



The American Civil War: A Nation Divided Over Slavery

KS3 HISTORY

Ages 11-14 ⌚ 4 min read

What Was the American Civil War?

The **American Civil War** lasted from **1861 to 1865** and was fought between the **North** (called the **Union**) and the **South** (called the **Confederacy**). It was one of the deadliest wars in history, with around **620,000** soldiers killed. But this wasn't a war between two countries—it was a war between different parts of the same country, which made it especially tragic.

The Big Problem: Slavery

The main reason for the war was **slavery**. In the South, slavery had become central to their economy. Wealthy plantation owners used enslaved African people to work their massive farms growing cotton, tobacco, and sugar. These enslaved people had no freedom, no rights, and were treated as property rather than human beings.

The North had gradually stopped using slavery and developed factories and industries instead. Many Northerners believed slavery was morally wrong and wanted it banned everywhere in America. Southerners argued that slavery was their way of life and their business, and they wanted the right to decide for themselves whether to allow it.

Think of it like two friends in a club who can't agree on the most basic rules. One friend thinks a rule is cruel and must be stopped everywhere. The other friend refuses to give up that rule and threatens to leave the club entirely.

Why Did the War Actually Start?

The conflict came to a head in **1860** when **Abraham Lincoln**, who opposed slavery, was elected President. Southern states were so upset that they decided to leave the United States and form their own country. However, President Lincoln refused to let the country break apart. When Southern forces attacked a US military fort called **Fort Sumter** in **April 1861**, the war began.

What Happened and What Changed?

The North eventually won the war because they had more soldiers, more factories, and more resources. The victory meant that the South couldn't leave the USA, and more importantly, slavery was abolished throughout America. The **13th Amendment**, passed in **1865**, officially ended slavery forever in the United States.

The Civil War showed that when people have deep disagreements about right and wrong, compromise can sometimes seem impossible. It also showed that sometimes major historical change comes at an enormous cost in human lives.