



SECTION 3

Life During Wartime

MAIN IDEA

The Civil War brought about dramatic social and economic changes in American society.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The expansion of roles for African Americans and women set the stage for later equalities of opportunity.

Terms & Names

- Fort Pillow
- Clara Barton
- income tax
- Andersonville

Mary Chesnut, a well-born Southerner whose husband served in the Confederate government, kept a diary describing key war events, such as the attack on Fort Sumter. Her diary paints a vivid picture as well of the marriages and flirtations, hospital work, and dinner parties that comprised daily life in the South.

In 1864, Chesnut found that her social standing could no longer protect her from the economic effects of the war.

A PERSONAL VOICE MARY CHESNUT

“September 19th . . . My pink silk dress I have sold for six hundred dollars, to be paid in installments, two hundred a month for three months. And I sell my eggs and butter from home for two hundred dollars a month. Does it not sound well—four hundred dollars a month, regularly? In what? ‘In Confederate money.’ Hélas! [Alas!]”

—quoted in *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*

The “Confederate money” Chesnut received was almost worthless. Inflation, or a sharp increase in the cost of living, had devalued Confederate currency to such an extent that \$400 was worth only a dollar or two compared to prewar currency. Not all the effects of the Civil War were economic—the war also caused profound social changes.



VIDEO

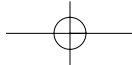
**WAR OUTSIDE
MY WINDOW**
Mary Chesnut’s
Diary of the
Civil War

African Americans Fight for Freedom

African Americans played an important role in the struggle to end slavery. Some served as soldiers, while others took action away from the battlefield.

AFRICAN-AMERICAN SOLDIERS When the Civil War started, it was a white man’s war. Neither the Union nor the Confederacy officially accepted African Americans as soldiers.

In 1862, Congress passed a law allowing African Americans to serve in the military. It was only after the Emancipation Proclamation was decreed, however,



Battery A of the 2nd United States Colored Artillery at gun drill

that large-scale enlistment occurred. Although African Americans made up only 1 percent of the North’s population, by war’s end nearly 10 percent of the Union army was African American. The majority were former slaves from Virginia and other slave states, both Confederate and Union.

Although accepted as soldiers, African Americans suffered discrimination. They served in separate regiments commanded by white officers. Usually African Americans could not rise above the rank of captain—although Alexander T.

Augustana, a surgeon, did attain the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. White privates earned \$13 a month, plus a \$3.50 clothing allowance. Black privates earned only \$10 a month, with no clothing allowance. Blacks protested, and several regiments served without pay for months rather than accept the lesser amount. Congress finally equalized the pay of white and African-American soldiers in 1864.

The mortality rate for African-American soldiers was higher than that for white soldiers, primarily because many African Americans were assigned to labor duty in the garrisons, where they were likely to catch typhoid, pneumonia, malaria, or some other deadly disease. Then, too, the Confederacy would not treat captured African-American soldiers as prisoners of war. Many were executed on the spot, and those who were not killed were returned to slavery. A particularly gruesome massacre occurred at **Fort Pillow**, Tennessee, in 1864. Confederate troops killed over 200 African-American prisoners and some whites as they begged for their lives.

Even though most Southerners opposed the idea of African-American soldiers, the Confederacy did consider drafting slaves and free blacks in 1863 and again in 1864. One Louisiana planter argued that since slaves “caused the fight,” they should share in the burden of battle. Georgia general Howell Cobb responded, “If slaves will make good soldiers our whole theory of slavery is wrong.”

SLAVE RESISTANCE IN THE CONFEDERACY As Union forces pushed deeper into Confederate territory, thousands of slaves sought freedom behind the lines of the Union army. Those who remained on plantations sometimes engaged in sabotage, breaking plows, destroying fences, and neglecting livestock. When Southern plantation owners fled before approaching Union troops, many slaves refused to be dragged along. They waited to welcome the Yankees, who had the power to liberate them. **A**

For whites on farms and plantations in the South, slave resistance compounded the stresses and privations of the war. Fearful of a general slave uprising, Southerners tightened slave patrols and spread rumors about how Union soldiers abused runaways. No general uprising occurred, but slave resistance gradually weakened the plantation system. By 1864 even many Confederates realized that slavery was doomed.

HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT



GLORY FOR THE 54TH MASSACHUSETTS

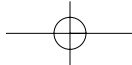
In July 1863, the African-American 54th Massachusetts Infantry, including two sons of Frederick Douglass, led an assault on Fort Wagner, near Charleston harbor. The attack failed. More than 40 percent of the soldiers were killed. Confederates found the regiment’s flag (above) under a pile of dead soldiers. Among the dead was the white commander, Colonel Robert G. Shaw. Among the survivors were Douglass’s sons and Sergeant William Carney, the first African American to win a Congressional Medal of Honor.

As the New York *Tribune* pointed out, “If this Massachusetts 54th had faltered when its trial came, 200,000 troops for whom it was a pioneer would never have put into the field.” Shaw’s father declared that his son lay “with his brave, devoted followers. . . . what a bodyguard he has!”

