Chapter 15: A War for Union and Emancipation, 1861-1865

Overview
Southerners may have talked about “states’ rights” or “property rights” but they were going to war to preserve the political economy of slavery. Northerners made it clear that they were not going to war to abolish slavery. President Lincoln claimed to be fighting to restore the Union. Both sides began to mobilize men and supplies to the battlefield by the summer of 1861. In 1862, Lincoln adopted the radical Republican position that emancipation was a military necessity. Eventually Lincoln justified the war in abolitionist terms. After the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect (January 1863) the war lasted for almost two more years and public discontent with the war increased. For northerners and southerners alike, the struggle on the home front was intensifying. Despite setbacks, the Confederate Army persisted and the last year of the war was by far the most brutal.

Key Topics
- The shift from limited to “hard” war
- The comparative military advantages and disadvantages of the North and the South
- Social and political divisions in the Confederacy
- The role of slaves in the process of Emancipation

Review Questions
- What were the political differences between the Union and the Confederacy?
- Define “hard war” and trace its development from 1861 to 1865.
- What caused the North to shift to a policy of Emancipation?
- What were the differences between northern and southern military strategies?
- What were the major consequences of the Civil War?
- Compare the effects of social divisions on the northern and southern war efforts.

Annotated chapter outline

Edmund Ruffin: Edmund Ruffin's activities from 1859 to 1865 personalize the events of the Civil War. For Ruffin this war was not some political abstraction. Ruffin's way of life and his cultural traditions were at stake.

From Union to Emancipation: Southerners may have talked about “states’ rights” or “property rights” but they were going to war to preserve the political economy of slavery. Northerners made it clear that they were not going to war to abolish slavery. President Lincoln claimed to be fighting to restore the Union.

- Responding to Lincoln’s election, the legislators in South Carolina called into session a secession congress, and on December 20, 1860, they withdrew from the Union. Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas followed suit almost immediately. Following a skirmish in April at Fort Sumter, South Carolina, the second wave of secessions began.
- The Civil War soon became a “hard war” with unconditional surrender the only acceptable resolution. Both sides had to get their men in place, officers ready, and equipment in the hands of the troops.
- In the South, an old fear, that of a race war, was given new life. But for the South's slaves, freedom was the buzzword and runaway slaves found sanctuary with Union troops.
- The southern defeat of Union troops at Manassas Junction, Virginia, caused Northerners to reevaluate their war aims. Radical Republicans began to articulate their beliefs that emancipation was a military necessity and when Lincoln signed the Confiscation Act, the shift in war aims was clear. The Republicans were also mindful that keeping England and France from recognizing the Confederate States of America was a primary war aim as well.
Mobilizing for War: Both sides began to mobilize men and supplies to the battlefield by the summer of 1861. Feeding, clothing, and arming tens of thousands was a monumental problem. Paying for the expense was a staggering proposition—one that tested the competing political economies of North and South.

- Even though the Confederate States of America modeled its constitution after that of the United States, except for a constitutional protection of slavery, the Confederacy was not a very sophisticated government.
- The southern military advantage was psychological and very powerful. They were fighting to defend their land, their homes, and their families. The Union army, on the other hand, was a “foreign” army that had to contend with difficult problems of re-supply and re-provisioning its troops.
- Union and Confederate soldiers fought for a patriotic cause. Each group defined patriotism according to its own perspective. Southerners defined patriotism in terms of liberty and independence; Northerners defined it in terms of freedom.

The Civil War becomes a Social Revolution: In 1862, Lincoln adopted the radical Republican position that emancipation was a military necessity. Eventually Lincoln justified the war in abolitionist terms.

- Both the Confederate and Union troops focused their attention on Virginia. Both forces had reached something of a stalemate in the autumn of 1862.
- Lincoln searched for something to break the stalemate and convince European powers to side with the Union. He decided to issue an Emancipation Proclamation. The Emancipation Proclamation transformed the Civil War into a social revolution, especially with the enlistment of African Americans in the military. It recognized a reality: too many slaves had run away to sanctuary behind Union lines to deny them their freedom.
- Black men in the uniform of the Union army enraged white southerners and exhilarated free blacks and slaves and they were proof that the Civil War had become a social revolution.

The War at Home: After the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect (January 1863) the war lasted for almost two more years and public discontent with the war increased. For northerners and southerners alike, the struggle on the home front intensified.

- Casualties in unprecedented numbers challenged the primitive medical profession and each side was forced to contend with inept military leadership.
- Union military defeats fueled the antiwar sentiment. So, too, did northern opposition to the emancipation policy especially from northern democrats who had always favored some sort of compromise with the South.
- The Union victory at the battle of Gettysburg and the surrender of Vicksburg were the two greatest Union victories of the war. Lincoln’s speech at the Gettysburg battlefield profoundly justified the Union efforts in terms of democracy and human equality. With the Gettysburg address, Lincoln elevated the meaning of the war. Antiwar sentiment in the North subsided; in the south it exploded.

