1865: The End of the Civil War

A Reading A–Z Level Z2 Leveled Book
Word Count: 2,065

Connections

Writing and Art

Write a short essay from the perspective of a Northerner, a Southerner, or a slave. Include details about what life was like before, during, and after the Civil War. Research additional information, if needed.

Social Studies

Choose one historical figure from the book. Create an informational poster about that person, using facts from the text and additional resources if needed. Be sure to cite your references.

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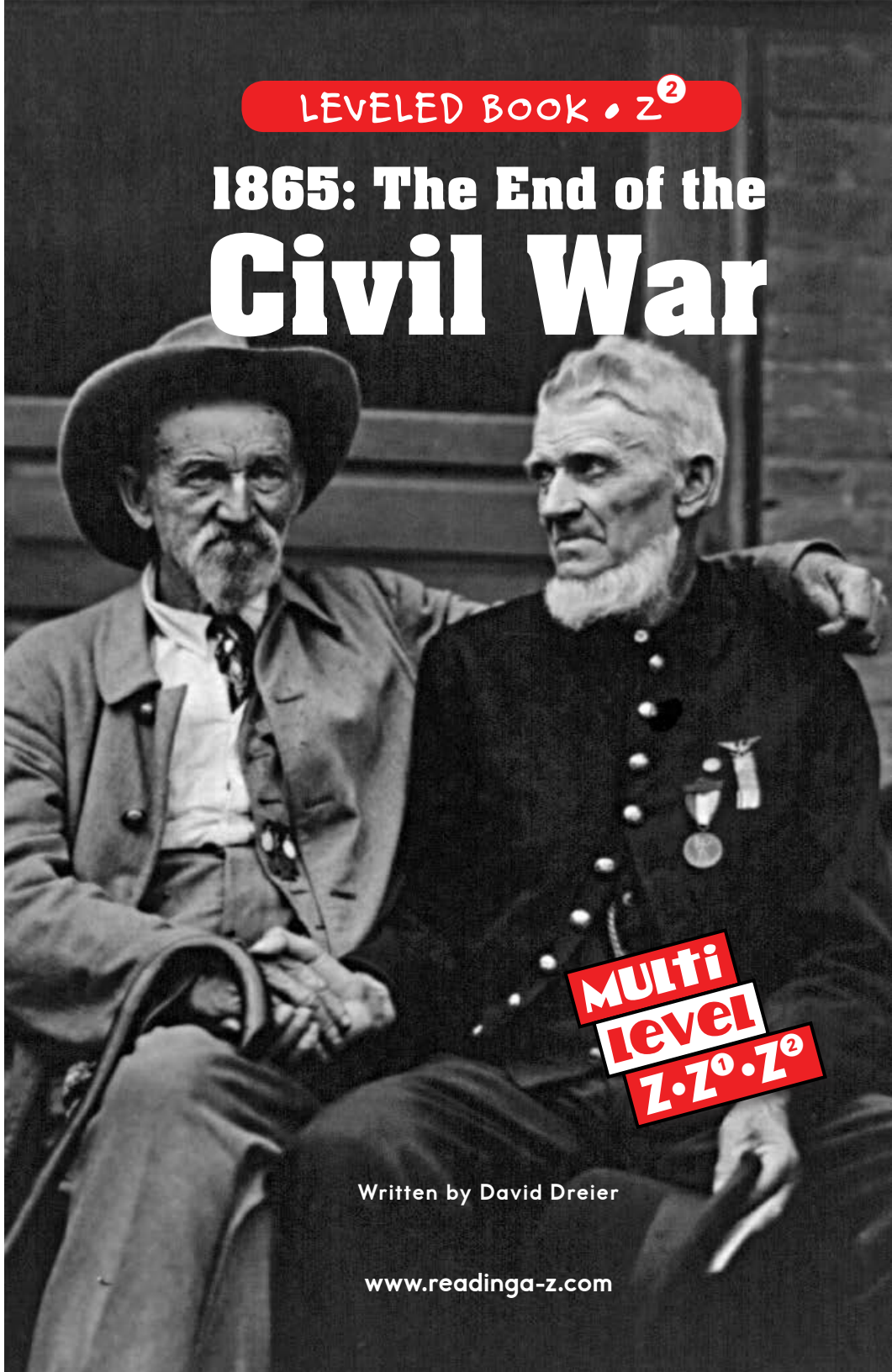

