

THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR: WHY IT HAPPENED

PART 1

The American Civil War was fought over 150 years ago. It began in 1861 and lasted until 1865. The battles of the American Civil War resulted in the death of 620,000 Americans. What caused this terrible civil war between the North and the South?

Well, historians believe that there were many causes of the war. One of the important causes of the war was the friction between the North and the South over, the issue of slavery. The southern way of life and the southern economy were based on the use of slave labor.

For almost 250 years before the Civil War, the economy of the South depended on the use of black slaves. The slaves were used to plant and pick cotton and tobacco. Cotton and tobacco were the main crops grown in the South. Most Southerners did not think it was wrong to own, buy, or sell slaves like farm animals. Slavery was, in fact, the foundation of the entire economy and way of life in the South. This was not the situation in the North. The northern economy did not depend on the use of slave labor. Why not?

Well, in the South there were many large cotton plantations that used hundreds of slaves. In the North, however, there were smaller farms. The northern farmers planted many different kinds of crops, not just cotton or tobacco. The Northerners did not need slaves, since their farms were smaller than most of the southern plantations. In fact, many Northerners were so opposed to slavery that they wanted to end slavery completely. The northern attitude against slavery made the Southerners angry. So, for many years before the war, there was constant friction between the North and the South over this issue. This friction eventually led to war.

There was other friction, too, as I said before, between the North and the South. There were, in other words, other causes of conflict between the North and the South. One involved the growth of industry in the North. While the South remained an agricultural area, the North became more and more industrialized. As industry increased in the North, it brought more people and greater wealth to the northern states. As a result, many Southerners began to fear northern political and economic domination. Because of this fear, many Southerners believed that the South should leave the Union and that they should form their own country.

In 1860, the Southerners decided it was time to leave the Union when Abraham Lincoln became president of the United States. Lincoln, as you may know, was against slavery. The people of the South were afraid that their way of life and their economic system were in danger with Lincoln in the presidency. Consequently, the southern states decided to secede from the Union. In other words, they wanted to break away from the North and form a separate country. In 1861, South Carolina seceded, and by June of 1861 eleven southern states had seceded and established a new country. They called the new country the Confederate States of America. The war between the North and the South began when the southern states seceded from the Union.

The main reason that the North went to war against the South was to bring the southern states back into the Union. In other words, the North went to war to keep the United States one country.

After four years of terrible fighting, the North won the war against the South, and the United States remained one country. The North won the war mainly because of its economic and industrial strength and power.

The Civil War had two important results for the United States: (1) the Civil War preserved the United States as one country; and (2) it ended slavery in the United States.

Many Americans wonder what the United States would be like today if the South had won the Civil War. The history of the United States would have been very different if the South had won the war between the States.

Listening Comprehension Check Part 1

1. How long did the American Civil War last? (b)
2. What was one cause of the American Civil War? (b)
3. Describe the economy of the South at the time of the Civil War. (c)
4. How was the economy of the North different from the economy of the South before the war? (d)
5. How did the growth of industry change the North? (b)
6. Why did the South decide to leave the Union and form its own country? (b)
7. What was the name of the country formed by the southern states? (d)
8. What was the most important reason that the North went to war with the South? (b)
9. Why did the North win the war? (d)
10. What did the Civil War accomplish? (c)

Listening Comprehension Check Part 2

11. The American Civil War started in 1861. (T)
12. The American Civil War ended over 100 years ago. (T)
13. There were many large cotton plantations in the North before the war. (F There were many large cotton plantations in the South.)
14. The use of slaves in the South began around the time of the American Civil War. (F For almost 250 years before the Civil War, the economy of the South depended on the use of slaves.)
15. Most Southerners felt that it was all right to own, buy, and sell slaves. (T)
16. Most slaves were unhappy and wanted President Lincoln to free them. (?)
17. Most Northerners wanted to use slaves to work on their small farms. (F The Northerners did not need slaves on their small farms.)
18. The only reason for the American Civil War was the issue of slavery. (F There were other causes of the conflict between the North and the South, for example, the growth of industry in the North.)
19. The North had better soldiers and generals than the South did. (?)
20. The American Civil War was over in a few months. (F The war lasted from 1861 to 1865.)

INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

1. Did you know that during the Battle of Gettysburg, in Pennsylvania, the only civilian to die was 20-year-old Mary Virginia Wade, who was shot through the heart while making bread?
2. It is known that 3,530 Native Americans fought for the North (or the Union). One-third, or 1,018, of these Native Americans lost their lives.
3. Did you know that when a woman mourned for a husband who died in the 1860s, she spent a minimum of two-and-a-half years in mourning? That meant little or no social activities: no parties, no outings, no visitors, and a wardrobe that consisted of nothing but black. However, the husband, when mourning for his wife who died, spent only three months in a black suit.
4. Did you know that during the Civil War, including the times before and after, it was legal and socially acceptable for a man to beat his wife, provided the instrument used in the beating was no thicker than his thumb? Thus, we get the term: Rule of thumb.

Preview of Vocabulary and Sentences

friction - a continuous disagreement over ideas or opinions; a clashing between two persons or groups of opposed views

One of the causes of the war was the friction between the North and the South over the issue of slavery.

foundation - a base or support which holds something up; understructure

Slavery was the foundation of the entire economy and way of life in the South.

plantation - a large southern estate or farm on which crops such as cotton and tobacco were grown, formerly by black slaves.

In the South there were many large cotton plantations that used hundreds of black slaves.

attitude - a way of thinking, acting, or feeling; a point of view

The northern attitude against slavery made the Southerners angry.

conflict - a long fight or struggle; a war; a clash

There were other causes of the conflict between the North and the South.

domination - control; supremacy; mastery

Many Southerners began to fear northern domination.

the Union - the United States as it existed between 1776 and 1861; the northern side in the Civil War.

Many Southerners believed that the South should leave the Union.

secede - to withdraw from a political alliance or organization

The southern states decided to secede from the Union.

the Confederate States of America - the group of 11 southern states that seceded from the United States in 1860-1861

They called the new country the Confederate States of America.

preserve - to keep together; to maintain

In this video the focus is on the two most important causes of the American Civil War. Certain words and phrases are used to signal the reasons or causes of the conflict, words and phrases such as:

The main reason . . . ,

Because . . . ,

Because of . . . ,

One of the important causes . . . ,

Other causes were . . . ,

Since....

Certain words and phrases are used to introduce results or effects, such as:

As a result...,

Consequently . . . ,

...so ... that...,

...resulted in . . . ,

...caused . . . ,

...led to