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## *Unit 4: U.S. Civil War—Causes, Course and Effects, 1840-1877*

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### **Unit Overview:**

This is a lengthy unit that requires students to remember a large amount of material over several topics. This memorization is a skill that will benefit students when they take the IB History Exam. This unit tackles how Americans responded to the dramatic changes that took place during the first half of the nineteenth century. Immigration, industrialization, and urbanization transformed the North while the South remained an agricultural society based on slave labor. The differences between the two regions finally became so severe that a murderous civil war broke out to resolve the issue. The Northern victory in the war freed the slaves, but did not bring blacks into the mainstream of US society.

### ***Lesson 4:1 Slavery in the United States:***

#### **Objectives:**

- Understand that the ideals of equality espoused in the *Declaration of Independence* helped initiate the idea that race was an integral component of the slave system.
- Understand that race control was a dominate factor of Southern society.
- Understand the arguments in defense of slavery.
- Understand the abolitionist movement.
- Understand that free blacks in both the North and South suffered from significant racial prejudice.
- Understand that slaves had little protection from physical and sexual abuses.
- Understand that slaves could resist their oppression in subtle ways.

#### **Topics:**

- Slavery in the United States.
- The abolitionist movement.

#### *Slavery in the U.S.*

Prior to the 1793 invention of the cotton gin (“gin” was short for “engine”) by Eli Whitney, most Americans, including slaveholders like Thomas Jefferson, believed that slavery would gradually die out because of the limited market for the crops (tobacco, rice and indigo) produced by slave labor in North America. With the invention of the gin, cotton became the primary crop in the South and the demand for slaves grew dramatically.

Even without slavery, agricultural societies tend to be conservative, with strong emphasis on personal and kinship relationships and the observation of established traditions. If agricultural land is held in large manors or plantations, such societies tend to be hierarchical and

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deferential. A slave system, since it means the involuntary servitude of large numbers of people, requires a social and legal system to maintain control of the oppressed populace. In the American South, this subordination was also racial, involving not only the control of slaves by their masters but also the control of four million blacks by eight million whites. Since the enslaved will resist their captivity, the system must be able to deal with the possibility of a slave revolt. This fact alters social priorities, for though American slavery may have originated in the seventeenth century as a means to ensure a permanent labor supply for the cultivation of staple crops, the risk of an uprising made the subordination of the slaves an end in itself. This system of subordination was what Thomas Jefferson was referring to when he said, “We have a wolf by the ears.”

The successful slave revolt in Haiti (1791-1804) terrified the white South. The revolting slaves had virtually exterminated the entire white population of Haiti and committed terrible atrocities, such as burying people alive and sawing them in half. Survivors had fled to the United States and Southerners heard the stories of their suffering. Nat Turner’s 1831 Virginia Rebellion, in which sixty whites were killed, further strengthened white Southern determination to keep blacks “in their place.” On isolated plantations, and in districts where blacks heavily outnumbered whites, the danger seemed a constant one. Every sign of restiveness in the slave quarters, every outsider seen along a lonely road, every enigmatic look on a slave face, even the omission of some customary sign of deference, might be the sign of unknown horrors simmering just beneath the surface of supposed slave docility.

Race control was the dominant factor of Southern society. Slaves lived on plantations not only because plantations were efficient in producing cotton, but also because they were remarkably effective in controlling slave labor. They also provided the planters with significant isolation from dangerous ideas. Slaves should be illiterate, unskilled, rural workers not only because the cotton economy needed those characteristics, but also because illiterate slaves were limited in their access to anti-slavery material. In the South certain questions were not publicly discussed. The Southern system of race control demanded the devotion of the non-slaveholding white majority to the unquestioning support of slavery, even though they might suffer economic disadvantages from this support. Since a major goal of Southern society was not economic mobility, but racial stability, the economic vitality of the capitalist economy and the free labor system of the North was missing in the South. The South became increasingly a closed society, suspicious of ideas from the outside and unsympathetic toward those who questioned the morality of the plantation system.

Every society creates a philosophy suitable to its social situation, and by 1860 the South had developed one, beginning with a confidence in the superior qualities of rural life. At one level this was just a continuation of Jeffersonian agrarianism. But on another level, the dedication to rural values led to a veneration of plantation life, in which even slavery was idealized by the belief that the subservient nature of slavery developed in the master a sense of responsibility for the slaves’ welfare and the slaves reciprocated with a sense of loyalty and

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affection to the master. Thus, the qualities of hospitality, personal courage, and loyalty to men rather than to ideas carried great weight in the *ante-bellum* South.