1865: The End of the Civil War

Written by David Dreier

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Focus Question

How did the Civil War change the United States?

Words to Know

amendment
assassinated
campaign
casualties
cessation
Confederate
Emancipation Proclamation
fugitive
indivisible
mourning
relentless
representatives
roiled
seceded
Union

Front cover: Nearly fifty years after the Civil War, two veterans from opposite sides shake hands at Gettysburg in 1913.

Title page: Confederate cannons at Richmond, Virginia, 1865

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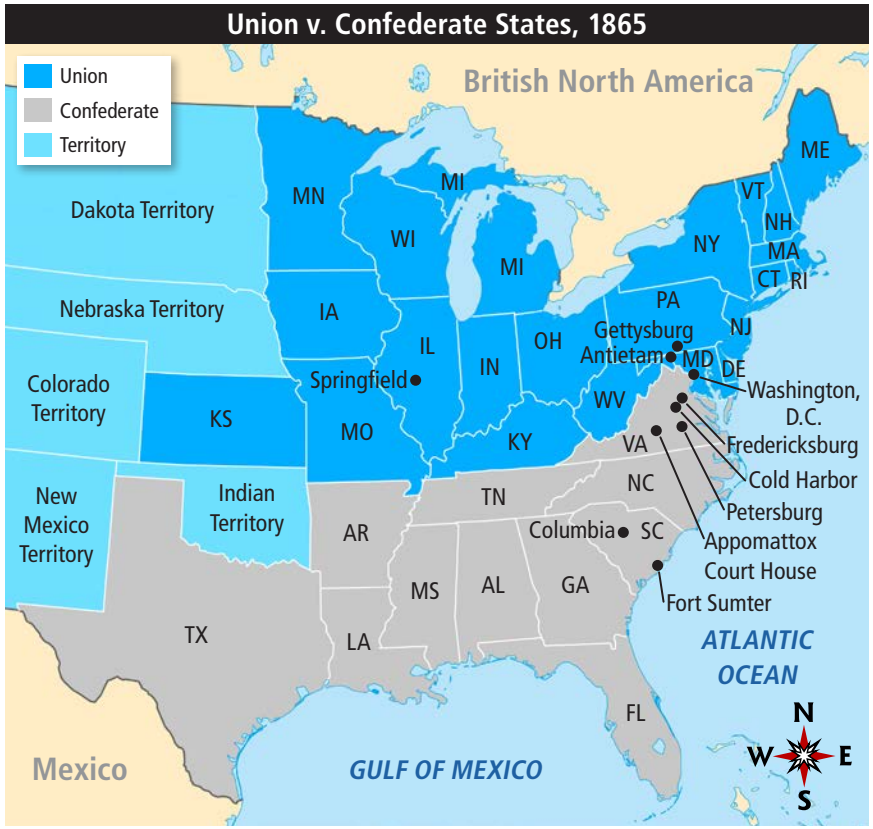
Correlation

LEVEL Z2	
Fountas & Pinnell	Y–Z
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	70+



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The Lost Cause

The end had come. It was early spring 1865, and General Robert E. Lee realized that his exhausted **Confederate** Army could do no more. Although Lee had said that he "would rather die a thousand deaths" than surrender, he now saw no alternative. The South's cause had been crushed by the **relentless** onslaught of the **Union**.

