CHAPTER 15

SECESSION AND THE CIVIL WAR

SUMMARY
Lincoln effectively guided the Union through the Civil War by inspiring Northerners with his conviction that the struggle would be won. The war tested the American ideal of democracy and was a defense of political liberalism at a time when much of Europe had rejected it. It was also the first tentative step toward racial equality.

The Storm Gathers
After Lincoln’s election in 1860, seven southern states seceded. Although in hindsight, the war seems inevitable, to most Americans at the time it was not. Armed conflict did not erupt until after a compromise effort had failed, shots were fired at Fort Sumter, and the North resolved to fight to preserve the Union.

The Deep South Secedes
With the election of Lincoln, the seven states of the Deep South seceded from the Union to better secure slavery. The process was not without debate, however. Southerners were divided over the process of secession as well as the need for it. South Carolina’s unilateral move forced the issue, however, and during February 1861, the seceded states met and formed the provisional government of the Confederate States of America that looked remarkably like the Union before the rise of the Republicans and the abolitionists.

The Failure of Compromise
When northern and border state moderates attempted a reconciliation of the sections, Lincoln led the Republicans in rejecting the proposed compromise because it would have permitted the spread of slavery to the Southwest. Lincoln also believed that compromise would have negated the platform that he had run and that a majority of Americans had voted for in the election of 1860. Even if the compromise had passed, there is no evidence that the secessionists would have been satisfied with it.

And the War Came
When crisis arose at Fort Sumter, Lincoln carefully avoided firing the first shot by shifting the burden of war to the South Carolinians and Jefferson Davis. On 13 April 1861, after forty hours of canon bombardment, the fort surrendered, marking the beginning of the Civil War. The firing on Fort Sumter served to rally the North behind Lincoln and his call for troops. The call for troops prompted a second wave of secession conventions in the border South states with varying results.

Adjusting to Total War
The northern war aim, to force the South physically back into the Union, required a “total war” of societies and economies as well as armies. This formidable task required all of
the North’s demographic and economic advantages. It was a long war because the South resisted tenaciously.

**Prospects, Plans, and Expectations**
At the outset of the war, the North benefited from greater resources of manpower, money, and manufacturing, but the South possessed some advantages, as well including southern optimism about independence and dedication to protecting their homes and way of life. The South’s strategy of waging an “offensive defense” was also an advantage at first, though ultimately the North’s anaconda plan was more effective.

**Mobilizing the Home Fronts**
Both the North and the South faced enormous difficulties in raising, equipping, and financing armies on such a large scale. The economies and societies of both the Union and the Confederacy had to make massive adjustments for the war: adjustments that the North was better able to make.

**Political Leadership: Northern Success and Southern Failure**
Lincoln exercised extraordinary powers, expanding the authority of the Presidency to an unprecedented extent. Jefferson Davis, somewhat limited by traditional southern states’ rights rhetoric, took a more narrow—and less successful—view of his role as Confederate president. Additionally, Davis focused his attention almost exclusively on waging the war, often neglecting very real problems on his home front.

**Early Campaigns and Battles**
Having problems with finding a “his general,” the northern war effort stalled in the East, where Lee turned back successive attempts to capture Richmond. In the West, however, the Union took much of the Mississippi Valley and established its naval supremacy within the first two years. Some of the early battles of the war were the bloodiest ever fought, revealing that this would not be a brief war.

**The Diplomatic Struggle**
While the early battles of the war were raging, the South tried and failed to use its cotton to attract the substantial European support that would be necessary if the South was to continue to hold out against the more powerful North. France and England feared a war against the North, whose wheat they relied upon, more than they needed the South’s cotton.

**Fight to the Finish**
In the final two and one-half years of the war, the North adopted increasingly extreme war measures to overcome determined southern resistance on the battlefield and on the home front.

**The Coming of Emancipation**
Though Lincoln supported freedom for Blacks, he moved slowly make emancipation of the slaves a war aim. When Lincoln did issue the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, his
motivations were more military, political, and diplomatic than moral. Though the Emancipation Proclamation only freed slaves in the southern states still at war with the Union, it did firmly commit the Union to Black freedom as a war aim and sped up the breakdown of slavery as a labor system by authorizing the use of Black troops.

