

In January 1863, because the Confederacy continued to fight, Lincoln said that the freedom of slaves in rebellious states was now a Union war aim, 'an act of justice', not just 'military necessity'. Finally, after Lincoln had died, in 1865, the 13th **Amendment** abolished slavery throughout the United States.

For Lincoln then, as for most Northerners, the Civil War was a war not for racial equality but for preservation of the Union. Even so, for the electorate in the 1864 presidential election, one of the Democrats' most effective anti-Lincoln criticisms was that he was a 'Negro lover' plotting **miscegenation**. However, Lincoln's views were slightly modified during the war. Initially he had not wanted Indians and blacks in the Union army. However, impressed by the performance of black soldiers, he considered giving the vote to 'the very intelligent' and most gallant.

(c) The Northern view of black people during the Civil War

Although the extension of slavery was possibly the major cause of the Civil War (1861–5), that war was not fought to end slavery. Most Northerners thought they were fighting to save the Union (of the United States) and not to free Southern slaves. Northerners feared that freed slaves would migrate to the North and flood the labour market and cause racial tension.

There was considerable hostility towards blacks in the North before and during the Civil War. Some newspapers claimed that Lincoln got America into a Civil War to help undeserving blacks. When Southern slaves first rushed to join Union forces the latter were highly suspicious. White conservatives in the North disliked the idea of arming Northern blacks whom they considered inferior and unreliable. However, by 1865, 10 per cent of Union troops were black. They came from the South as well as the North. Nearly half a million Southern slaves joined the Union army.

Black troops, although brave and enthusiastic, were given the worst and most dangerous tasks. They were usually paid less than whites. In 1863 an Irish mob had attacked black soldiers in New York, but in 1865 black soldiers were given an affectionate farewell parade there. The *New York Times* thought that signalled 'a new epoch'. The new epoch, however, did not mean that blacks attained equality. Although amendments to the Constitution from 1865 to 1870 gave rights of citizenship to the ex-slaves, real equality was far away.

Amendment

Under the Constitution, Congress could add 'Amendments' (changes or new points) to the Constitution. Amendments needed ratification (approval) by 75 per cent of states.

Miscegenation

Sexual relationships between blacks and whites.

Key question

Were Northerners and Southerners equally racist?

13th Amendment ended slavery: 1865

Key terms

Key terms

Key question

What caused the US Civil War?

Progressive

A historian who is an advocate of political policies that bring about rapid progress or social reform.

Revisionist

A historian who changes a well-established interpretation.

Key date

(d) Key debate

Historians find it hard to agree on what the Civil War was all about and have debated the following questions:

Was slavery the cause of the Civil War? and what was Lincoln's position on race?

Abraham Lincoln (1861) said that 'all knew' that slavery 'was somehow the cause of the war'.

Jefferson Davis, President of the defeated Confederacy, put the blame for the Civil War on Northern violators of states' rights and rabble-rousing abolitionists (1881).

Arthur Schlesinger Sr (1922) said that the South only used the principle of states' rights as a protection and argument for the preservation of slavery, which he saw as the main cause of the conflict.

Karl Marx saw the war as a struggle between two economic systems, between free labour and slave labour. By the 1920s, **progressive** historians such as Charles Beard (1927) followed Marx in believing that history was the record of clashes between interest groups and classes. Beard saw the war as an economic struggle, between the industrial North and agricultural South – slavery was not central to Beard's interpretation.

In the 1930s, many **revisionist** historians such as James Randall blamed abolitionist fanatics and blundering politicians for the Civil War.

