

CTF

History 322

Re: Lecture Outline for Social History of the
Civil War

Few events have received as much attention as the Civil War. Over 800 histories of Civil War regiments have been published. More than 50,000 books and articles on the war between the states have been published.

Despite this outpouring of literature we do not know much about the impact of this, America's bloodiest war, on everyday life in the U.S. This despite the fact that the war probably affected the lives of most everybody who was living at time. Every person alive during the war years (1861-1865) probably either had a loved one, some relative, or some in-law who served on one side or the other.

More Americans were killed in the Civil than in all our wars combined, beginning with the Revolution, if we eliminate Vietnam and the wars after Vietnam. Over 600,000 Americans, North and South, died in this war.

Calculate military deaths per 10,000 of the population the Civil War figure would be 182 as compared to WW II (with a greater population base) of 30 per 10,000.

About 6% of Northern white males age 13 to 46 died in the war.

About 18% (or almost 1/5) of all Confederate white males (same age cohort) died in the war.

There are no firm figures on civilian casualties. Certainty that there was a smaller % of civilian casualties than one might expect from the horrendous number of military lives lost. One historian estimates that perhaps 50,000 civilians died in the South. (reasons).

History 322

page two

Lecture Notes on Social and military history

Begin with certain "givens" or generally accepted assumptions about the Civil War:

That the Northern victory was a certainty. God marches on the side with the largest battalions. In short, it was only a matter of time before the preponderance of Northern manpower, industrial strength, financial wherewithal, and logistical advantages would force the Confederacy to her knees. (I don't think any respectable historian of this period believes this any more).

Actually, when the war broke out the advantage was on the side of the South. The invader, the Union, despite all the pluses in the bean counting category, still did not have the force attributes or assets to conquer such a large country as the Confederacy. (Take away the US territories in 1861 and the South was a larger land mass than the North.

Superior human and material resources in the North were necessary but not sufficient to assure a victory.

In short, the North's victory/ or the South's defeat cannot be explained by bean counting alone.

Contingency thesis; the turning points. 1862 Antietam/ 1863 Gettysburg/Vicksburg reversed the Reb momentum at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville; 1864 election. Had the election been held in August rather than November Lincoln would have been sent packing.

~~So what were the critical factors in addition to human and material resources that account for the Union victory?~~

~~Leadership--political and military.~~

~~External factors v. internal factors.~~

History 322

Page three

Re: Notes w/ Social History and Civil War

With the emergence of the "new" social history and its emphasis on giving voice to previously "voiceless" segment of history, there has been a marriage of sort between the "new" social history and the battlefield or military history of the Civil War. Implicit in this approach is the belief that leadership at the top--the Great White Fathers contributions--does not tell the whole story. Actions and sentiments of the masses or the inarticulate affect the shaping of events more than the more traditional historians claim.

Military historians (here we are speaking of those who research and write about the Civil War) who have accepted the above premises, now attempt to employ techniques to link military or battlefield history with what is going on on the homefront. This attempt to join the battlefield w/ the homefront or the civilian with the soldier is called (what else) the "new" military history.

The Civil War has become an area of studying informed by this new approach that has produced over the past six years some of the most exciting research. Despite this new approach Civil War historians have not broken with the past. To get into the internal or the bottom up history of the war they still are working with the old framework--How the North Won the Civil War or Why the South Lost the Civil War.

In terms of the "new" military history what were the critical factors in addition to human and material resources that account for the Union victory of the Confederacy's collapse?

Introduce: the notion of will, morale, perseverance, determination to stick the war to the bitter end. (These could be called Internal Factors). This new emphasis is attached in some in our longest war, the war we lost in SE Asia--ten years of Vietnam--sensitized us to the fact that military policy or battlefield victories cannot merely be explained by who has "The Biggest and Best Battalions" or by bean counting.

History 322

Page four

Re: Notes w/ Social History and Civil War

Broad Brushed Examples:

1. Political Leadership. Lincoln as energizer or great spokesman for the core values of Republicanism--He was able to best articulate the core values of the masses: Individualism, egalitarianism, self-government, and self-control, and was able to sustain it through the most harrowing moments of the Civil War.

Whereas Jeff Davis on the other hand was not able to do the same thing as far as internalizing the notion among the 8-9 million southerners of the great virtue of Confederate nationalism. that this ideal was worth sticking the war to the end. He was not able to put the southern soul through the refining fires of this war and above all else an iron will to win. Here the point would be that Davis and the Confederate Founding Fathers were able to unify the South, despite the many differences in that section and the grave and serious doubts among many southerners about the wisdom of secession, as long as battlefield victories were delivered, but as the Confederacy's setbacks on the battlefield grew more regular in the last two years of the war support for southern nationhood crumbled. (The implication here is that the war was lost on the home front and not the field of war.

2. Lincoln as the Great Emancipator. . . Lincoln plays the central role.

Slaves and human agency. . . . another view from bottom up.