

**THIS IS REQUIRED READING FOR ALL STUDENTS, BUT THE ACTIVITY IS EXTRA CREDIT... PRINT AND COMPLETE IN INK FOR BONUS POINTS.**

**"NOW WE ARE ENGAGED IN A GREAT CIVIL WAR" 1848-1880**

Purpose:

This Crossroads Essay analysis is an optional enrichment activity providing additional insight into the era. *Read directions carefully.*

Directions:

As you **read the article**, *annotate* in the space provided along the right margin. *Use INK.* Your annotations must be *thoughtful, relevant, and higher level.* Do *not* simply restate facts and observations from the text. Sample annotation are provided on page 2.

Annotate by:

- a. **Highlighting** the main ideas/arguments,
- b. **identifying major themes** (MAGPIES)
- c. **identifying historical context**
- d. **describing historiography of event**
- e. **defining terms** you may not know. (if it's bold... define it!)

- M** igration and Settlement
- A** merica in the World
- E** eography and the Environment
- P** olitics and Power
- I** dentity; American and National
- E** conomy; Work, Exchange, and Technology
- S** ociety and Culture

**I. Some Basic Themes: A Historical Sermon**

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**The era of the Civil War is the pivotal period of the nation's history.**

The Revolutionary generation first posed and -- *they thought* -- answered the question, "Are we to be a nation?"  
What was their answer?

The Jeffersonian and Jacksonian generations posed evolving answers to the corollary -- "What kind of nation are we to be?"  
What was their answer?

But the generation of **Abraham Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, Frederick Douglass, Ulysses S. Grant, Robert E. Lee, Stephen A. Douglas, Mary Chesnut**, and their compatriots were forced to reconsider what kind of nation the United States would be. By asking whether the United States could continue as one nation, the men and women of the 1860s had to confront the linked questions of what values resided at the core of the nation's identity, and what it meant to be an American.

**This period ... has dramatic conflict; tales of heroism and sacrifice, cowardice and betrayal; and eloquence unmatched in the annals of any nation or people. It is also a perfect historical laboratory to examine central questions of understanding history:**

- Does a great event, such as the Civil War, have an identifiable cause (or set of causes)?
- What is the place of "great men" (such as Lincoln or Lee) and what is the place of ordinary people in history?
- What place does politics play in history? Is it central, or is it just a preoccupation of those who have power, irrelevant to those who do not have it?
- What do such concepts as "freedom," "emancipation," "slavery," "federalism," and "equality" mean? Do they have one unchanging meaning over time, or do they change over time?
- Is war glorious, terrible, or both? What does it mean to go to war, to take part in war?

One methodological point: The terms "North" and "South" -- though both popular and seemingly useful to indicate opposition -- are misleading. Much of the so-called "North" was actually the middle and far West, and the South includes Texas, which is at the same time Western, Southern, and unique unto itself. It is far better to use the terms "Union" and "Confederate," unless specific reference to a given region is needed.

**ALTHOUGH THIS PAGE IS ANNOTATED FOR YOU... READ AND STUDY IT...  
IT HAS SEVERAL MAJOR EVENTS AND POINTS THAT YOU WILL BE TESTED OVER!**

**II. The Structure of the Period**

**1. Prologue, 1619-1820.** Issues of slavery and race, and issues of federal versus state authority are as old as the American nation. A preliminary backward glance reminds us when and where slavery came to the Americas, how Thomas Jefferson attempted (in his draft of the Declaration of Independence) to pin the blame for slavery on George III, how the Federal Convention confronted and evaded slavery in the writing of the Constitution, and how the issue simmered, just under the surface, until the Missouri crisis of 1819-1820. The Missouri Compromise revealed to the American people two things:

- (i) that slavery would not just "go away," as the Founders had hoped, and
- (ii) that slavery was the foremost of several key issues dividing the nation into sections and fostering sectional competition. The Missouri Compromise also sought to define zones of free states and slave states, postponing the ultimate resolution of the crisis.

