

History 225

Re: Nomenclature

Myths that confuse or mask understanding. They abound in history and the Civil War is no exception, nor should we expect it to be.

Many of these myths are simply frivolous. Take for example the great bruhaha over what to call the bloody contest that took place from 1861 to 1865

During the war the North called this fiery contest the Civil War, or Southern Insurrection, or simply the Rebellion.

Southerners were comfortable with the War for Southern Independence. Although during the war and immediately afterwards Southerners like Confederate VP Alexander Stephens called it the Civil War in his book *A Constitutional View of the War Between the States*. The new name of war between the states quickly took on a popular currency among Southerners.

Civil War came under criticism by Southern partisans one two counts:

One, the argument went, was that Civil War was inaccurate and a slander to the South because by definition Civil War is a struggle between two groups fighting for the same country. This Southern purist argued was incorrect because the South was not fighting to control the Union only the 11 states of the Confederacy.

Secondly, they contend that the war was not between citizens of the same country in light of the fact that the South or Confederacy was a separate nation.

What then are the alternatives. From the Southern side the Civil War should in all accuracy or fairness to the realities should be called the War Between the States, or Lincoln's War, or the War of Northern Aggression.

During the Truman administration immediately following the end of WW II Dixiecrats in Congress imposed on HST (who was politically anxious to appease these rampant southern nationalists and keep them from strolling from the Democratic party) approved a House measure sponsored by Southerners that henceforth the War Between the States should be the official name of the struggle.

Of course, what does Congress know!!!!

In any case the core of this argument for the War Between the States is based on an incorrect definition of "civil war." Check it out in your own dictionary. It is not defined as a war between citizens for control of the state, but as a war between

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groups of citizens. Period.

More apropos is the charge by Southerners that this was a war between two separate nations. The inference being that the Confederacy was at the time of this struggle a separate nation because it said it was a separate nation.

What is the accepted definition of nationhood. Among international legalists and social scientists there is a happy unanimity on what constitutes nationhood:

1. That people setup and maintain a workable civil government;
2. That that government be able to protect the territorial integrity of this nation;
3. Lastly, that legitimate nationhood is reflected in recognition from other countries of the world.

On all three counts the Confederacy achieved only the first. And this was a rather rickety experiment in civil government. Of course the South was attempting nation-building under extreme circumstances—the bloodiest war of the 19th century.

In the other two areas, as your readings will disclose, the Confederacy was losing on an almost daily basis huge areas of territory to invading Union armies

As for recognition not a single country, large or small, extended formal recognition to the Richmond government.

On this basis the Confederacy was in fact only a well organized insurrection or separatist movement that failed to achieve nationhood.

God and History are more frequently than not always on the side of the victors. When in history has the name of a war been selected by the losers?