The War Comes to a Bloody End: Despite setbacks, the Confederate Army persisted and the last year of the war was by far the most brutal.

- When Union troops extended their control of Tennessee and the Confederate troops retreated into Georgia it looked as if the Union might prevail.
- As 1864 ended, President Lincoln was reelected to a second term and the Union had broken the Confederates’ hold on Georgia and the Shenandoah Valley. All Confederate attempts at a negotiated peace were rejected.
- With the Confederate defeat in Georgia, the Union troops moved north and swept through South Carolina, home of secession on their way to Virginia. The Confederates were defeated. Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox Courthouse and the war was over.
What did the Civil War mean? The northern political economy of free labor prevailed and the political economy of slavery destroyed. Much of the South lay in ruins and one quarter of the white male population lay dead. On the other hand the war energized the North’s economy. The national government was stronger than the state governments and there was no question of the supremacy and indivisibility of the nation. But the dramatic change was the emancipation of more than four million African Americans -- a change made constitutional in the Thirteenth Amendment.

Conclusion: On April 14, 1865, Abraham Lincoln was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth. At the time he died there was no plan in place for the reconstruction of the Union.

Analytical reading These questions refer to the passage “Emancipation as a Military Necessity” on pages 356-357.
1. According to Lincoln, why was emancipation an inescapable reality?
2. Why did he believe it to be a military necessity?

Lecture Strategies
The chapter on the Civil War, ironically, the destiny of the semester or so it seems, enables you to bring to conclusion the threads you have discussed all semester: you can compare northern and southern economic and logistical reserves, strategy, leadership (both military and political), international affairs, social revolutionary change, and so on. The consequences of this war are also compelling topics. Ask your students to consider whether the war solved more problems than it created. Ask your students to consider the importance of this war to our present society. It seems that the Civil War has a timelessness that few other wars have.

Supplements: Prentice Hall has developed a number of supplements that can enhance your lectures as well as your students’ comprehension and performance.

Penguin Classics See Olaudah Equiano, The Interesting Narrative and other Writings, edited with an introduction and notes by Vincent Carretta, New York: Penguin Books, 1995. Published in 1789, Equiano's account is among the earliest autobiographical accounts of the colonial slave trade and the effects on its victims. Equiano's slavery spans the period from about 1755 to 1766 but it is also his life story that is interesting. See also Henry Louis Gates, Jr., The Classic Slave Narratives, edited with an introduction by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: A Mentor Book, 1987. The first-hand stories of Olaudah Equiano, Mary Prince, Frederick Douglass, and Harriet Jacobs introduce the reader to slavery from the inside (and over the period of American slavery) and more importantly what it means to be free. See also Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave Written by Himself, with an introduction by Peter J. Gomes. New York: A Signet Classic, 1997.


In Immigrant Voices: Twenty-four Narratives on Becoming an American, edited by Gordon Hunter, New York: A Signet Classic, 1999, Hunter has chosen twenty-four narratives of immigrants to tell the stories of immigrants’ transformations to Americans. Added to the predominantly European immigrant stories in this late nineteenth century section of the text are Joseph Pickering, “Inquiries of an Emigrant,” which features an excerpt from the 1831 guidebook for immigrants; Rebecca Burlend, “A True Picture of Emigration” written in 1846 is the story of her experiences; Anna Howard Shaw, “Story of a Pioneer” is the story of her adjustment to life in the United States in the 1880s. She was a physician and suffragette.

Lincoln's second inaugural address are among the works collected here along with a host of letters and notes.

**American Stories: Biographies in United States History** by Katheryn A. Abbott and Patricia Hagler Minter. See Chapter 14, The Civil War, 1861-1865, for biographical sketches of Judah Benjamin and Louisa Schuyler.

**Documents Collection** see **Part Fifteen: The Civil War**

*Jefferson Davis, Address to the Provisional Congress of the Confederate States of America 1861*

*The “Cornerstone Speech” 1861*

*Mary Boykin Chesnut, A Confederate Lady’s Diary 1861*

*Why They Fought 1861*

*A Confederate General Assesses First Bull Run 1861*

*Charles Harvey Brewster, Three Letters from the Civil War Front 1862*

*Clara Barton, Medical Life at the Battlefield 1862*

*James Henry Gooding, Letter to President Lincoln 1863*

*Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address 1863*

*John Dooley, Passages from a Journal 1863*

*A Firsthand Account of the New York Draft Riots 1863*

*Susie King Taylor, Reminiscences of an Army Laundress 1802*

*General William Tecumseh Sherman on War 1864*

The documents of particular relevance to this chapter are identified with an asterisk, although previous and subsequent parts have relevant documents.