On April 9, Lee donned a fresh uniform. He rode wearily on his horse to meet U.S. General Ulysses S. Grant at a private home in the town of Appomattox Court House, Virginia. He arrived at the house and sat down to wait. Half an hour later, the U.S. commander made his appearance, clad in an old uniform spattered with mud. The two generals engaged in friendly conversation, then got down to the business of ending the war.

Slavery and the Union

In the decades leading up to the Civil War, the nation was **roiled** by divisions between North and South. Many people had doubts that the Union would survive intact.

Slavery had become an important division. The North was a region of expanding industry and small farms, with large-scale agriculture

playing a lesser part in the economy. Although slavery had existed in the North, all Northern states had outlawed the practice by 1804.

The South was a much different world—an agricultural society dominated by the production of cotton. Southern plantation owners had found that the cheapest way to cultivate and harvest cotton was with slave labor. By the mid-1800s, nearly four million slaves from Africa were in the Southern states. They toiled at many kinds of jobs, but most lived and worked on cotton plantations. Their freedom denied, plantation slaves typically lived in squalid housing and were treated harshly by their owners.

During the same period, Northern abolitionists—antislavery activists—were denouncing human bondage in the South. This disagreement over slavery brought a second issue into focus: states' rights. The **Fugitive** Slave Act of 1850 was a federal law that made a fugitive from one state a fugitive in every state. It also required people in free states to return runaway slaves to their masters, yet some Northerners helped runaway slaves escape instead. Northern juries, in turn, sometimes refused to convict those who violated the act.

A South Carolina slave family poses together in 1862.

Still, the Civil War might never have happened if the United States had remained a small collection of states in the eastern part of the continent. It did not. During the 1800s, the nation was expanding into huge territories to the west that were acquired through the 1803 Louisiana Purchase and the 1848 treaty ending the U.S.-Mexican War. Those territories were becoming states, and Congress had to decide whether new states would allow slavery.

The Southern states wanted to keep a rough balance between slave states and free states because if free states outnumbered slave states, Southern **representatives** would be outnumbered in Congress, and the South would lose political power. That balance was maintained for several decades through a series of congressional compromises for the creation of new states, but tensions between North and South were growing.

Those tensions reached the breaking point with the U.S. presidential election of November 1860. To the South's dismay, Abraham Lincoln, candidate of the antislavery Republican Party, was elected president of the United States.

The Southern states feared that a Republican-led government would destroy their economy and put an end to their way of life. After the election, seven Southern states—South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas—**seceded** from the Union. In February 1861, they officially formed the Confederate States of America, which they hoped would be a permanent nation separate from the United States.

The war began in April 1861 in Charleston, South Carolina. The Confederacy considered Fort Sumter, a Union fortification in Charleston Harbor, to be a foreign presence in its territory. On April 12, after the Union commander of Fort Sumter refused to surrender the fort, Confederate forces bombarded it. Four other Southern states—Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee—then also seceded and joined the Confederacy.

Most Southerners exulted at the coming of war. No one in the South—or the North—had any idea how terrible the war would be.

Waging Total War

In the first two years of the war, little went well for the Union. President Lincoln was plagued by one incompetent general after another. The Union was able to claim a victory of sorts in the Battle of Antietam in Maryland on September 17, 1862. That battle resulted in terrible **casualties** on both sides, but the North counted the battle as a victory because it forced General Lee to retreat to Virginia.

The victory also enabled Lincoln to issue the **Emancipation Proclamation**, which granted freedom to slaves in the Confederacy. Freeing all the slaves, along with preserving the Union, had become Lincoln's main goals for the war.

Antietam might have been more of a genuine Northern triumph if the commanding Union general, George B. McClellan, had followed Lincoln's order to pursue Lee and destroy his army. McClellan, always a hesitant officer, ignored the order, however. An exasperated Lincoln relieved McClellan of his command in November 1862 and replaced him with Ambrose Burnside—who would be even worse.