Once race was tied to slavery, prejudice began to have practical uses which added to the strength of slavery and to its inhumane qualities. Racial prejudice and slavery together created a vicious circle in which the assumed inferiority of blacks was used as justification for their enslavement, and then their subordination as slaves was used to justify the belief that they were inferior. Ironically, racial prejudice was increased by the *Declaration of Independence*. When Thomas Jefferson wrote “all men are created equal,” the belief that blacks, Indians, and to a lesser extent, white women, were not equal to white men enabled white men to exclude those groups from the opportunities of equality. After July 4, 1776 a white belief in black racial inferiority was absolutely necessary for the political and philosophical justification of black bondage. Beginning in the 1830s, in the face of the increasing Northern assault on slavery, Southerners began to move from the idea that slavery was a necessary evil that would eventually die out, to a positive good that benefited slaves and society as a whole. Southerners often argued that chattel slavery was a better form of life than the “wage slavery” that laborers in the North had to endure.

Having an understanding of white American views on race makes it easy to understand the precarious position of free blacks. By 1860 about 250,000 free blacks lived in the South. In the upper South, much of the free black population traced its origins to emancipation inspired by the idealism of the American Revolution and the *Declaration of Independence*. In the deeper South, many free blacks were mulattoes, usually the emancipated children of a white planter and a black slave. There were some free blacks who had purchased and earned their freedom through work outside the plantation. Free blacks were prohibited from working certain occupations and forbidden from testifying against whites in court. They were vulnerable to being forced back into slavery by unscrupulous slaver traders. Their very freedom made them examples of what blacks could achieve outside of slavery and therefore they were resented and harassed by white Southerners.

An additional 250,000 free blacks lived in the North. Most states denied black men the right to vote, and some banned blacks from public schools. They were restricted to the most unskilled jobs and forced to live in segregated neighborhoods. Northern blacks were especially loathed by poor immigrants (which in the first half of the nineteenth century tended to be Irish) since they competed for the same low paying jobs. Prior to the Civil War, many Northern whites were against the spread of slavery into the new Western territories because of racial prejudice.

The conditions of slavery varied greatly depending on the region, the master, and the size of the farm or plantation. The slaves—both men and women—usually worked from dawn to dusk in the fields, under the control of a white overseer or a black driver. They had no civil or political rights since they were forbidden to testify in court. Their marriages were not legally recognized because owners wanted to be able to sell slaves without restrictions.

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Beatings and other forms of physical punishments were common. Just as there are books today on how to raise children, there were books during the slave era that instructed masters how to manage their slaves. Masters were advised that whipping a slave now and then was a good thing because it would keep the slaves docile. Since savage beatings made surly laborers, masters were also warned that overly severe punishments might be counterproductive. There was also social pressure involved—it was bad form to severely beat one’s wife, children, or slaves—a “real man” could handle his inferiors without having to resort to severe physical abuse.

Because of the greater availability of white women, miscegenation in North America was probably not as common as it was in Latin America and the Caribbean. But, historians estimate that about thirty percent of the children born to slaves in the United States had white fathers. Slaves were raped. Female slaves also understood that having sex with a master, or his sons, could lead to an improved life—working in the big house instead of the fields, better food and clothing, less severe punishment. It is important to emphasize that the relationship between master and slave was always unequal, with the master setting the terms of the relationship. Limited evidence also indicates that the wives of slave owners would sometimes turn a blind eye to a husband’s dalliances in the slave quarters. Child birth was life threatening in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Allowing one’s husband to find his pleasure in the slave quarters was an effective means of birth control. If a child was born of the illegitimate liaison and looked too much like the father, the embarrassment could be removed by selling the child “down the river.”

Although a majority of whites that owned slaves owned only one or two, a majority of blacks lived on larger plantations of twenty slaves or more. In some areas of the Deep South blacks made up more than 75 percent of the population. Masters encouraged their slaves to adopt Christianity. After the Nat Turner’s Rebellion (Turner was a slave preacher) whites led the slave services. Christianity was beneficial to whites because it helped them justify the idea that slavery “civilized” blacks by helping them find salvation. But, perhaps more importantly, slave Christianity was also a method of race control (“turn the other cheek”) because suffering in this life would be rewarded by eternal life in heaven.

Since open rebellion would almost certainly lead to severe punishment or even death, slaves used the universal “weapons of the weak” to show their displeasure and, hopefully, at the same time avoid punishment. Slowing down one’s work pace to the point where the master understood that a day off, better food or a party was necessary to get it back up to where he wanted it was a common method of resistance on the larger plantations. Slaves stole food. They would sabotage equipment, and in extreme cases a “mysterious” fire could break out in the barn or big house. Running away was risky, especially from the Deep South, but always a last resort.

