

Primary Source Set

Voices from the Civil War

Guiding Question

- How did the war transform the nation socially, economically, and politically?

Objectives

- ☐ I can compare different perspectives on the Civil War from various groups of people.
- ☐ I can evaluate the impact of the Civil War on daily lives of soldiers and civilians.
- ☐ I can connect historical examples of civic virtue to contemporary civic engagement.

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Background Information

This photograph, taken by Matthew Brady or his associates, depicts a ward in a Civil War hospital, likely between 1861 and 1865. It shows rows of beds filled with wounded soldiers, highlighting the scale of casualties and the rudimentary conditions of medical care during the war. This image provides a stark visual representation of the suffering endured by soldiers and the challenges faced by medical staff.

Wounded Soldiers in Hospital

Source: <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/524705>



Background Information

Sullivan Ballou was working as an attorney when the Civil War began. He answered President Lincoln's call for 75,000 volunteers by signing up with the 2nd Rhode Island Infantry. Ballou was killed in the first major battle of the war at Bull Run. He penned this letter to his wife Sarah shortly before the battle.

Sullivan Ballou's Last Letter, 1861

Source: <https://www.nps.gov/articles/-my-very-dear-wife-the-last-letter-of-major-sullivan-ballou.htm>

Text	Vocabulary and Context
My Very Dear Wife: Indications are very strong that we shall move in a few days, perhaps tomorrow. Lest I should not be able to write you again, I feel impelled to write a few lines, that may fall under your eye when I shall be no more.	Indications- signs
If it is necessary that I should fall on the battle-field for any country, I am ready. I have no misgivings about, or lack of confidence in, the cause in which I am engaged, and my courage does not halt or falter. I know how strongly American civilization now leans upon the triumph of government, and how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and suffering of the Revolution, and I am willing, perfectly willing to lay down all my joys in this life to help maintain this government, and to pay that debt.	misgivings- doubts halt or falter- fail

I have sought most closely and diligently, and often in my breast, for a wrong motive in this hazarding the happiness of those I loved, and I could not find one. A pure love of my country, and of the principles I have often advocated before the people, and "the name of honor, that I love more than I fear death," have called upon me, and I have obeyed.	diligently- carefully hazarding- risking
Sarah, my love for you is deathless. It seems to bind me with mighty cables, that nothing but Omnipotence can break; and yet, my love of country comes over me like a strong wind, and bears me irresistibly on with all those chains, to the battlefield. The memories of all the blissful moments I have spent with you come crowding over me, and I feel most deeply grateful to God and you, that I have enjoyed them so long. And how hard it is for me to give them up, and burn to ashes the hopes of future years, when, God willing, we might still have lived and loved together, and seen our boys grow up to honorable manhood around us...	Omnipotence- a divine power irresistibly- unable to be resisted blissful- joyful

Background Information

Ulysses S. Grant's tenacity and dedication in the Civil War helped the Union achieve victory. From the beginning, the North struggled to find a general who was not afraid of taking aggressive strategic action in order to defeat the South. Grant's successes ultimately led to Lincoln appointing him as head of all Union forces in 1864. In 1862, Grant was serving as a lower ranking general when he led Union forces at the Battle of Shiloh. In his memoirs, he recounts the brutality of the battle and the valor shown on both sides.

Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant, 1885

Source: <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2001.05.0019%3Achapter%3D25>

Text	Vocabulary and Context
Shiloh was the severest battle fought at the West during the war, and but few in the East equalled it for hard, determined fighting. I saw an open field, in our possession on the second day, over which the Confederates had made repeated charges the day before, so covered with dead that it would have been possible to walk across the clearing, in any direction, stepping on dead bodies, without a foot touching the ground. On our side National and Confederate troops were mingled together in about equal proportions; but on the remainder of the field nearly all were Confederates...	mingled - mixed
The enemy fought bravely, but they had started out to defeat and destroy an army and capture a position. They failed in both, with very heavy loss in killed and wounded, and must have gone back discouraged and convinced that the "Yankee" was not an enemy to be despised...	