The war ground on, both sides feeling that their cause was just. Casualties mounted. In December 1862, the North suffered a disastrous

Freedom for Some

The Emancipation Proclamation freed many slaves, but not all of them. On the first day of January 1863, it granted freedom to all slaves in "enemy territory." This allowed slaves in Confederate areas to fight for the Union—soldiers whom the North badly needed. It also redefined the war by making it a crusade against slavery.

Yet the proclamation did not pertain to slaves in the border states of Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri. Why not?

These border states, though slaveholding, never seceded from the Union. Lincoln was concerned that freeing slaves in these states would persuade the states to join the Confederacy.

The country's remaining slaves would have to wait two more years to be free.

defeat at the Battle of Fredericksburg in Virginia. The losses suffered by Union forces, under Burnside's command, were staggering. One Union survivor recalled that ". . . men fell like leaves in autumn. It seems miraculous that any of us escaped at all." By the battle's end, more than 12,500 Union men were killed, wounded, or missing. The cries of the wounded, one man said, were "weird, unearthly, terrible to hear and bear."

The Human Costs of the War

The Civil War was the deadliest war in U.S. history. At least 620,000 Americans, both Union and Confederate, died in the four-year conflict. The numbers of casualties—killed, wounded, or missing—in some battles were staggering. The casualties in the one-day Battle of Antietam, Maryland, in 1862 totaled nearly 23,000. To date, it remains the single bloodiest day in U.S. history.

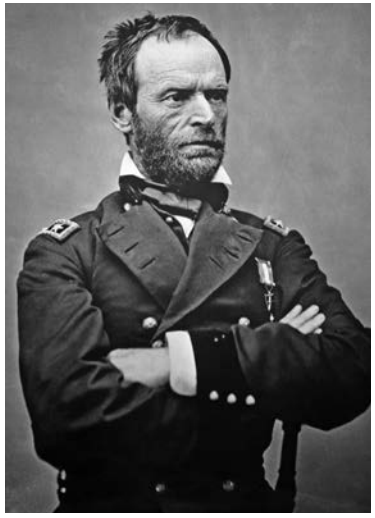
In those days, before modern medicine, diseases and infections caused two-thirds of Civil War deaths. Battlefield surgeons often—though unknowingly—spread infections with unsterile instruments.

A turning point in the war came in July 1863 with the Battle of Gettysburg in Pennsylvania. Union forces, now under the command of General George Meade, won a decisive victory over Lee's forces. After this battle, Lee was never again able to invade the North, and from then on the Confederacy was on the defensive. But again, casualties were horrendous: about 51,000, including as many as 28,000 on the Southern side. What's more, Meade, like McClellan, failed to follow up his victory by pursuing Lee's army.

As the war dragged on, Northern sentiment against the fighting grew. In 1864, General McClellan was the Democratic candidate for president. The Democratic platform called for a **cessation** of fighting and a negotiated end to the war. The 1864 election would determine the whole direction of the war—and Lincoln believed he would lose.

Instead, Lincoln won. Reelection gave him a mandate to continue the war in order to reunite the country and end slavery. In January 1865, Congress passed the Thirteenth **Amendment**, which ended slavery in the United States. In addition, Lincoln finally had the generals he needed: Ulysses S. Grant and William Tecumseh Sherman. Those two commanders waged brutal war on the Confederacy. They sought to break its back and bring the war to an end.

Sherman's **campaign** took him through the deep South. In late 1864, after burning much of Atlanta, his men marched across the state of Georgia. They tore up rail lines, destroyed bridges, and set fire to many homes.

