

History 322

Page: Addendum to Notes on Social History &
Civil War

Outline/Notes w/ Internal Factors

Point here: Advocates of looking at the internal factors in explaining the Confederacy's defeat look to the home front in the South to explain the collapse of the South's revolution. Or at least to argue that trying to explain Why the North Won by emphasis on the External, the battlefield victories, is to write a shallow history, regardless of the drama of the saga of marching armies and appeal to the martial spirit. (Drum and Bugle History).

The Internal school argument is that Union arms and superior infrastructure were necessary but not sufficient to bring Old Dixie Down. They were only sufficient when Union troops were able to exploit the great fault lines or divisions within South society. So an indispensable understanding of Why the North Won rests upon the appreciation of the extent of the "nightmare" of the internal or home front situation within the Confederacy.

Broad Brush treatment of Internal factors:

1. Recognition that white male slaveholders made up only 5% of the total southern population. Some 70% of southern voters in prewar South were nonslaveholders.

In order to protect the slave regime the slaveocrats depended during the war on support from nonslaveholding white men (the southern yeoman), the lesser sex (the white women of the South, most of whom were in nonslaveholding families, and, ironically but no less true, the allegedly lesser race, the slaves themselves). The Confederacy either through ideological appeal or coercion was forced to depend upon this (fragile) population to draw its human resources to fight the war and to keep the home front mobilized to confront the Union invasion.

2. Border State "defections"--The slave states of Maryland, Delaware, Kentucky, Missouri, and in time eastern Tennessee sided with the Union rather than the Confederacy. This was home front politics. (As Lincoln said: "To deprive the Confederacy of the Border States substantially ends the rebellion." (add West Virginia))

This denied Richmond 50% of the slave states' factory production; 25% of the population; food and livestock resources, etc.

3. Slave "defections": During the war, and especially as Union troops moved deeper into the South, that 40% of the South's population (the 3.5 million slaves) became a ruinous control problem.

History 322

Page Two (addendum Notes)

Source: Freehling essay ("Divided South")

About 600,000 slaves on their own initiative ran off to the Union lines. Some 140,000 of these former slaves were ultimately recruited and joined the Union army. This was human agency at work. These 140,000 plus 34,000 free blacks in the North added 15% to Mr. Lincoln's army. (170,000 additional Union troops). Add to this the 350,000 southern white Union soldiers means that 500,000 residents of slave states fought with the Union army. When you consider that the Confederacy was able to mobilize about 900,000 men in all theatres of the war, this half million additional Union forces from the slave states is even more a figure to conjur with.

Add another home front factor here: drawing off of slaves, even the majority who did not wear Union blue, added to the home front problems of the Confederacy because they were no longer exploitable as producers of food or builders of fortification, etc. They were no longer an asset for Richmond. Moreover, those slaves who were not near Union lines to defect or who stayed back on the plantations were a potentially unruly or dangerous element for home front southerners (slave rebellion was a Great Fear). This was unnerving component for southern civilians and especially wives of Confederate soldiers who were off to war and could not guarantee protection of the home front. (This will be made plain w/ reading of the Faust essay).

In short, the Internalists or those who push the home front explanation for the collapse of the Southern experiment in independence point to these grave internal flaws that Union arms (External factors) were able to exploit to end the secession. There is an abiding irony here: By seceding the slaveholders brought upon themselves the home front nightmares that were inherent in the system. Abolition, the end of the peculiar institution sine die, and the precipitous collapse of the slaveholders dream of independence began with the first shots at Ft. Sumter in April 1861.

History 322

Page three

Re: Notes w/ Social History and Civil War

CTF

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 studing 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.