**African Americans and the War**
Almost 200,000 African Americans, mostly freedmen, served in the Union armies as soldiers. Though they faced discrimination and segregation, they contributed significantly to the northern victory, and their heroism contributed to the northern commitment to emancipation and the war effort as a whole.

**The Tide Turns**
By 1863, the South’s economy and society were demoralized and in disarray. At the same time, its diplomacy had collapsed; and its soldiers were weary. As civilian criticism on the home front increased, so too did the rate of desertion. In the North, too, morale was low, and war weariness was growing. Northern resentment toward the Emancipation Proclamation and the new policy of conscription reached an apex with the New York City draft riots, while in politics, the Democrats, or Copperheads, gained electoral ground. The Union’s capture of Vicksburg, the last Confederate stronghold on the Mississippi River, along with victory at Gettysburg turned the tide of the war solidly in the Union’s favor, despite General Meade’s failure to destroy Lee’s army.

**Last Stages of the Conflict**
With the promotion of Grant to general in chief in the East, Lincoln had found his general. Though at first unsuccessful against Lee, Grant changed the pattern of warfare by following up bloody assaults with more bloody assaults, eventually laying siege to a bedraggled and exhausted southern army at Petersburg. At the same time, General Sherman was marching through the South, taking the war home to the southern people. These Union military successes assured Lincoln’s reelection in 1864, and in April 1865, led to a Confederate surrender.

**Effects of the War**
Four years of struggle had changed the status of women, African Americans, and working people. Most clearly, the war had broadened federal powers, channeling them into a new corporate, industrial economy. The war effort also cemented the idea that the federal government was supreme over the states, cost billions of dollars, and claimed the lives of more than 600,000 soldiers.
**Conclusion: An Organizational Revolution**

The most pervasive change in northern society engendered by the war was an organizational revolution out of which many of the huge corporations that colored the postwar period were born. Philanthropy was also affected by this revolution. The most notable example being the creation of the Sanitary Commission early in the war. In general, the war encouraged a shift away from traditional individualism toward social discipline and collective action. In many ways, the Union’s ability to organize, mobilize, and “modernize” won the war.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

After mastering this chapter, you should be able to

1. Explain why Lincoln was so effective as the Union’s wartime leader and compare him to Jefferson Davis.

2. Trace the development of southern secession from Lincoln’s election through the decision of the upper South to join the Confederacy including the establishment of the Confederacy.

3. Evaluate the Republican decision to reject the Crittenden compromise plan.

4. Describe the development of the North’s resolve to fight, if necessary, to defeat secession.

5. Analyze the opposing strategies of the Civil War and the advantages of each side at the outset of the conflict.

6. Define the concept of “total war,” then explain its effect on the efforts of the North and the South to mobilize their home fronts for the war effort.

7. Describe the experience of soldiering in the Civil War.

8. Describe the relative success of the Union and Confederate armies in the early campaigns in the eastern theater of war.

9. Describe the relative success of the Union and Confederate armies in the western theater of war.

10. Explain why “King Cotton Diplomacy” failed.

11. Trace and explain Lincoln’s gradual movement toward the emancipation of the slaves.
12. Describe the role played by African-American troops in the Union armed force during the Civil War.

13. List and describe the principal social and economic changes that accompanied the Civil War.

14. Describe the experience of Northern and Southern women during the war.

15. Describe the lasting effects of the Civil War on the nation.

GLOSSARY

To build your social science vocabulary, familiarize yourself with the following terms:

1. **unilateral** involving only one of two or more sides. "... South Carolina's unilateral action set a precedent ..."

2. **reactionary** favoring movement toward political and social conservatism. "... the goal of the new converts ... was not to establish a slave holders' reactionary utopia."

3. **martial law** military law over a civilian population, usually for a temporary emergency. "... ruthless methods ... included the use of a martial law ..."

4. **demographic** related to the scientific study of the statistics of human population. "The South had some advantages...counterbalancing the North’s demographic ... superiority."