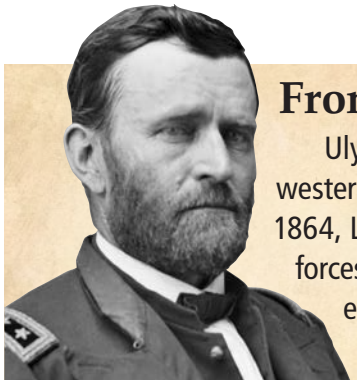


General William Tecumseh Sherman in 1865

In January 1865, Sherman's army turned northward into South Carolina. Emma LeConte, a seventeen-year-old girl in Columbia, South Carolina, described the nighttime burning of the city by Sherman's troops: "They would enter houses and, in the presence of helpless women and children, pour turpentine on the beds and set them on fire. . . . The wretched people rushing from their homes were not allowed to keep even the few necessities they gathered up in their flight." Throughout the burning city, LeConte recalled, "a quivering molten ocean seemed to fill the air and sky."

Meanwhile, to the north, Grant had been waging a relentless campaign against Lee. One particularly horrible battle took place in mid-1864 at Cold Harbor, Virginia. Grant ordered an attack on strongly entrenched Confederate lines that caused some seven thousand Union casualties in twenty minutes. One Union soldier later said, "This wasn't war, but murder."

Such bloodshed caused many in the North to denounce the Union commander as "Grant the Butcher." Nonetheless, Grant was wearing down Lee's army. In early 1865, he had Lee bottled up in trenches outside of Petersburg, Virginia.



From General to President

Ulysses S. Grant proved himself in the western campaigns of the Civil War. In March 1864, Lincoln gave Grant command of all Union forces. Five years later, Grant became the eighteenth president of the United States. He is featured on the fifty-dollar bill.

The South Surrenders

Before dawn on April 3, Lee abandoned Petersburg with the tattered remnants of his army. He knew that staying there any longer would spell doom. Lee hoped to link up with another Confederate army marching north from Tennessee.

In his diary, Union Private Jacob Haas recounted the events of that day, when the Confederacy was verging on collapse. Haas said he was awakened early on the morning of April 3 to "a terrible shock of the earth," which he soon learned was caused by Lee's men blowing up their stores of gunpowder before fleeing Petersburg. A bit later, he wrote, Union troops took over the town with great rejoicing. The air was filled "with thousands of voices all cheering . . . and the band playing 'Yankee Doodle.'"

Lee's retreating army was doggedly pursued by Union forces. Grant was determined that Lee would not escape. On April 6, Grant's army inflicted about eight thousand casualties on the Confederates. Lee saw that surrender was the only reasonable option. After four bloody years, the Civil War was coming to an end.

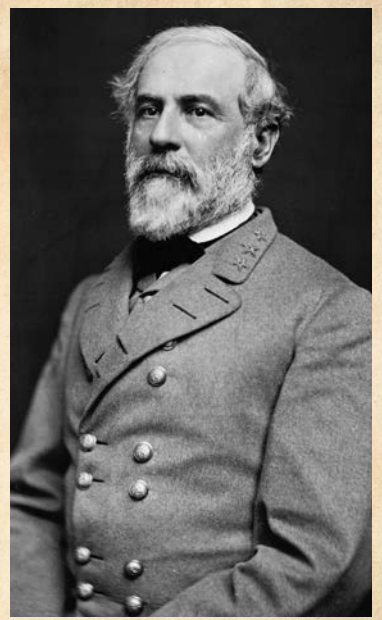
Grant and Lee met on April 9 at a private home in the town of Appomattox Court House, Virginia. At that historic meeting, Grant offered generous terms for the South's surrender. He allowed all Confederate soldiers to return to their homes and agreed that Lee's troops could keep their horses and mules. Because Lee's men were nearly starving, Grant ordered twenty-five thousand food rations for them.