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### *The Abolitionist Movement*

Because of widespread racial prejudice, early abolitionist efforts concentrated on moving blacks back to Africa. In 1822 the Republic of Liberia was established with former slaves. Some 15,000 freed blacks were transported there over the next forty years. By 1860 Southern slaves were no longer Africans, but native-born African-Americans, with their own distinctive history and culture and free blacks had no desire to immigrate to Africa. In 1833 Great Britain emancipated its slaves and America became one of the few “Europeanized” countries with slavery (by 1860 in the Western Hemisphere only the United States, the Spanish colonies of Cuba and Puerto Rico, and Brazil still had legalized slavery).

In 1831, the radical abolitionist movement began to be a major force in American politics when the twenty-six year old William Lloyd Garrison published his first issue of his newspaper *The Liberator*. On the masthead were these words: “I will be as harsh as truth and as uncompromising as justice. . . .I am in earnest—I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch—and I WILL BE HEARD!” In 1833 Garrison and other abolitionists formed the Anti-Slavery Society. Frederick Douglass was a prominent black member of the society. In 1845 he published his autobiography which depicted his origins as the son of a black slave woman and a white father, his struggle to learn to read and write, and his escape from slavery in 1838. Since the Constitution stated that escaped slaves must be returned to their masters, Douglass could be legally returned to slavery—at one point, fearing for his safety, he had to flee to London. Garrison often appeared to be more interested in his own virtue than in the immorality of slavery itself. He constantly demanded that the “virtuous” North secede from the “wicked” South. Garrison never explained how this action would end slavery. On July 4, 1854, Garrison burned a copy of the Constitution as “a covenant with death and an agreement with hell.” Douglass, on the other hand, along with other moderate abolitionists, increasingly looked to politics to end slavery. These political abolitionists backed the Liberty party in 1840, the Free Soil Party in 1848, and beginning in 1854, the Republican Party. Abolitionists also began to help slaves escape from the South through an “Underground Railroad” that moved escaped slaves to free states in the North or to Canada. While the abolitionists did not end slavery, their agitation raised American consciences about the moral evils of slavery and their actions certainly helped lead to the Civil War.

### **Lesson 4:2 Ante-bellum Reform:**

#### **Objectives:**

- Understand that Transcendentalism helped raise the social conscious of some Americans and these reformers attempted to improve what they perceived as weaknesses in American society. *Ante-bellum* reform movements helped set the foundation for future successes and they raised many people’s awareness of societal ills.
- Understand that “reform” is always a double-edged sword. What is perceived as reform for one person may be viewed as oppression by another—immigration restrictions and prohibition are obvious examples. Less obvious may be abolition; the abolitionists

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believed they were fighting to free people from an inhumane system, while slaveholders viewed the abolitionists as crazed radicals who were attacking their constitutional property rights.

### Topics:

- *Ante-Bellum Reform.*
  - ✓ Transcendentalism.
  - ✓ Social reform.
  - ✓ Prohibition and immigration.
  - ✓ The Know-Nothings.
  - ✓ The Second Great Awakening.

### Content Background:

#### *Transcendentalism*

All *ante-bellum* reformers believed in trying to perfect the society in which they lived. The philosophy of transcendentalism put forth by Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson proclaimed that God was in everyone, and therefore everyone had the ability of becoming “Christ-like.” A person could transcend [rise above] his human weakness and achieve perfection. This perfection would be achieved through education which would raise a person’s consciousness about society’s imperfections. The transcendentalists believed that once people were educated about society’s evils these problems would disappear. In his essay *Civil Disobedience* Thoreau declared that above man’s law was a higher law—God’s Law—and that if man’s laws were unjust and violated the higher law, a citizen had a duty to disobey these laws. Thoreau’s ideas were first played-out in a major way during the Mexican War (1846-1848). Most transcendentalists thought that the Mexican War was immoral for two reasons. First, they saw it as a war of aggression, and second, they believed it was a war to spread slavery. Since slavery was sanctioned in the Constitution, Thoreau’s theory allowed a person to protest slavery and the Mexican War in good conscience. Thoreau emphasized that people should not use violence in their disobedience, but through their actions raise the consciousness of people who by following man’s law violated the “higher law.” This philosophy had a great influence on Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.

