

Truth about the Civil War

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Where is the truth, the real truth, the God's honest truth in what we hear and know and believe?

If I say bias or prejudice, those are bad words that are unacceptable. But if I say perspective or viewpoint, those words are fine. Yet all four of those words really mean the same thing. The viewpoint is in the words of the writer, the mind of the reader and the words of the speaker. It is in all of us.

I am an upstate, eastern and central New Yorker. I have no ancestors who fought in the Civil War, haven't been in the military, or have interest in the GAR.

But I am an historian who has lived these last 3 years in the 19th century, studied it, read widely and written several published books. I formed Southern Heart Publishing to assist my publications. Partly that name was chosen because you cannot live the 19th century without sympathy for the South.

I have only visited Antietam and just the greeting center at Harper's Ferry. But I reflected sadly at Andersonville and was moved by it. I cannot know about all the battles. I have just compiled a list from the American Battlefield Protection Program and the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission. They list only 384 battles but believe there were 8,000 hostile conflicts. Shelby Foote believes there were 9,000.

Estimates vary, depending on which account you read. There were about 2 million Americans who participated in it. About 80,000 to 100,000 freed blacks fought bravely in it the last year to year and a half of it after the Proclamation. About 600,000 or 620,000 or 650,000 or just under 700,000 Americans of all arms were killed. Less than 2% of Southern whites owned as little as one slave, yet 20% of the male population (service age 17 to 45) of them were killed. The South was demolished of infrastructure. For the South, this was The War of Northern Aggression.

Reconstruction was not focused on repairing any of this. It was focused on creating opportunity for freedmen. This is the only part many late 20th and early 21st century modern historians care about.

I care about all of it. It was the pivotal moment in all of American history. For good or bad or whatever reason, Shelby Foote says it was its own thing. It was its own thing he said, but it was not one thing; it was many streams of things coming together into an unstoppable river.

The events that led up to it were the broken promise of The Northwest Ordinance of 1789 by the Missouri Compromise of 1820, the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, "Bleeding Kansas", John Brown's rampage of violence and killing in the

Pottawatomie massacre, the sacking of Lawrence, the raid on Harper's Ferry, the Dred Scott case and finally the firing on Fort Sumter from Charleston.

And yes, it was about slavery and tariffs and states' rights versus a central government, two different economies, cultures and geographies. It was about John Adams' view versus Thomas Jefferson's; two different visions for a new country from its inception, two powerful factions that would fulfill George Washington's worst nightmare that he shared with us and warned us about in his kindly farewell address.

Our ideals were just spoken about and written down when our nation was formed, but were not yet realized. In one way, the Civil War's conclusion began to realize those ideals for some of us in reality, while for others of us, it was a loss of those ideals.

Either way, it forged the country we would become, one with few states rights and a powerful central government.