The **endeavor** of the enemy on the first day was simply to hurl their men against ours-first at one point, then at another, sometimes at several points at once. This they did with daring and energy, until at night the rebel troops were worn out. Our effort during the same time was to be prepared to resist assaults wherever made. The object of the Confederates on the second day was to get away with as much of their army and material as possible. Ours then was to drive them from our front, and to capture or destroy as great a part as possible of their men and material. We were successful in driving them back, but not so successful in captures as if farther pursuit could have been made...

endeavor- attempt

Our loss in the two days fight was 1,754 killed, 8,408 wounded and 2,885 missing... [The Confederacy] reported a total loss of 10,699, of whom 1,728 were killed, 8,012 wounded and 957 missing.

Background Information

Dolly Sumner Lunt was a well-off woman living in Georgia during the Civil War. Her husband died a few years before the war began, leaving her in charge of running the plantation. Lunt supported the Confederacy and was a slave-owner, despite expressing some moral qualms about the institution. In 1864, Union general William Tecumseh Sherman began his March to the Sea, a nearly 300-mile trek from Atlanta to Savannah, Georgia. Sherman ordered the freeing of slaves as well as the destruction of railroads, factories, and civilian property during the march in order to damage the ability of the Confederacy's war effort and break its morale. Lunt witnessed the destruction firsthand and wrote about it in her journal. In it, she referred to her slaves as "servants." The diary was published after her death.

A Woman's Wartime Journal, Dolly Sumner Lunt, 1918

Source: <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/burge/lunt.html>

Text	Vocabulary and Context
July 22, 1864 We have heard the loud booming of cannon all day... Judge Floyd stopped, saying: "Mrs. Burge, the Yankees are coming. They have got my family, and here is all I have upon earth. Hide your mules and carriages and whatever valuables you have."... I went to the smoke-house, divided out the meat to the servants, and bid them hide it. Julia [a slave] took a jar of lard and buried it...china and silver were buried underground...	
NOVEMBER 19, 1864. Slept in my clothes last night, as I heard that the Yankees went to neighbor Montgomery's on Thursday night at one o'clock, searched his house, drank his wine, and took his money and valuables... I hastened back to my frightened servants	hastened- hurried

and told them that they had better hide, and then went back to the gate to claim protection and a guard. But like demons they rush in! My yards are full. To my smoke-house, my dairy, pantry, kitchen, and cellar, like **famished** wolves they come, breaking locks and whatever is in their way. The thousand pounds of meat in my smoke-house is gone in a twinkling, my flour, my meat, my lard, butter, eggs, pickles of various kinds - both in vinegar and brine - wine, jars, and jugs are all gone...**Utterly** powerless I ran out and appealed to the guard.

“I cannot help you, Madam; it is orders.”...

famished- starving

Utterly- completely

I had not believed they would force from their homes the poor, doomed negroes, but such has been the fact here, cursing them and saying that "Jeff Davis wanted to put them in his army, but that they should not fight for him, but for the Union." No! Indeed no! They are not friends to the slave. We have never made the poor, cowardly negro fight, and it is strange, passing strange, that the all-powerful Yankee nation...should at last take the poor negro to help them out against this little Confederacy..."

Background Information

Hannah Johnson was a Black freewoman living in the North during the Civil War. Her son joined the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Regiment, the first all-Black regiment in the war. Captured Black Union soldiers faced horrific treatment by the Confederacy, ranging from summary execution to enslavement, in violation of all normal codes of conduct regarding prisoners of war. Hannah wrote the following letter to President Lincoln asking him to consider the plight Black soldiers faced.