**2. Sectional Crisis, 1820-1850** The heirs of the Revolutionary generation -- the generation of Andrew Jackson, John Quincy Adams, John C. Calhoun, Henry Clay, and Daniel Webster -- proved remarkably adroit at postponing issues of slavery and sectionalism, hoping that somehow either the problem would go away or that it would lose its urgency. At the same time, militants on both sides of the issue -- defenders of slavery as a positive good and advocates of immediate and complete abolition -- both played important roles in the controversy and helped to keep it alive. The 1850 Compromise repealed the 1820 line and sought to readjust the balance between free and slave states, again postponing an ultimate resolution.

**3. The Impending Crisis, 1850-1861.** Realizing that the issues dividing North from South, with the West as an uneasy third wheel, would not go away, and that the survival of the Union was increasingly at risk, the politicians of the 1850s sought to find an answer that would resolve the slavery issue and the increasing hostility between the sections. Three candidates presented themselves:

- (i) **Popular Sovereignty**, the invention of Democrats Lewis Cass of Michigan and Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, who threw the issue into the hands of the people of each would-be state. Proposed by Douglas as the core of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, this theory was discredited by the catastrophic strife -- a precursor of the Civil War itself -- that tore Kansas apart in the 1850s.
- (ii) **Slavery as Property Right**, the brainchild of Chief Justice Roger B. Taney of Maryland, who declared a slaveowner's interest in his slaves to be like any other property right and denied African-Americans any status as citizens entitled to rights under the Constitution. Taney's goal was to elevate the issue to a nonpolitical, constitutional level and dispose of it by an "authoritative" interpretation of the intent of the framers of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Taney set forth his version of this theory in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857), which has been reviled ever since, not only as the single worst decision of the U.S. Supreme Court, but also as an unintended catalyst of sectional strife that culminated in the Civil War.
- (iii) **"Putting Slavery in the Course of Ultimate Extinction"** - the position of moderate Republicans such as Abraham Lincoln of Illinois. Lincoln insisted that he did not want to tamper with slavery where it had taken root, but wished to prevent its expansion (hoping that slavery would die out if it could not grow). He offered this position several times in the 1850s, most notably in his "House Divided" speech of 1858. In 1858, when Lincoln challenged Douglas's bid for re-election to the U.S. Senate, they searchingly discussed all three proposals throughout Illinois in the classic "Lincoln-Douglas Debates."

But the search for peaceful solutions to the contest between free states and slave states (or, perhaps, "solutions" that would delay the ultimate resolution of the issues) proved increasingly unavailing. The presidential election of 1860 posed the crisis, as the Democrats shattered into sectional fragments and the newly-organized Republicans (contesting only their second presidential election) captured the Presidency. Southern fears that Republicans would not hold to Lincoln's stated policy of limiting the spread of slavery and Southern demands for independent nationhood combined with Northern and Western skepticism about the seriousness of the secession threat to bring on the last and most calamitous sectional crisis.

*Historical Context... Culture and Politics & Power: slavery issue divided Americans and led to political compromise in the DOI, Constitution, & Missouri Compromise which was later replaced by the Compromise of 1850 and its concept of popular sovereignty but then found unconstitutional in the Dred Scott decision.*

*Identity: "All men are created equal" (DOI) is paramount to American identity and it was clouded by the concept of some human beings being the property of other human beings. Supporting this concept as law (Roger Taney) tore the country apart. It was impossible to reconcile the two any longer or to just hope it will go away on its own.*

*Politics and Power: Lincoln ran for senate in 1858. His house divided speech, "A House Divided Cannot Stand" foreshadowed war, but he believed political stability required leaving it alone in the South and just preventing it from expanding.*

Popular Sovereignty means...

Dred Scott ruling...