5. **blockade** the closing of passage to and from an area. "Lincoln also attached great importance to the coastal blockade ..."

6. **commissary** a department that supplies provisions and equipment. "... the Confederate commissary resorted to the impressment of ... produce ..."

7. **writ of habeas corpus** a judicial order requiring a government to present an individual to a court for explanation of his detention. "... suspended the writ of habeas corpus ...

8. **belligerency** a state of being at war. "The Confederate commissioners ... succeeded in gaining recognition of southern 'belligerency' ...

9. **privateers** privately owned ships commissioned by a government to fight an enemy. "... it permitted the South to ... outfit privateers in neutral ports."
10. **mediation** the process of acting as an intermediary between two parties. ". . . the British would cosponsor his plan to offer European mediation of the American conflict . . ."

11. **resolution** the adoption by vote of an assembly’s expression of will or opinion. "Congress voted to pass the resolution . . ."

12. **emancipation** the act or process of freeing, as from slavery. " . . . he was reluctant to commit his administration to a policy of immediate emancipation."

13. **contraband** illegal trade or goods. " . . . in accordance with the theory that they were contraband of war . . ."

14. **conscription** drafting for military service. "The Enrollment Act . . . provided for outright conscription . . ."

15. **cease-fire** an agreement to halt military hostilities. “Their platform appealed to war weariness by calling for a cease-fire . . .”

**IDENTIFICATION**

Briefly identify the meaning and significance of the following terms:

1. Montgomery Convention________________________________________________________

2. Crittenden Plan______________________________________________________________

3. Fort Sumter______________________________________________________________

4. “Total War”_______________________________________________________________

5. New York City draft riots__________________________________________________

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6. Sanitary Commission

7. Robert E. Lee

8. Ulysses S. Grant

9. “King Cotton Diplomacy”

10. Emancipation Proclamation

MATCHING

A. Match the following ships with the appropriate description.

___ 1. Virginia  a. Union ship that resupplied Fort Sumter
___ 2. Merrimack  b. Confederate ironclad destroyed near Hampton Roads, Virginia
___ 3. Monitor  c. armored Union gun ship that sank Confederate ironclad vessel
___ 4. Alabama  d. U.S. ship taken, renamed, and armored by the Confederacy
___ 5. Trent  e. British steamer boarded by U.S. warship

f. Confederate privateer built in a British shipyard
B. Match the following battles with the appropriate description.

1. Antietam
   a. Grant's 1863 victory took control of the Mississippi for the Union

2. Vicksburg
   b. Grant's 1864-1865 siege took this rail center near Richmond

3. Gettysburg
   c. Sherman's 1864 victory occupied the “hub of the Deep South”

4. Petersburg
   d. Lee's 1862 invasion of Maryland stopped here

5. Atlanta
   e. Lee's 1863 victory over Hooker cost him the life of one of his best generals
   f. Lee's 1863 loss during invasion of the North helped “turn the tide” of the war

COMPLETION

Answer the question or complete the statement by filling in the blanks with the correct word or words.

1. Southerners who supported secession by individual states were opposed by ________________, who argued that their states should act together rather than singly.

2. Fort Sumter was located in the harbor of ________________.

3. The four border states that remained in the Union were ________________, ________________, and ________________.

4. General Winfield Scott recommended squeezing the South into submission with an ________________.

5. Politicians who called for restoration of the Union by negotiation rather than war were called ________________.

6. Union naval forces that captured New Orleans were led by Flag Officer ________________.
7. Lincoln replaced _______________________ because he thought the general was suffering from a case of “the slows.”

8. The Union captured, held, and then released two Confederate envoys to Britain; they were __________________________and ___________________________.

9. An American ambassador to Britain helped prevent the recognition of the Confederacy; he was ___________________________.

10. In 1864, the Democrats nominated ________________________________.

TRUE/FALSE

Mark the following statements either T (True) or F (False).

___ 1. The southern states’ righters produced a Confederate constitution strikingly different from that of the United States.

