16.1: Introduction

During the 1850s, tensions mounted between the North and the South over the issue of slavery and its relationship to political, social, and economic power. When Republican Abraham Lincoln won the presidential election of 1860, southerners firmly believed his victory would bring an end to the life they knew and loved. And so, seven states in the Lower South seceded from the Union before Lincoln’s inauguration. Secession of these slave states ultimately led to a civil war between the South and the North that lasted from April 1861 to April 1865. Once the fighting began, several more states seceded from the United States of America to cast their lot with the newly formed Confederate States of America. Initially it seemed as though the South might win its bid for independence. But in time, the North’s political and economic advantages helped it to secure victory.

Soldiers, according to historian James McPherson, fought for cause and comrades. They battled one another to preserve American values: to preserve liberty and freedom in a democratic nation. They also fought because they felt a sense of loyalty to their fellow soldiers. However, the Civil War was not just about military victories and losses. The war divided family and friends in large numbers, and it caused numerous tensions on the home front. In the North, the fate of slavery continued to divide the people. In the South, funding the war exacerbated preexisting tensions between planters and yeomen. Ultimately, the North triumphed over the South and restored the Union. Nevertheless, no matter how you look at the war, the conflict brought profound social, political, and economic changes to the American people.

16.1.1: Learning Outcomes

learning outcomes

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

• Explain why the South and North eventually determined war was the only way to respond to their differences.
• Explain the difference between an army fighting another army and an army taking on civilians, such as in Sherman’s March.

• Assess political and economic developments in the South and North during the Civil War

• Explain the complex motives that went into the creation of the Emancipation Proclamation and analyze why the Proclamation applied only to those states still in rebellion against the Union, rather than freeing all slaves in both the North and South.

• Explain why conscription was necessary in both the North and the South.

• Describe the impact of the war on the Union and Confederate home front.

• Explain the issues that created political, social, and economic tension beginning in 1864 and 1865. • Explain the use of African Americans in the Union and Confederate Armies.