

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

Class Conflict in the Union and Confederacy

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Resources

If you can read only one book

Author	<i>Title. City: Publisher, Year.</i>
Williams, David	<i>A People's History of The Civil War: Struggles for the Meaning of Freedom.</i> New York: New Press, 2005.

Books and Articles

Author	<i>Title. City: Publisher, Year.</i>
Bernstein, Iver	<i>The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War.</i> Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.
Fleche, Andre M.	<i>The Revolution of 1861: the American Civil War in the Age of Nationalist Conflict.</i> Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012.
Nelson, Scott Reynolds and Carol Sheriff, eds.	<i>A People at War: Civilians and Soldiers in America's Civil War, 1854-1877.</i> New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
Paludan, Phillip Shaw	<i>A People's Contest: The Union & Civil War, 1861-1865.</i> Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1988.
Williams, Blair	<i>Virginia's Private War: Feeding Body and Soul in the Confederacy, 1861-1865.</i> New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Williams, David	<i>Bitterly Divided: The South's Inner Civil War</i> . New York: New Press, 2008.
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Organizations

Web Resources

URL	Name and description
http://zinnedproject.org/materials/civil-war-and-class-conflict/	This is a teaching aid and essay covering Chapter 10 of David Williams' <i>A People's History of The Civil War</i> .

Other Sources

Scholars

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Topic Précis

The Civil War was a conflict that pitted an industrializing, free labor North against a rural, slaveholding South. But there were also internal tensions and strife emerging out of conflict related to class and status within each society. Non-slaveholding whites in the South, Irish-Catholics in the North, women, African Americans, the poor, the wealthy, and white Protestant males, all struggled to either dominate their rivals, or find a seat in the arenas of ideas and power in their respective societies. In the decades prior to the war, a social and economic revolution unfolded primarily in the Northeast and Old Northwest shifting the economic foundation in the North from small craft and subsistence ventures to high level banking, finance, communication, and industrial enterprises. These changes led to class conflict between the working class and elites, between immigrants and natives and between whites and free African Americans. Anglo Protestant elites were suspicious of Irish Catholic and German immigrants and labor unions representing the working class. The suspicion was returned with both anger and resentment. Non-elite whites feared competition from free and emancipated African Americans who in turn feared violence from these working-class whites. During the war these class conflicts resulted in riots and urban unrest, the most famous of these being the New York City Draft Riots in 1863. The

ability of elites to pay substitutes to avoid the draft was particularly resented. Irish Catholic and German working men and women looted Protestant Republican businesses, fought nativist gangs and lynched African Americans. Riots were quelled by newly formed police forces and by the use of Union soldiers. While the myth of the Lost Cause presented the South as a united region with a clear sense of purpose in fact the Confederacy was also riven with class conflict. There elite planters and slave-owners led the move to secession. Plantation owners grew cash crops to enhance their wealth rather than converting to needed farming for food. While yeomen farmers grew most of the food in the Confederacy, food became increasingly scarce as the war progressed and outside sources were cut off or food growing regions over run by Union armies. Food riots occurred in the south, most notably the Richmond Food Riot in 1863. Confederate draft legislation which exempted men owning 20 or more slaves, exemption for government employees and the purchasing of substitutes added to class resentment and anger. Another source of conflict was the existence throughout the Confederacy of individual and regional loyalty to the Union. The most obvious manifestation of this was the secession of twenty-seven counties in western Virginia to form West Virginia, loyal to the Union. But throughout the south there were bands of anti-Confederate partisans in harassing, attacking, and undermining Confederate authority through angry mobs, theft, aiding escaped slaves, guerilla warfare or aiding the Union army. And of course, the white classes resented and feared uprisings by African Americans who in turn feared for their lives and safety. The Civil War was not just two sides fighting for different causes. In the North growing divisions between the working class and elites set the stage for the strife arising from the labor movement of the late 19th century. In the Confederacy, the mutual antipathy between the planter elites and the yeoman farmers and the existence of many pockets of loyalty to the Union led to constant action undermining the Confederate cause. Thus, both sides had their own internal class conflicts which undermined their ability to fight their main opponent. Ironically, although the internal conflicts in the Confederacy were much more severe than in the Union, the myth of the Lost Cause obscured this until only very recently when modern historians began investigating these class conflicts more deeply.
