

TVCWRT Civil War Tutorial, Part V: The Home Front by Arley McCormick

Domestic tranquility in the South was influenced by inflation, manpower and food shortages, battlefield attrition, and bad news while in the Federal states absent husbands and sons were noticed, the economy was growing in pockets, railroads were expanding west, and consumer goods were available. There was growing interest in letting the South go their own way as Peace Democrats and Copperheads complained about the conscription act.

The Southern economy suffered 1862 as inflation grew 136.36% 1862. It was worse in 1863. By the end of 1863 inflation stood at 700% based upon data accumulated by the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee. Considering the Union blockade was 10% effective, it is notable that consumer goods were not the primary focus for Southern imports. Privateers and blockade runners focused on war materials and consumer goods that brought the most profit. Finished goods from Europe were extremely limited yet a clandestine black market thrived with Northern suppliers at various clandestine locations. When Vicksburg surrendered the availability of beef and salt diminished and that had a direct effect on each Southern home. Along with other military setbacks the result was food riots.

Food riots broke out in numerous Southern cities but the riot in Richmond created the best opportunity for historical analysis. A mob of women and children raided the retail district for flour, other food, and clothing but what drew out the President to address the mob was stealing jewelry, fine clothes, and robbing banks. He threatened to array troops against them and did. But quelling the mob was one thing solving the problem quite another.

Even before the Northern army came into possession of Southern territory slaves were leaving and the exodus, particularly in the wake of Union Army conquests, increased. Drought caused shortages and Southern Partisans interfering with rail shipments of rations destined to Union troops resulted in the Union troops raiding Southern farmers and confiscating hogs, horses, and foodstuff. Farmers resorted to hiding as much as they could and established elaborate signal systems to warn them of encroaching troops. Southern Partisans who generally lived off the land competed with Union troops for food and horses.

The Confederate Congress impacted the farmers with legislation impressing a percentage of their crop, paying in Confederate currency, and imposing severe penalties exacerbating the shortage of food stuff for Southern cities. Citizens bickered among themselves and characterized business men, often Jews, for hoarding foodstuff for higher prices. Occasionally they suffered personal injury. The Confederate government and the Union invaders were the common enemy of the farmer.

There were issues that affected both the North and South almost equally. West of the Mississippi, in the absence of military or paramilitary organizations in Texas, Comanches were running off settlers and recovering land lost over the previous three decades. The Indian Nation was involved in an internal civil war between and within tribes. The 5 Nations were divided between their support

for the North and the Confederacy and taking advantage of the internal divisions, the Kiowa were raiding farms for cattle to feed their nation. Other tribes in the west were settling scores with Union settlers and the small quantity of Union troops in the territories.

In the Federal north the economy was thriving in spots but there was a reactive response to the Emancipation Proclamation. Although, few if any slaves were actually freed the fear in the north was employment. Units from Illinois and Indiana threatened to mutiny. They were mostly volunteers fighting to save the union not free the slaves. When President Lincoln added freeing the slaves to the Union war aims it fed the Peace Democrats and the Copperhead's who had long encouraged the North to let the South go.

In New York, as well as other Northern cities, where immigrants competed for jobs, a combination of adding freeing the slaves to the war aims and new conscription legislation aroused an aggressive response.

On July 13th 1863 the New York draft riot resulted in approximately 2000 looters and rioters from the docks, fire houses, and other sources attacking an orphanage for colored children. The children were evacuated before the break in yet the mob attempted to burn the building. Other mobs roamed the streets for three days beating and hanging Africans whenever and wherever they found them. The estimates of orphans dislocated range from 600-800 and the random killing of Africans from 300 to over 1000. The death toll includes tallies from many other cities in the North that entertained riots.

The 1863 highlights include Northern victories in the field and Southern shortages of manpower and agricultural products and each affected unit strength and desertions. While sustaining the family unit in the South had never been easy, the end was not in sight and it could only get worse. While Southerners and Northerners were quarreling with each other and their governments', the spark of social unrest had very limited impact on either the Federal or Confederate governments attempt to prosecute the war.