Hannah Johnson's Letter to President Lincoln, 1863

Source: <https://www.freedmen.umd.edu/hjohnsn.htm>

Text	Vocabulary and Context
Excellent Sir: My good friend says I must write to you and she will send it. My son went in the 54th regiment. I am a colored woman and my son was strong and able as any to fight for his country and the colored people have as much to fight for as any. My father was a Slave and escaped from Louisiana before I was born morn forty years ago.	morn- more than
I have but poor edication but I never went to schol, but I know just as well as any what is right between man and man. Now I know it is right that a colored man should go and fight for his country, and so ought to a white man. I know that a colored man ought to run no greater risques than a white, his pay is no greater his obligation to fight is the same. So why should not our enemies be compelled to treat him the same, Made to do it.	edication- education schol- school risques- risks

My son fought at Fort Wagoner but thank God he was not taken prisoner, as many were I thought of this thing before I let my boy go but then they said Mr. Lincoln will never let them sell our colored soldiers for slaves, if they do he will get them back quck he will rettallyate and stop it...	Fort Wagoner (Fort Wagner)- the 54th Regiment fought a battle attacking Fort Wagner in South Carolina, where it suffered huge losses quck- quick rettallyate- retaliate
[Slave owners] have lived in idleness all their lives on stolen labor and made savages of the colored people...You must put the rebels to work in State prisons to making shoes and things, if they sell our colored soldiers, till they let them all go. And give their wounded the same treatment. [It] would seem cruel, but their no other way, and a just man must do hard things sometimes, that shew him to be a great man.	idleness- laziness
They tell me some do you will take back the Proclamation, dont do it. When you are dead and in Heaven, in a thousand years that action of yours will make the Angels sing your praises I know it... Robbing the colored people of their labor is but a small part of the robbery their souls are almost taken, they are made bruits of often. You know all about this.	take back the Proclamation- Revoke the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared all enslaved people in the Confederacy to be free bruits (brutes)- animals
Will you see that the colored men fighting now, are fairly treated. You ought to do this, and do it at once, Not let the thing run along meet it quickly and manfully, and stop this, mean cowardly cruelty. We poor oppressed ones, appeal to you, and ask fair play. Yours for Christs sake. Hannah Johnson.	manfully- assertively

Background Information

J.O. Smith served in the Union army at the Battle of Antietam. In this letter, he tells a story of a scene he saw in the aftermath of the battle. His anecdote displays the brutal wounds suffered during the war while also depicting a touching scene of kindness shown by a Confederate soldier who just hours before was a bitter enemy of a Union soldier that he carried to a hospital.

Letter from J.O. Smith, 1862

Source: <https://www.nps.gov/anti/learn/education/classrooms/antietam-letters-and-diaries-of-soldiers-and-civilians.htm>

Text	Vocabulary and Context
A strong, sturdy-looking Reb was coming laboriously on with a Yank of no small proportions perched on his shoulders. Wonderingly I joined the group surrounding and accompanying them at every step, and then I learned why all this especial demonstration; why the Union soldiers cheered and again cheered this Confederate soldier, not because of the fact alone that he had brought into the hospital a sorely wounded Federal soldier, who must have died from hemorrhage had he been left on the field, but from the fact, that was palpable at a glance, that the Confederate too was wounded.	laboriously- with great difficulty hemorrhage- bleeding palpable- noticeable
He was totally blind; a Yankee bullet had passed directly across and destroyed both eyes, and the light for him had gone out forever. But on he marched, with his brother in misery perched on his sturdy shoulders. He would accept no assistance until his partner announced to him that they had reached their goal - the field hospital.	

It appears that they lay close together on the field, and after the roar of battle had been succeeded by that painfully intense silence that hangs over a hard-contested battlefield; where the issue is yet in doubt, and where a single rifle shot on the skirmish line falls on your ear like the crack of a thousand cannon.	
The groans of the wounded Yank reached the alert ears of his sightless Confederate neighbor, who called to him, asking him the nature and extent of his wounds. On learning the serious nature of them, he said: "Now, Yank, I can't see, or I'd get out of here mighty lively. Some darned Yank has shot away my eyes, but I feel as strong otherwise as ever. If you think you can get on my back and do the seeing, I will do the walking, and we'll sail into some hospital where we can both receive surgical treatment."	
This programme had been followed and with complete success. We assisted the Yank to alight from his Rebel war-horse, and you can rest assured that loud and imperative call was made for the surgeons to give not only the Yank, but his noble Confederate partner, immediate and careful attention.	programme- plan alight- step off imperative- urgent