

What Your Teacher *Probably* Won't Tell You About The "Civil War"



You have been studying American History since grade school. Each year you are required to remember more details, but the overall story remains the same. If you are like most young people you probably have been wondering about a few things for years.

For example: Why are the American colonists who wished to disunite themselves from England considered "Patriots", but the Confederates who wished to disunite from Washington considered "Rebels"? Why are most of the battlefields located in the South? Why do they call it a "civil war"?

It is likely that your teacher views the Northern victory as a good thing. It has been said that the winning side of every war gets to write the history books. So, if your teacher is relatively neutral, you can consider yourself fortunate. Most schools focus primarily on only one point of view. (See our publication, *What Your Teacher Probably Won't Tell You About the Constitution*.)

Why Do We Put Quotation Marks on "Civil War"?

Look at the news whenever there is civil war in any part of the globe. Almost always, they are speaking of a war to determine who will control the government in some country. If two separate countries are at war, it is simply called a "war."

On December 20, 1860, the sovereign State of South Carolina declared its independence from the U.S. opting out of its union with the other States. The Buchanan Administration did not object. The States along the Gulf Coast—Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama Georgia and Florida—all followed suit and united themselves into a new Confederacy. Again, the Buchanan administration did nothing to discourage this new independent political entity.

Only after the Lincoln administration came to power did the U.S. government take exception to the new Confederacy. Lincoln asked each State to contribute to an army to invade the separated States and coerce them back into the union. That action caused the States of Arkansas, Tennessee, North Carolina and Virginia to join the Confederate camp. Other States tried to secede and join the Confederacy as well, but were forcibly stopped by the U.S. military.

The Lincoln government then invaded the new Confederacy. He tried to call his invasion, "The War of Rebellion." However, that name did not stick. It has also been called, "The War Between the States," "The War to prevent Southern Independence," "The War of Northern Aggression" and several other names.

Why Did the Buchanan and Lincoln Administrations Differ in Their Reactions to the Confederacy?

Follow the money. The upstart Republican Party had campaigned for several years on a platform of what we now call "tax-and-spend." Prior to 1861, there was a certain amount of resistance to federal taxation and federal spending. But an entire political party based on a tax-and-spend philosophy coming to power was something new.

For any other political party, it would not have mattered if the Southern States were part of the Union or independent. But, the new Republican Party favored taxing the South to spend in the North. Average Southerners were outraged. After all, how much more could the agricultural South be expected to pay to build up the industrialized North?

How Much of the Taxes Did the South Pay?

The South paid far more than its fair share of taxes before the war. Just four Southern States—Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia—paid 75% of all federal taxes. Just think, three out of every four dollars sent to Washington, D.C. were from just four Southern States and all the other Southern States contributed as well. Why should they have to pay the bill for public spending in the North?

How Could Taxes Be Levied So Unfairly?

It is what they call a tariff. Tariffs are not necessarily a bad thing, but when one segment of society is more likely to need imported goods, that segment of society will be paying more in tariffs. (See our publication, *What Your Teacher Probably Won't Tell You About Tariffs*.)

High tariffs were intentionally enacted to unfairly target the South. It was a well-known fact that the Southern economy needed to import more foreign goods than the North.

Why Does My Teacher Say the "Civil War" Was About Slavery?

If you are in a public school, the answer is straightforward. Your teacher is a government employee and must do what the government wants. It is government money that pays your teacher's salary.

If your teacher told you the war was about preventing unfair tax increases, it would make the South look good. School administrators are constantly looking for tax increases to raise money for school spending. Teachers are eager to help support these tax increases, so that the school administrators can raise their salaries. (See our publication, *What Your Teacher Probably Won't Tell You About Paying for Your Education*.)

So the Slavery Theory is a good excuse to keep your minds off the issues of taxation. (See our publication, *What Your Teacher Probably Won't Tell You About Taxes*.) The Slavery Theory is very popular. It is so popular that many parents would have a problem if another theory were taught.

Most private schools won't buck the trend either. They are supposed to provide a better education than public schools, so they rarely dare to teach something that is contrary to what is taught in public schools.

How Did the Slavery Theory Come Into Being?

In the early years of the War, slavery was not much of an issue. At Lincoln's first inaugural address, he proposed an Amendment to the Constitution guaranteeing that slavery would remain in effect wherever it was legal. He invited the Southern States to rejoin the union hoping that his proposed Amendment would woo them back.

So, if preserving slavery had been the issue, the South had their man in Lincoln. They could have supported his Amendment and there would have been no war. But slavery was not the issue.

As this unpopular war continued to drag on, abolitionists encouraged Lincoln to consider the war to end slavery. But Lincoln refused. He was only interested in keeping the South and the tax money it paid to his federal government. That is why Lincoln wanted to preserve the union.

His infamous "Emancipation Proclamation" was an unsuccessful attempt to start a servile insurrection in the South, and to impede increasing popular support in Europe for the Confederacy. He was already making plans to deport the freed slaves after the war.

But the war was very brutal and ugly. The Northern Army had been committing serious war crimes against the people of the South, both black and white. They needed to give a good reason to gain public support for the war.

So when the North was on the verge of winning the war, the Lincoln administration began to recast it into a war against slavery. It is like the kid who has his fingers caught in the cookie jar, who says anything he can think of to justify his behavior and hopes that it will be believed.

After the War, Why Didn't the South Try to Set the Record Straight?

They did! But hardly anyone could get the message. The reason was Reconstruction. After the “Civil War,” the U.S. Army occupied the South for several years. The victorious North stripped many Southerners of their basic rights and even denied their children proper education. (See our publication, *What Your Teacher Probably Won't Tell You About Reconstruction*.)

However, many of those who survived the war wrote down their experiences during the war. We don't know of even one of them who claimed that preserving slavery was the reason for the war or the reason that their State seceded.

How Could We Have Ended Slavery Without the “Civil War”?

Slavery had been going out of style for years. Every other Western country rid itself of slavery without any significant violence, with one exception. Within 25 years of the end of the “Civil War,” the last two Western countries, Cuba and Brazil outlawed it peacefully.

The only place that came close to ending slavery with a war was in Haiti. However, that rebellion was part of the French Revolution, not a war to end slavery.

What Would Have Happened Had the South Won the War?

It is hard to say what would have happened if something had been different. But it is safe to say that slavery would have probably remained legal for a while in Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky and what would become West Virginia, as well as any other slave State that remained in the union.

Slavery would have eventually died out in the South, as well as the North. Most likely, it would have happened before 1888, when it was outlawed in Brazil. The South had been talking about how to bring slavery to an end for years before the War.

The tax-and-spend Republicans in the North would have had to raise taxes up North or they would have needed to find some other country to invade and ravish.

Most likely, the Southern economy would have been strong and primarily agrarian. Small farms, with self-sufficient farming families would have likely remained common for many years, perhaps to this day.

In all likelihood, North America would have developed into two or more associations of States. Those separate countries would have had close alliances with each other and would have been as strong as, or stronger than the nations of Europe, and would be world leaders.

However, we can be fairly sure about some things. The sovereignty of the States would be firmly established. States would be free to leave the union and join another confederacy or *visé versa*, or they could be completely independent. The individual citizen's freedom from the oppression of a central government with unlimited power would have been preserved.

-By **T.V. Weber**, author of *The Crumbling Wall Against Tyranny*