MAIN IDEA

Drawing Conclusions

A How did African Americans contribute to the struggle to end slavery?



The War Affects Regional Economies

The decline of the plantation system was not the only economic effect that the Civil War caused. Other effects included inflation and a new type of federal tax. In general, the war expanded the North's economy while shattering that of the South.

SOUTHERN SHORTAGES The Confederacy soon faced a food shortage due to three factors: the drain of manpower into the army, the Union occupation of food-growing areas, and the loss of slaves to work in the fields. Meat became a once-a-week luxury at best, and even such staples as rice and corn were in short supply. Food prices skyrocketed. In 1861 the average family spent \$6.65 a month on food. By mid-1863, it was spending \$68 a month—if it could find any food to buy. The situation grew so desperate that in 1863 hundreds of women and children—and some men—stormed bakeries and rioted for bread. Mrs. Roger A. Pryor remembered talking to an 18-year-old member of a mob in Richmond on April 2, 1863. **B**

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Causes

B What caused food shortages in the South?

A PERSONAL VOICE MRS. ROGER A. PRYOR

“As she raised her hand to remove her sunbonnet, her loose calico sleeve slipped up, and revealed a mere skeleton of an arm. She perceived my expression as I looked at it, and hastily pulled down her sleeve with a short laugh. ‘This is all that’s left of me!’ she said. ‘It seems real funny, don’t it? . . . We are going to the bakeries and each of us will take a loaf of bread. That is little enough for the government to give us after it has taken all our men.’”

—quoted in *Battle Cry of Freedom*

The mob broke up only when President Jefferson Davis climbed up on a cart, threw down all the money he had, and ordered the crowd to disperse or be shot. The next day, the Confederate government distributed some of its stocks of rice.

The Union blockade of Southern ports created shortages of other items, too, including salt, sugar, coffee, nails, needles, and medicines. One result was that many Confederates smuggled cotton into the North in exchange for gold, food, and other goods. Deploring this trade with the enemy, one Confederate general raged that cotton had made “more damn rascals on both sides than anything else.”

NORTHERN ECONOMIC GROWTH Overall, the war's effect on the economy of the North was much more positive. Although a few industries, such as cotton textiles, declined, most boomed. The army's need for uniforms, shoes, guns, and other supplies supported woolen mills, steel foundries, coal mines, and many other industries. Because the draft reduced the available work force, western wheat farmers bought reapers and other labor-saving machines, which benefited the companies that manufactured those machines. **C**

The economic boom had a dark side, though. Wages did not keep up with prices, and many people's standard of living declined. When white male workers went out on strike, employers hired free blacks, immigrants, women, and boys to replace them for lower pay.

ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

CURRENCY AND INFLATION

To raise revenue, both the Union and the Confederacy issued paper money. The Union passed a law declaring that its currency was legal tender, so everyone had to accept it. This national currency succeeded because the public maintained confidence in the Northern economy.

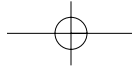
The currency issued by the Confederate treasury (pictured below) was unbacked by gold. Added to this, each state in the Confederacy continued to use its own currency. Because of the war-weakened Southern economy, the public lost faith in Confederate currency—its value plummeted, and prices soared. The Confederacy's war inflation rate reached close to 7,000 percent; prices were 70 times higher at the end of the war than at the beginning. The Union inflation rate was 80 percent. (See *inflation*, on page R42 of the Economics Handbook.)



MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Causes

C Why was the war less damaging to the economy of the North than to that of the South?



Northern women—who like many Southern women replaced men on farms and in city jobs—also obtained government jobs for the first time. They worked mostly as clerks, copying ledgers and letters by hand. Although they earned less than men, they remained a regular part of the Washington work force after the war.

Because of the booming economy and rising prices, many businesses in the North made immense profits. This was especially true of those with government contracts, mostly because such contractors often cheated. They supplied uniforms and blankets made of “shoddy”—fibers reclaimed from rags—that came apart in the rain. They passed off spoiled meat as fresh and demanded twice the usual price for guns. This corruption spilled over into the general society. The *New York Herald* commented on the changes in the American character: “The individual who makes the most money—no matter how—and spends the most—no matter for what—is considered the greatest man. . . . The world has seen its iron age, its silver age, its golden age, and its brazen age. This is the age of shoddy.”

Congress decided to help pay for the war by tapping its citizens’ wealth. In 1863 Congress enacted the tax law that authorized the nation’s first **income tax**, a tax that takes a specified percentage of an individual’s income.

Soldiers Suffer on Both Sides

Both Union and Confederate soldiers had marched off to war thinking it would prove to be a glorious affair. They were soon disillusioned, not just by heavy casualties but also by poor living conditions, diet, and medical care.

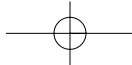
LIVES ON THE LINES Garbage disposal and latrines in army camps were almost unknown. Although army regulations called for washing one’s hands and face every day and taking a complete bath once a week, many soldiers failed to do so. As a result, body lice, dysentery, and diarrhea were common.