**4. And the War Came, 1861-1865.** It is now a truism that the Civil War was a completely new kind of war: a war of societies and peoples, not just of armies; a war that fostered frantic development of technologies of communications, transportation, manufacturing, and (of course) killing. No longer was war merely a contest between armies, which bystanders could watch while eating picnic lunches. The Civil War was the first truly modern war, the conflict that taught the world about ideas of "the destructive war" and "unconditional surrender." It was a war whose objectives evolved as the struggle evolved. For the Union, it began as a war to preserve the Union and the authority of the government in Washington. But it eventually became a war to destroy slavery, the foundation of the way of life that led the South to attempt to leave the Union. For the Confederacy, it began as a contest to establish the Southern states' right to leave the Union and to preserve their way of life; it evolved as a war of survival and a desperate defense against invasion. The war reached into society in the Union and the Confederacy. It forced the people of both sides to face the horrors of war by showing them (through the photography of Mathew Brady and his collaborators) what war really looked like, and by the extraordinary carnage the war caused. It imposed privations, chiefly on the people of the Confederacy. It led to advances in ideas about sanitation, medicine, social services. It fostered a new, vigorous, and at times arrogant nationalism in the Union -- what Robert Penn Warren termed the "Treasury of Virtue" that could excuse any national excess and forgive any national sin. By contrast, in the former Confederate states, defeat and surrender fostered among Southerners an ironical perspective on the glittering, successful American experiment -- what Warren called the "Great Alibi," excusing racism, discrimination, poverty, and corruption. (Warren's *The Legacy of the Civil War*, first written in 1961, remains the best short discussion of its subject.) **Summarize the historiography in your annotation as well as identifying themes!**

**5. The Shape of the War, 1861-1865.** This area of the subject, the strategy and tactics of the Civil War, long was a major field of American history. Even in our time, as the "new military history" (discussed in section 4 above) has established itself as a legitimate field of inquiry, there still remains good reason to understand the shape of the war as it evolved between Fort Sumter and Appomattox Courthouse. In part, this is because one of the greatest challenges facing President Lincoln was the conduct of the war -- how to secure victory and preserve the Union, and whom to put in charge of the war effort to achieve the Union's war aims. ... The shape of the war, as it evolved from 1861 to 1865, is relatively simple. At the outset of the war, both Union and Confederate commanders believed in the old military adage: "To conquer the enemy, you conquer the enemy's capital." Consequently, both Union and Confederate forces lost many casualties and fought dozens of bloody, inconclusive battles over Washington, D.C., the Union capital, and Richmond, Virginia, the Confederate capital. By the middle of the war (1862 and early 1863), some Confederate commanders -- notably James Longstreet -- advocated defensive war, by which Union forces would have to reconquer the seceded states, acre by bloody acre. By contrast, Union commanders such as Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman intended to make the war a full-scale struggle of peoples and resources; they proposed both to defeat Confederate armies in pitched conventional battles and to destroy Confederates' ability to make war. Union victories in July 1863 in Vicksburg, Mississippi (in the west) and **Gettysburg**, Pennsylvania (in the east) indicated that the turning-point had been reached. From then on, the Union armies and commanders grew ever more confident that victory was only a matter of time and treasure. The battles of 1864 and 1865 were among the most horrific the world had yet seen, providing a grim foretaste of what people's war would look like should it ever break out on a global scale. These conflicts devastated the South, leaving wounds that would not heal for generations -- and that ambitious, selfish politicians sought to keep open for generations more. **Identify broad and other context in your annotation as well as identifying themes!**

**6. Emancipation, 1861-1865.** We understand the freeing of the slaves best if we see it as a shared process. President Abraham Lincoln, of course, played a vital role. But Lincoln traced a complex path in working out what to do about slavery. He was conscious of the evil of slavery yet at the same time aware of its protected constitutional status; he did not want to take steps that would be moral victories but constitutional and legal nullities. Therefore, Lincoln framed his first moves against slavery as war measures, hoping to use the threat of emancipation to persuade Confederate states to cease their part in the rebellion. This is why the **Emancipation Proclamation** (1863) freed only slaves in the rebel states and left alone those in pro-Union border states and in conquered rebel territory.

