

THE END OF THE CIVIL WAR

North (Union) defeats the South (Confederacy) on the battlefield, but it remains to be seen.....

What was lost? What was won? What changed? What stayed the same? Why did it matter?

SOUTHERN PLANTERS

Planters lose nearly everything.

Once their slaves were emancipated, they not only lost a source of free labor, but a major source of capital.

Beyond being laborers, the slaves were also property, and, as such, had monetary value. Planters could borrow money from banks using their slaves as collateral. In fact, they preferred to use their slaves as collateral rather than their land since the risks entailed in losing slaves were less threatening than the risk of losing land, the foundation of the planters' wealth. But with emancipation, they no longer had this option.

Without slaves to bring in the cotton crop, the planters lost out on the profit of the harvest. Some farmers whose plantations had turned into battlefields also lost the value of their crops. Others had to flee their plantations to escape Union troops. Often these troops burned the planters' crops and houses.

Planters who had supported the Confederate cause by buying war bonds had lost all the money they put into the bonds since the Confederate government ceased to exist once the war was over and the Union government would not honor Confederate war bonds.

Many had lost their sons in the war and were thus left with no heirs to continue to run the family plantation. In essence, they had lost labor (the slaves) and management (the sons who helped run the plantation).

Beyond financial losses, the planters took a psychological hit. Their status was reduced (if, as it turned out, only temporarily). They no longer had a sense that they were the ones "in control" – the ones who were at the top of the social (and racial) hierarchy. Rather than pillars of the community, these men were now considered traitors. It remained to be seen if they would be able to reacquire their position at the top of society. (Spoiler: they did.)

Some planters even feared for their safety – would their slaves exact revenge on them? The fact that they worried about this revealed that they understood they had been their

slaves' oppressors – and that it would make sense that these slaves might *want* to exact revenge.

THE FREEDMEN

Formerly enslaved people now had “freedom” – freedom to leave the plantations, freedom to go find the members of their families from whom they had been separated, freedom, in theory, to live as they wanted.

Some blacks stay where they are because the planters still need their labor, and they have no cash or access to credit to finance a move.

But the reality was that the freedmen had no food, shelter, work, education, economic resources, or opportunities. They had, as one observer put it, “nothing but freedom.” As a result, blacks were “free,” but faced a life of poverty and had few opportunities for advancement.

They also were despised by much of the white population in the South and, in many cases, by the Union soldiers who resented them for being the “cause” of the war. Though they had won freedom, they had lost security.

Moreover, the freedmen were less personally secure. As slaves, they had value to their masters who took steps to protect them from harm. Once freed, however, they lost the protection of their masters and could become targets for angry, racist whites looking to assert their own “racial superiority.”

By the 1870s the Ku Klux Klan was terrorizing blacks in the South along with those whites who hoped to help them.

In this sense, then, freedom was a double-edged sword for African-Americans. It was also unclear what “freedom” meant for the newly freed slaves – would their freedoms be the same as the whites' freedoms?

The freedmen expected that they would be the same, but most whites were not willing to go this far toward genuine “equality.” The course of Reconstruction would determine the meaning of “freedom” for the freedmen.

NON-PLANTER SOUTHERN WHITES

Many were not only on the losing side in the war, but had literally lost their lives in defense of the Confederacy. Many who survived resented defending the interests of rich slaveholders when they themselves had no slaves and no economic stake in slavery. Many believed it had been “a rich man's war, but a poor man's fight.”

They did have a racial stake in slavery, however. So long as blacks remained slaves (and thus property), even the poorest white would be distinguishable from (and superior to) enslaved blacks. Once the slaves were freed, this automatic distinction vanished.

Rather than allying with the newly freed blacks, with whom they shared economic interests, poor whites in the South embraced the ideology of white supremacy even more fervently. Their “white” identity proved more important than their economic status. In this sense, white supremacy as a racist ideology grew in strength after the Civil War.

NORTHERNERS

The Northerners’ victory not only meant the end of slavery and the reuniting of the Union. It also had political consequences since it marked the emergence of a more powerful central government in Washington – one that would take an active part in, among other things, the country’s economic development.

Since the Confederate states had seceded from the Union, their Senators and Congressmen left Congress at the beginning of the war. This meant Northern Senators and Congressmen (the majority of whom were Republicans by 1865) dictated the nation’s political agenda throughout the war years.

Specifically, this meant the laws passed in Congress benefited the North. In particular, Congress began to raise tariffs to protect northern manufacturing interests.

A high tariff (a tax imposed on imported goods) raised the price of foreign imports and enabled domestic manufacturers to compete more successfully with their foreign competition since the foreign goods were now more expensive.

Before the Civil War, the South had opposed raising the tariff. Southerners did so, first, because the region imported a large amount of foreign goods and the higher tariffs would raise the prices of these goods for southern consumers.

Southern planters also opposed raising the tariff since they exported much of their cotton and tobacco crops to foreign nations. If the US raised its tariff on goods imported from these nations, it was expected that, in retaliation, these countries would raise their tariffs thus driving up the prices of U.S. exports and making them less attractive to foreign buyers (which would cut into the profits of the southern planters).

With the southerners out of Congress, though, there was little opposition to raising the tariff.

The north’s victory in the Civil War signaled that the US was moving rapidly to becoming a nation whose economy focused on manufactured goods rather than just agriculture. As more and more workers took jobs in the expanding manufacturing sector, many working-class people came to believe that high tariffs would protect their jobs.

High tariffs made US goods competitive and thus drove up the demand for US products and drove down demand for imports (which were now more expensive). When demand rose, companies were likely to keep their workers (and perhaps pay them more) and even hire new workers as the owners expanded their businesses.

On the issue of raising the tariffs, then, both employers and employees (who often disagreed on most issues) appeared to be in agreement.

The important point, as the politicians realized, was to raise the tariff, but not to raise it so much that consumers came to believe that higher prices for goods were hurting them more than the chance to keep their job (and perhaps get higher wages) was helping them.

People would only put up with higher prices if they felt they received higher wages or more job security in return.

In any event, the raising of the tariff rates signaled both an increase in the North's political and economic power.

Also, as a result of the war, a stronger sense of "nationhood" emerged as seen by the fact that in books published after the Civil War, one reads, "The United States **is**..." rather than "The United States **are**..."

In this sense, the psychological victory went to the North which had always envisioned the nation less as a confederation of states all governing themselves and more as a nation, governed by a strong national government.

Americans coming out of the Civil War had a stronger national identity. "States rights" had taken a hit.