___ 2. Conflicting views on slavery determined the final division of states into Union and Confederate.

___ 3. Under the pressure of Union blockade, the Confederacy sponsored a program that produced enough munitions to supply southern troops throughout the war.

___ 4. Both the North and the South resorted to heavy taxation to maintain their fiscal integrity in spite of the financial demands of the war.

___ 5. When South Carolina seceded, southern “cooperationists” proposed that all southern states cooperate by immediately seceding from the Union.

___ 6. Immediately after the secession of South Carolina, northern business united behind the Union war effort.

___ 7. States of the upper South had to decide on secession when Lincoln asked them for troops to help “coerce” the southern states.

___ 8. A Union conscription law provoked the worst domestic disturbance in our history when a New York antidraft riot led to at least 120 deaths.

___ 9. The Civil War improved the economic situation of working Americans by providing high wages.

___ 10. While President Buchanan theoretically opposed the right of secession, he did little to oppose it in fact.
MULTIPLE CHOICE

Circle the one alternative that best completes the statement or answers the question.

1. The secession movement was dominated by
   a. hill country White supremacists who feared Black social competition.
   b. southern radical nationalists who hoped to establish a plantation “utopia.”
   c. southern moderates intent on securing slavery from northern political interference and federal control.
   d. moderates from the Upper South who gave up on the Union with the election of Lincoln in 1860.

2. The Republicans rejected the Crittenden plan for compromise because they
   a. wanted to defeat the South militarily.
   b. hoped to demoralize southern moderates.
   c. feared driving southern extremists to war.
   d. it would have allowed slavery into the Southwest and undermined the principle of majority rule.

3. The firing on Fort Sumter
   a. brought European aid for the South.
   b. demonstrated Union naval power.
   c. unified northern opinion for defense of the Union.
   d. demonstrated the Union's will to fight.

4. Which was not an advantage enjoyed by the North at the beginning of the war?
   a. a better transportation system
   b. greater industrial production
   c. a larger population
   d. better military leadership

5. Which of the following best describes Lincoln’s military strategy?
   a. the “anaconda” policy of starving the South into submission by cutting off its supplies of commodities and food
   b. winning the war with a quick strike at the Confederate capital
   c. an attempt to capture control of the Mississippi Valley
   d. a two-front policy keeping the pressure on Richmond while also advancing in the Mississippi Valley

6. During the Civil War, the South suffered shortages in all of the following except
   a. cash and other liquid assets.
   b. transportation facilities.
   c. foodstuffs.
   d. munitions.
7. The superior training and supply of Northern troops was offset by
   a. the large number of seasoned troops in Confederate ranks.
   b. the superior fighting ability of Southern troops.
   c. the large number of fresh troops in the Confederate ranks.
   d. all of the above

8. Which best describes Jefferson Davis's major weaknesses as a war leader?
   a. inability to deal with home-front problems
   b. excessive tact in dealing with field commanders
   c. abusive exercise of Confederate government power
   d. obsession with popular political support

9. Why did the North have so little success in its eastern military campaigns during the early part of the war?
   a. Lincoln's constant meddling in the details of battle
   b. the Union's constant shortage of munitions and other essential supplies
   c. Winfield Scott's overly aggressive campaign to capture Richmond
   d. George McClellan's overly cautious approach in the campaign to capture Richmond

10. "King Cotton Diplomacy" failed because
    a. Britain started growing its own cotton.
    b. British mill workers willingly suffered to help destroy slavery.
    c. the textile industry no longer used much cotton.
    d. the British economy gained more than it lost from neutrality.