Lincoln also experimented with proposed constitutional amendments that would have established a system of gradual, compensated emancipation, whereby slave owners would be paid for their loss of property at the same time that the slaves were freed. By 1865, however, he had decided that slavery had to be extirpated root and branch, and that the proper means was a constitutional amendment abolishing the institution completely. He hailed the Thirteenth Amendment (1865) as the cure for the evil of slavery, yet did not live to see either its adoption or its supplementing by other constitutional amendments.

But the freeing of the slaves was not simply the work of President Lincoln. The slaves did not stand idly by as the war was fought. They played critical -- even central -- roles in their own liberation, both before and after abolition and the destruction of slavery became central war aims for the Union. Freed slaves and free African-Americans for the first time were allowed to wear their country's uniform and bear arms in its cause, which truly became their own. Indeed, in many cases throughout the Confederacy, the slaves emancipated themselves without waiting for the assistance of Union armies.

**7. Defining the Meaning of Victory - Reconstruction, 1863-1877.** Few areas of American historiography have seen as abrupt and complete shifts as Reconstruction. Its first historians vilified the period as a brutal ordeal for the hapless (white) South under the oppression of ignorant freedmen and rapacious "carpetbaggers" and "scalawags." One of the great heroes of the old view was Andrew Johnson; early historians depicted him as remaining faithful to Lincoln's generous plans for easygoing reconstruction -- and nearly losing his office for his pains. Not until the civil rights movement of the 1960s did historians begin to reconsider the actions and motives of the Radical Republicans and the freed slaves. Especially now, with the labors of the Freedmen and Southern Society Project at the University of Maryland, writing the history of Reconstruction has been transformed. Historians now depict Andrew Johnson as a stubborn, vindictive racist who probably deserved impeachment (though not in the manner that it actually happened). Historians interpret the Radicals as a well-meaning but deeply divided group of reformers -- some of them ardent believers in racial equality, others as racist as Johnson, still others cynical opportunists. Finally, most historians view Southern leaders not as noble victims of oppression but as racist oppressors who wanted to reestablish antebellum society in every respect except those outlawed by the **Civil War Amendments to the Constitution.**

*Summarize the historiography in your annotation as well as identifying themes!*

Reconstruction was a period in which African-Americans showed that they could govern themselves and take part in public life alongside their former owners and oppressors. And yet the critical factors in Reconstruction's short-lived success were not the Constitution's new amendments, nor the newly-enfranchised freedmen, nor the nation's professed commitment to the principles of Union, victory, and equality. The sole effective guarantors of the success of Reconstruction were the Union occupation forces in the former Confederate states. And Reconstruction was about to be cut off with brutal abruptness.

In 1876, the Democrats apparently captured the Presidency. Most observers agreed that a Democratic victory would bring a swift end to Reconstruction. But the triumph of the Republican ticket brought the same result -- the withdrawal of Union occupation forces, the recapture of Southern states' governments and politics by former Confederates and Confederate sympathizers, and the abandonment of the freed slaves to the "tender mercies" of their former owners. How did this happen? At first, it appeared that the Democrats had amassed a modest electoral majority. Republicans immediately charged that voting fraud in three Southern states had diverted nineteen electoral votes from the Republican to the Democratic ticket; shifting those nineteen votes would give the Republicans a one-vote margin of victory in the electoral college. In a murky and still-controversial series of investigations and deals, a special electoral commission composed of eight Republicans and seven Democrats awarded the disputed electoral votes to the Republicans. In 1955, C. Vann Woodward published a pathbreaking study, *Reunion and Reaction*, in which he offered the first close interpretation reconstructing the complex web of subterranean political and economic transactions that resulted in the Republican victory and the "**Compromise of 1877.**" Several later historians have disputed many of Woodward's findings, and some have even denied that a sectional "**Compromise of 1877**" ever took place. Whatever the case, however, Union armies were withdrawn, and (as Eric Foner, the greatest historian of the period, has noted), Reconstruction remained "America's unfinished revolution."

*Summarize the historiography in your annotation as well as identifying themes!*