

## **Key Learning Point Regarding the Civil War**

*by Arley McCormick*

There is no simple answer to the question of why did we found ourselves in a civil war? Nor is there a simple answer that illustrates it solved the ills of the country. Our society still debates, often violently, the unsolved mysteries of society's faults. It's more like a rivalry between two teams. One may win on the scoreboard today but for the loser; there is always next year. And here we are nearly 160 years later and we find the country destroying artifacts and rewriting the history of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. One topic may offer an explanation; human rights.

Human rights may define the struggle within society. The struggle didn't start with the War of the Rebellion. It was created when one group of mortals achieved authority over another group creating a hierarchy that, modified over century's, defined a portion of the masses as less than human and bred to serve the more intellectual, powerful, and wealthy of the group. The war was a devastating drama that destroyed lives, corrupted the economy, particularly, in the Southern states, and attempted to redefine the rights of all that live under the umbrella of a constitutional democracy.

Study of the antebellum years leading to war, the war years, and the aftermath can be divided into compelling topics depending on individual inclinations. Over a million books are in print and the quantity grows each year. Name a topic and someone wrote a book about it. Many are devoted to the people, places, and events that helped define who we are as Americans.

Those interested in the military aspects of the conflict focus on the leaders, planning, operations and tactics, technology and equipment or aggressively chase the experience of their ancestors who served in the war. Others focus on politics, national and international, or the home front, medicine, prisons, and the list goes on. Some try to understand why Americans fought savagely to kill 900,000 of their countryman. Was it over, economics (high tariffs), slavery a composite of a religious awaking and emigration, a divide created by industrialization and agriculture economies, honor, home and family, or sustaining a United States? Or is it possible that from the alternatives, when analyzed as a composite picture of 19<sup>th</sup> Century society in America, a result was war. A good student can develop an argument that adds substance to nearly every assumption. And there is compelling arguments, with examples and photos that illustrate savage and inhumane treatment inflicted on victims. But, do those examples, amplified over time, illustrate the behavior accepted by citizens of the 19<sup>th</sup> century or are they outlier's representative of conduct found in the challenges similar to human trafficking, random killing, and drug distribution observed today.

What we learn from the historical record is the elected body of our democracy, the Congress, passed laws to free the enslaved people of the Confederacy and the political party of each of those states, in some fashion, deliberately limited their inclusion as equal citizens. The battle of vocabulary in the halls of congress and the state governments' was often raunchy and resulted in less

than ideal law. Presidents and leaders expressing their option added to the chaos. It was said, before President Lincoln's assassination, that he recognized an uneducated freedman, representing a large percentage of the population, excluded from participating in society his entire life, could not be expected to fully integrate over night, and his 10% plan, manipulated after his death, in a fashion reflected that belief.

The political parties of the former Confederate states were aided by prominent and not so gentle members of society who administered the intent of the state elected body. While an Army of occupation, employing the authority of law, eventually neutralized the overtly organized brigands, it could not change the hearts and minds of many citizens that, while not in favor of inflicting harm on their fellowman, did little to minimize the intent employed by elected and appointed officials to administer the law fairly.

What is seldom acknowledged in the Northern States supporting the War; they were equally burdened with the human rights perception that years of slavery generated. While providing a terminal location for the Underground Railroad, freedmen were not integrated into society any more readily than in the Southern states. Many freedmen interviewed during the Great Depression era indicated they, having escaped or migrated from the South were accepted in the North and found accommodation, often less acceptable than the plantation, promises of good paying jobs that never materialized, and they were marginalized in their daily interaction with other citizens and the law. Some chose to return home to their family in the South where they understood the rules.

Today human rights continue to divide our society. Indeed, human rights are the genesis that divides countries, people, and economies of the world. It is not a unique condition exclusive to the USA.

What did we learn from the War of the Rebellion? Not the only thing but maybe the most enduring took over fifty years; as a result of the United States participation in WWI; the rest of the world recognized the collective us as Yanks.