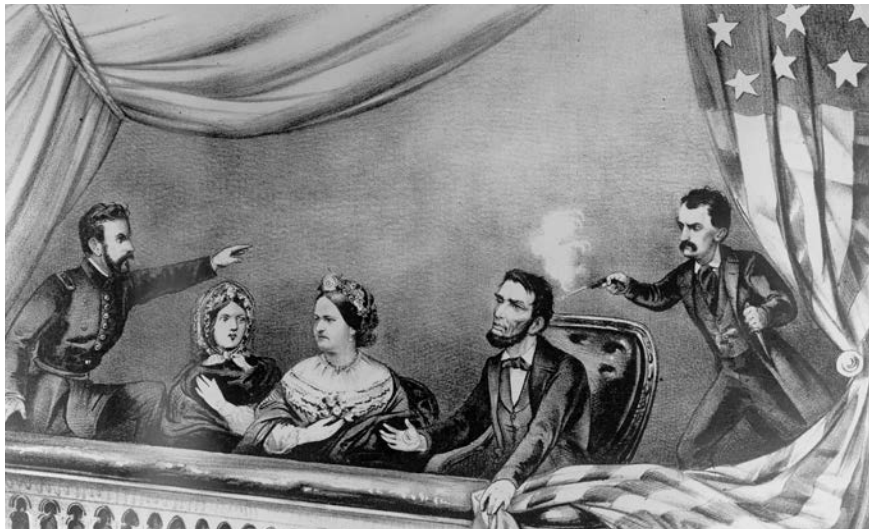
Other Confederate forces in the South had not yet given up the fight, but they all soon surrendered. On April 2, Confederate President Jefferson Davis fled Richmond, the Confederate capital. On May 10, he was captured and would spend two years in prison.

The Civil War was over.

What Else Lee Surrendered

When the Civil War broke out, President Lincoln offered Robert E. Lee command of the Union armies. Lee declined, saying he could not fight against his beloved state of Virginia. After Lee departed to join the Confederacy, the U.S. government took his estate, Arlington. The grounds of the estate, located across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C., became Arlington National Cemetery.





An artist depicts John Wilkes Booth shooting Abraham Lincoln.

The Assassination of President Lincoln

The United States remained united, yet the North's joy over its victory in the war soon turned back to **mourning**. On April 14, 1865, a man whose name would soon be known throughout the nation—John Wilkes Booth—gained entrance to the Lincolns' private box at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C., as the president and his wife, Mary, sat watching a play. Booth fired a single shot into Lincoln's head and then jumped down to the stage. The unconscious Lincoln was taken across the street to a private house. He died early the next morning.

Booth was an actor and Southern sympathizer. He was also part of a group of conspirators who sought revenge for the defeat of the Confederacy.

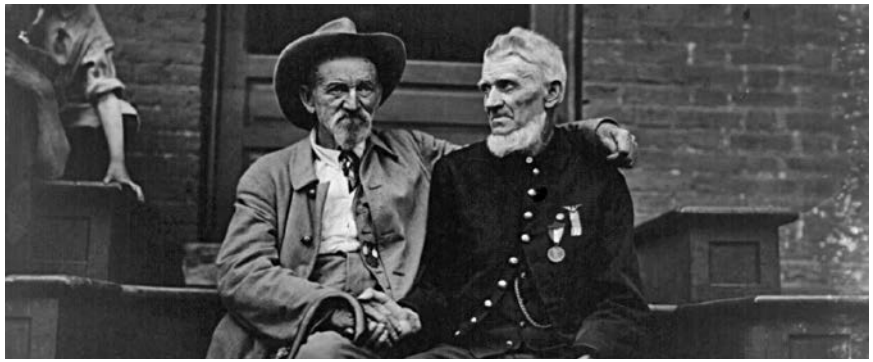
Tragedy on the Mississippi

The greatest on-water disaster in U.S. history occurred in April 1865 near Memphis, Tennessee. The steamboat *Sultana*, severely overloaded with nearly 2,500 passengers, was moving upstream on the Mississippi River. The passengers included some 2,300 Union soldiers who had just been released from Confederate prison camps. In the early morning hours of April 27, a faulty boiler exploded. At least 1,700 people died in the explosion and resulting fire or by drowning. Because the calamity was overshadowed by the Lincoln assassination, it received little notice and was soon forgotten.