11. Why was Lincoln so reluctant to make immediate freedom for the slaves a Union war aim?
    a. He preferred gradual and compensated emancipation.
    b. He feared alienating border-state Unionists.
    c. He knew many northerners were racially prejudiced.
    d. all of the above

12. Which of the following best describes Ulysses S. Grant’s approach in his campaign against Robert E. Lee?
    a. forcing Lee to take the offensive so Grant could capitalize on his superior defensive talents
    b. keeping the pressure on Lee with constant assault or siege
    c. taking Richmond in a single overpowering strike against Lee
    d. holding Lee in northern Virginia while William T. Sherman marched from Georgia to Richmond
13. Which of the following Civil War battles and campaigns are in the correct chronological order?
   a. Peninsula campaign, Vicksburg and Gettysburg, the siege of Petersburg
   b. Vicksburg and Gettysburg, Peninsula campaign, siege of Petersburg
   c. the siege of Petersburg, Vicksburg and Gettysburg, Peninsula campaign
   d. None of the above

14. Civil War Republicans enacted all of the following policies except
   a. a low tariff for free trade.
   b. free land with a homestead act.
   c. land grants for railroad construction.
   d. a national banking system with standardized currency.

15. Which of the following was not an effect of the Civil War?
   a. broadening "the woman's sphere"
   b. broadening the scope of federal power
   c. improving the industrial workers' standard of living
   d. enacting government support for business and agriculture

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

To check your understanding of the key issues of this period, solve the following problems:

1. Considering that the South faced such a formidable military task in a war with the North, why did they secede?

2. Could the Southerners have better defended their interests through a political struggle within the Union, rather than a military struggle outside the Union?

3. Could the South have won the Civil War, or was its defeat inevitable?

4. Discuss the social and economic effects of the “total war” on the North and South.

5. Do American social and ethnic minorities make significant gains during our wars? During the Civil War? Do women?
Critical Thinking Exercise

Using material in Chapter 15 of the text and the Primary Sources provided below, please answer the questions that follow the reading selections.

Clara Barton, “Medical Life at the Battlefield”
Lucy Breckinridge, “Diary”

Clara Barton, Medical Life at the Battlefield (1862)

I was strong and thought I might go to the rescue of the men who fell. . . . What could I do but go with them, or work for them and my country? The patriot blood of my father was warm in my veins. The country which he had fought for, I might at least work for.

But I struggled long and hard with my sense of propriety—with the appalling fact that I was only a woman whispering in one ear, and thundering in the other the groans of suffering men dying like dogs—unfed and unsheltered, for the life of every institution which had protected and educated me!

I said that I struggled with my sense of propriety and I say it with humiliation and shame. I am ashamed that I thought of such a thing.

When our armies fought on Cedar Mountain, I broke the shackles and went to the field. . . . Five days and nights with three hours sleep—a narrow escape from capture—and some days of getting the wounded into hospitals at Washington, brought Saturday, August 30. And if you chance to feel, that the positions I occupied were rough and unseemly for a woman—I can only reply that they were rough and unseemly for men. But under all, lay the life of the nation. I had inherited the rich blessing of health and strength of constitution—such as are seldom given to woman—and I felt that some return was due from me and that I ought to be there.

. . . . Our coaches were not elegant or commodious; they had no seats, no platforms, no steps, a slide door on the side the only entrance, and this higher than my head. For my man attaining my elevated position, I must beg of you to draw on your imaginations and spare me the labor of reproducing the boxes, boards, and rails, which in those days, seemed to help me up and down the world. We did not criticize the unsightly helpers and were thankful that the stiff springs did not quite jostle us out. This need not be limited to this particular trip or train, but will for all that I have known in Army life. This is the kind of conveyance which your tons of generous gifts have reached the field with the freights. These trains through day and night, sunshine and heat and cold, have thundered over heights, across plains, the ravines, and over hastily built army bridges 90 feet across the stream beneath.

At 10 o’clock Sunday (August 31) our train drew up at Fairfax Station. The ground, for acres, was a thinly wooded slope—and among the trees on the leaves and grass, were laid the wounded who pouring in by scores of wagon loads, as picked up on the field the flag of truce. All day they came and the whole hillside was red. Bales of hay were broken open and scattered over the ground littering of cattle, and the sore, famishing men were laid upon it.

And when the night shut in, in the mist and darkness about us, we knew that standing apart from the world of anxious hearts, throbbing over the whole country, we were a little band of almost empty handed workers literally by ourselves in the wild woods of Virginia, with 3,000 suffering men crowded upon the few acres within our reach.