Army rations were far from appealing. Union troops subsisted on beans, bacon, and hardtack—square biscuits that were supposedly hard enough to stop a bullet. As one Northerner wrote:

The soldiers’ fare is very rough,
The bread is hard, the beef is tough;
If they can stand it, it will be,
Through love of God, a mystery.

Wounded Union troops recuperate after battle near a makeshift field hospital.





Science & Technology

BATTLEFIELD MEDICINE

In the Civil War, weapons technology overtook medical technology. Minié balls, soft lead bullets, caused traumatic wounds that could often be treated only by amputation. As the effects of bacteria were not yet known, surgeons never sterilized instruments, making infection one of soldiers' worst enemies.

Field Hospitals ▼

The badly wounded were taken to field hospitals, like this one at Gettysburg. The surgeon is



Clara Barton ▶

As a war nurse, Clara Barton collected and distributed supplies and dug bullets out of soldiers' bodies with her penknife. Barton was particularly good at anticipating troop movements and sometimes arrived at the battlefield before the fighting had even begun. Most women, however, served in hospitals rather than at the front lines. On the battlefield soldiers were usually attended by male medics.



Surgeon's Tools ▼

A surgeon's kit might contain cloth for bandages or administering chloroform, opium pills to kill pain, forceps and knives for cleaning wounds, and saws for amputations.



Confederate troops fared equally poorly. A common food was "cush," a stew of small cubes of beef and crumbled cornbread mixed with bacon grease. Fresh vegetables were hardly ever available. Both sides loved coffee, but Southern soldiers had only substitutes brewed from peanuts, dried apples, or corn.

CIVIL WAR MEDICINE Soon after Fort Sumter fell, the federal government set up the United States Sanitary Commission. Its task was twofold: to improve the hygienic conditions of army camps and to recruit and train nurses. The "Sanitary" proved a great success. It sent out agents to teach soldiers such things as how to avoid polluting their water supply. It developed hospital trains and hospital ships to transport wounded men from the battlefield.

At the age of 60, Dorothea Dix became the nation's first superintendent of women nurses. To discourage women looking for romance, Dix insisted applicants be at least 30 and "very plain-looking." Impressed by the work of women nurses he observed, the surgeon general required that at least one-third of Union hospital nurses be women; some 3,000 served. Union nurse **Clara Barton** often cared for the sick and wounded at the front lines. After her courage under fire at Antietam, a surgeon described her as the "angel of the battlefield."

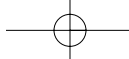
As a result of the Sanitary Commission's work, the death rate among Union wounded, although terrible by 20th-century standards, showed considerable improvement over that of previous wars. **D**

The Confederacy did not have a Sanitary Commission, but thousands of Southern women volunteered as nurses. Sally Tompkins, for example, performed so heroically in her hospital duties that she eventually was commissioned as a captain.

MAIN IDEA

Summarizing

D How did the Sanitary Commission improve medical treatment during the war?



The Confederate prison at Andersonville, Georgia, in 1864 ▶

PRISONS Improvements in hygiene and nursing did not reach the war prisons, where conditions were even worse than in army camps. The worst Confederate prison, at **Andersonville**, Georgia, jammed 33,000 men into 26 acres, or about 34 square feet per man. The prisoners had no shelter from the broiling sun or chilling rain except what they made themselves by rigging primitive tents of blankets and sticks. They drank from the same stream that served as their sewer. About a third of Andersonville’s prisoners died. Part of the blame rested with the camp’s commander, Henry Wirz (whom the North eventually executed as a war criminal). The South’s lack of food and tent canvas also contributed to the appalling conditions. In addition, the prisons were overcrowded because the North had halted prisoner exchanges when the South refused to return African-American soldiers who had been captured in battle.

Prison camps in the North—such as those at Elmira, New York, and at Camp Douglas, Illinois—were only slightly better. Northern prisons provided about five times as much space per man, barracks for sleeping, and adequate food. However, thousands of Confederates, housed in quarters with little or no heat, contracted pneumonia and died. Hundreds of others suffered from dysentery and malnutrition, from which some did not recover. Historians estimate that 15 percent of Union prisoners in Southern prisons died, while 12 percent of Confederate prisoners died in Northern prisons.

A series of battles in the Mississippi Valley and in the East soon sent a fresh wave of prisoners of war flooding into prison camps.



ASSESSMENT

1. TERMS & NAMES For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Fort Pillow
- income tax
- Clara Barton
- Andersonville

MAIN IDEA

2. TAKING NOTES

In a two-column chart, list the economic changes that occurred in the North and South as a result of the Civil War. Explain how these changes affected the two regions.

ECONOMIC CHANGES

North	South

CRITICAL THINKING

3. ANALYZING EFFECTS

What effects did the Civil War have on women and African Americans?

Think About:

- new opportunities in both the North and the South
- discriminatory practices that persisted for both groups

4. SYNTHESIZING

Imagine you were one of the Northern women and doctors who convinced the government to establish the Sanitary Commission. What reasons would you have offered to justify this commission? Use details from the text to support your response.