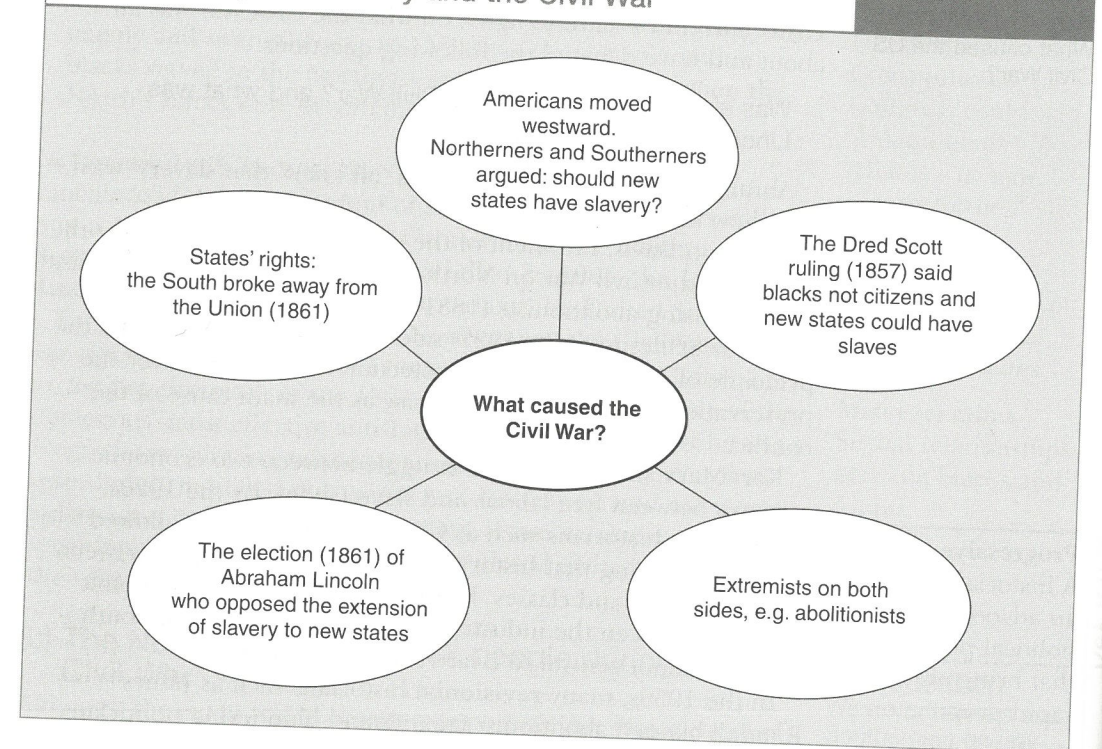
In 1945, Arthur Schlesinger Jr blamed the Civil War on slavery. That has been the dominant interpretation ever since, as with Eric Foner (1980).

Given that Lincoln's ideas on slavery and race seemed to change and develop in different circumstances, it is not surprising that historians disagree over his position on race. Kenneth Stampp (1957) pointed out the irony that the president who became known as the 'Great Emancipator' emancipated reluctantly. Stampp was influenced by James Randall, who had stressed Lincoln's caution on racial issues. According to Hugh Tulloch (1999), Lincoln personally 'loathed slavery', but the majority of the Northerners whom he represented believed in white supremacy, so Lincoln had to move cautiously on the slavery issue. Stephen Oates (1977) believed that under pressure of war Lincoln became increasingly convinced of the need for racial equality.

Some key books in the debate

Charles and Mary Beard, *The Rise of American Civilisation* (1927).
Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (1980).
Stephen Oates, *With Malice Towards None* (1977).
James Randall, *Civil War and Reconstruction* (1937).
Arthur Schlesinger Sr, *New Viewpoints in American History* (1922).
Arthur Schlesinger Jr, *The Age of Jackson* (1945).
Kenneth Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution* (1957).
Hugh Tulloch, *The Debate on the American Civil War Era* (Manchester, 1999).

Summary diagram: Slavery and the Civil War



2 | The Post-war South: Starting Reconstruction

(a) 'Reconstruction Confederate style'

In April 1865 the Confederate army surrendered at Appomattox. Within days, President Lincoln was assassinated. His successor President Andrew Johnson faced the problem of what to do with the defeated Southern states. These states, with their old political system obsolete, ruined economies and changed societies (blacks were now free), had to be reincorporated into the Union. The whole process of introducing and managing change was known as **Reconstruction** (the years 1865–77 are often called the 'Age of Reconstruction').

In 1865, many Southern blacks demanded equality, and particularly the right to vote. President Johnson, however, moved to conciliate the traditional white Southern élite. Once any Southern state accepted the end of slavery and rejected the Confederacy, it was readmitted into the Union. White officials who had served the Confederacy were now elected to govern the Southern states. The ex-Confederate states introduced 'Black Codes' to ensure that blacks did not gain economic, social, political or legal equality. This was 'Reconstruction Confederate style'.

Key questions

How was the defeated South treated during Reconstruction?

What did President Johnson do with the defeated South in 1865?

Reconstruction Confederate style: 1865

Reconstruction

The process of rebuilding and reforming the 11 ex-Confederate states and restoring them to the Union.