They planned to kill not only Lincoln but also Vice President Andrew Johnson and Secretary of State William Seward. As it turned out, only Lincoln was **assassinated**, though Seward received serious knife wounds.

Union troops tracked Booth and a fellow conspirator, David Herold, to a farm in Virginia. Booth was shot to death, and Herold was taken prisoner. Herold and other conspirators were later tried for their crimes. Four of them, including Herold, were found guilty and hanged.

Lincoln's body was transported by a funeral train back to his home state of Illinois. He was buried in Springfield, the city where he had practiced law before entering politics. Although Lincoln was gone, he lived long enough to achieve his main goals: the preservation of the Union and an end to slavery.



Nearly fifty years after the Civil War, two veterans from opposite sides shake hands at Gettysburg in 1913.

Legacy of the Civil War

The end of the Civil War also began the next chapter in the history of the United States. By December 6, 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment had been ratified by enough states to become law. Two additional amendments—the Fourteenth and Fifteenth—giving former slaves civil rights and voting rights, were passed within the next five years.

From Civil War to Civil Rights

After the war, the U.S. government protected the freed slaves under a system called Reconstruction. After Reconstruction ended in 1877, the Southern states found ways to get around the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. Black people sank back into a condition of domination by white people.

In the 1960s, black people finally obtained the rights supposedly guaranteed to them by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. Some consider the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 the final chapter of the Civil War.

Beyond freeing the slaves, the Civil War established the principle that the United States is an **indivisible** nation. States, whatever their grievances, do not have the right to secede from the Union.

In the years since the Civil War, the nation has seen other times of great strife and strain. Americans continue to be divided today on many issues, in many ways. Yet we remain one nation—the United States of America.

Civil War Timeline

1860

November 6, 1860: Abraham Lincoln is elected president

December 20, 1860: South Carolina, the first of eleven Southern states, secedes from the Union

1861

June 8, 1861: Tennessee, the last of eleven Southern states, secedes from the Union

April 12, 1861: The Civil War begins

1862

September 16–18, 1862: Battle of Antietam

1863

January 1, 1863: Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation

November 8, 1864: Lincoln is reelected

1864

January 31, 1865: Congress passes the Thirteenth Amendment

April 14, 1865: John Wilkes Booth shoots Lincoln

1865

April 9, 1865: General Robert E. Lee surrenders to General Ulysses S. Grant

December 6, 1865: Congress ratifies the Thirteenth Amendment

1866

Glossary

amendment *(n.)* a change or addition to a document or law, such as the U.S. Constitution (p. 11)

assassinated *(v.)* killed in a planned attack, often for political purposes (p. 16)

campaign *(n.)* a planned series of actions designed to reach a certain goal (p. 11)

casualties *(n.)* people injured, killed, or missing during a war, accident, or disaster (p. 8)

cessation *(n.)* a break in or stopping of an event or process (p. 10)

Confederate *(adj.)* having to do with the Confederacy, or the Southern states that separated from the United States during the Civil War (p. 4)

Emancipation Proclamation *(n.)* an order issued by President Lincoln in 1863 that freed all the slaves under Confederate authority (p. 8)

fugitive *(n.)* a person who is running from something, usually legal authorities (p. 5)

indivisible *(adj.)* unable to be separated or divided (p. 18)

mourning *(n.)* the act of expressing grief or sorrow, especially for someone who has died (p. 15)

relentless *(adj.)* continuing at the same level of strength, intensity, or determination, despite obstacles or opposition (p. 4)

representatives *(n.)* people chosen to speak, vote, or otherwise act on behalf of an individual or group (p. 6)

roiled *(v.)* disturbed, agitated, or angered (p. 4)

seceded *(v.)* formally withdrew from membership in an organization or group (p. 7)

Union *(n.)* the group of states that fought against the Confederacy during the American Civil War; the United States (p. 4)