After gathering up every available implement or convenience for our work, our domestic inventory stood 2 water buckets, 5 tin cups, 1 camp kettle, 1 stew pan, 2 lanterns, 4 bread knives, 3 plates, and a 2-quart tin dish, and 3,000 guest to serve.

You will perceive by this, that I had not yet learned to equip myself, for I was no Pallas, ready armed, but grew into my work by hard thinking and sad experience. It may serve to relieve your apprehension for the future of my labors if I assure you that I was never caught so again.

But the most fearful scene was reserved for the night. I have said that the ground was littered with dry hay and that we had only two lanterns, but there were plenty of candles. The wounded were laid so close that it was impossible to move about in the dark. The slightest misstep brought a torrent of groans from some poor mangled fellow in your path.

Consequently here were seen persons of all grades from the careful man of God who walked with a prayer upon his lips to the careless driver hunting for his lost whip—each wandering about among this hay with an open flaming candle in his hands.

The slightest accident, the mere dropping of a light could have enveloped in flames this whole mass of helpless men.

How we watched and pleaded and cautioned as we worked and wept that night! How we put socks and slippers upon their cold feet, wrapped your blankets and quilts about them, and when we no longer these to give, how we covered them in the hay and left them to their rest! . . .
The slight, naked chest of a fair-haired lad caught my eye, dropping down beside him, I bent low to draw the remnant of his blouse about him, when with a quick cry he threw his left arm across my neck and, burying his face in the folds of my dress, wept like a child at his mother's knee. I took his head in my hands and held it until great burst of grief passed away. "And do you know me?" he asked at length, "I am Charley Hamilton, we used to carry your satchel home from school!" My faithful pupil, poor Charley. That mangled right hand would never carry a satchel again.

About three o'clock in the morning I observed a surgeon with a little flickering candle in hand approaching me with cautious step up in the wood. "Lady," he said as he drew near, "will you go with me? Out on the hills is a poor distressed lad, mortally wounded, and dying. His piteous cries for his sister have touched all our hearts none of us can relieve him but rather seem to distress him by presence."

By this time I was following him back over the bloody track, with great beseeching eyes of anguish on every side looking up into our faces, saying so plainly, "Don't step on us."

Lucy Breckinridge, Diary (1862)

Sunday, August 12th, 1862

It rained so steadily today that we could not go to church. I sat all the morning in the library with George talking about "reds" and marriages. He said very earnestly, "Well, Luce, take my advice and do not get married until the war is over. There are many reasons why you should not; for instance, you might be a widow in a short time." Then, after thinking a few minutes, it seemed to strike him that it would not be such a bad thing to be a pretty young widow. He has an idea that I am engaged, and seems to take a great deal more interest in me; treats me with marked respect and unwonted tenderness. He is a funny boy and a very sweet one. I never loved him so much before, because all my special love was given to John [Lucy’s brother]. He and I were so nearly the same age, and never were separated in any way until the last two or three years. I loved him better than anyone on earth. Though we were playmates from our babyhood, I do not ever remember having been angry with John. I was more intimate with him and stayed with him more than I did with Eliza [Lucy’s sister]. We never formed a plan for the future in which we were not connected. Everything seems changed to me since he died. He was the noblest of us all, and all his life had been the favorite with his brothers and sisters. "God takes our dearest even so; the reason why we cannot know; helpless he leaves us crushed with woe."

Eliza and Emma went over to the graveyard and put up a white cross with John’s name on it and the date of the Battle of Seven Pines with the inscription, "He hath entered into peace," and put garlands of ivy on it. It is only a temporary mark for the grave. All of his brothers and sisters wish to raise a monument to his memory, the first of our band who has been taken from us. What a sad summer this has been.

1. Explain the failure the North and South to reach a compromise that would have prevented war.
2. Describe, explain, and evaluate the employment of “total war.”
3. Describe both of the battlefield work of Clara Barton and reaction to the carnage.
4. Describe and explain the wartime difficulties faced by Lucy Breckinridge.
5. Are your answers to questions 3 and 4 above related to that of question 2? If so, how?