#### *Social reform*

Reformers tried to improve American society by improving conditions and treatment for those less privileged than others—women, the blind, deaf, prisoners, and the insane. Dorothea Dix publicized the plight of the insane and prisoners in Massachusetts. Women like Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton tried to improve the legal status of women. Women could not vote nor hold public office. Most colleges and professions were closed to them. Married women could not control their own property, and in divorce the husband received the children. The New York Seneca Falls Conference and Declaration in 1848 was an unsuccessful attempt to correct these faults.

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### *Prohibition and immigration*

Americans had always been heavy drinkers. Nevertheless, drunkenness was universally regarded as sinful and socially unacceptable. In the moral improvement campaigns of the *ante-bellum* period, reformers published statistics that illustrated that a considerable number of crimes were committed by people who were drunk. They also drew a connection between poverty and drinking. Drunkenness, the reformers claimed, led to poverty. Once evangelical preachers took up the subject of temperance, the movement spread rapidly. By 1835 over one million Americans belonged to temperance societies, and several states passed prohibition laws. In the 1830s and 1840s the crusade against alcohol took on a new energy because of the huge influx of immigrants who had different customs than native Americans, among which was supposedly drinking to excess. Only 8,400 Europeans came to the U.S. in 1820. More than 23,000 arrived in 1830 and 84,000 immigrated in 1840. In 1850 at least 370,000 people immigrated into the U.S. Not only were the numbers larger than before, most of the new immigrants were Catholics and many did not speak English. In 1820 3,600 Irish came to the US and most of them were Protestant. Primarily because of the Irish Potato Famine, 164,000 Irish arrived in 1850, and the vast majority were Catholic. In 1820, 968 Germans entered the U.S.; in 1850, hard economic times caused 79,000 to immigrate to the U.S. and many of them were from Catholic southern Germany. Between 1830 and 1860 the Catholic population of the U.S. increased from 300,000 to more than three million or from three percent of the total population to thirteen percent. In the view of the prohibitionists, restricting alcohol consumption would reduce child and spousal abuse and ensure that immigrant factory workers came to work sober and not hung-over. In addition, much of the immigrants' political and union activities took place in local bars, and although not often publicly stated, nativists realized that without those meeting places, the political and union activity of the immigrants would be restricted.

### *The Know-Nothings*

The growth of Catholicism in the U.S. was difficult for many Protestant Americans to accept. Since the days of the Puritans they had been taught Catholicism was not just another Christian denomination but a source of evil. In addition, in the Italian Papal States the Pope was seen as the leader of a backward-looking and authoritarian state. The political principles of Catholicism seemed to be the exact opposite of the American traditions of democracy. Because many of the Irish immigrants were devote Catholics, many Protestant Americans feared their values and culture. Moreover, the vast majority of the Irish immigrants were impoverished. Once in the U.S., they were willing to work for low rates of pay. Native workingmen regarded them as a threat to their own standard of living. Economic fears combined with the evangelical campaign against the new immigrants' religious beliefs and their apparently heavy drinking caused a strong anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant movement to develop in the 1840s. Fights between Protestant and Irish Catholic workingmen regularly took place in northeastern cities. Anti-Catholicism took on political form with the founding of the Order of the Star Spangled Banner, a secret organization that was dedicated to restricting Catholic immigration. The order's members came to be known as "Know-Nothings" because when asked by outsiders about the organization, they replied, "I know nothing." After 1850,

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the organization formed the American political party. At its zenith, the American Party elected 75 congressmen. By 1860 the American Party was incorporated into the Republican Party.

### *The Second Great Awakening*

In the Second Great Awakening, as in the First in the mid-eighteenth century, persuasive preachers traveled across New England and New York with the message that human nature was contaminated with original sin. This was the same message that Puritan ministers had preached. Unlike the Puritans, however, these preachers stated that not just a few “Elect” were saved through God’s grace; everyone who repented and prayed for deliverance from their sinful natures would be granted salvation. This vision of religion fit in well with the American version of democracy—Heaven was not reserved for the elite, it was a democratic place. A high-quality revivalist sermon began with an emotional description of the sinfulness of human beings. The second part of the sermon frighteningly detailed the sufferings of hell, for which all unrepentant sinners were destined. The preacher then concluded on a note of optimism. Any person could be saved if he repented and declared faith in Jesus Christ. While the revivalism of the Second Great Awakening spread through every state to some extent, it was strongest in New England and in upstate New York, regions that seemed left behind in America’s economic growth, and on the frontier, where life was equally difficult and tenuous. The message was spread through camp revival meetings. People who lived remote, lonesome lives responded to the calls by the thousands—more than 20,000 in one instance—and came to the camp meeting from long distances. The atmosphere of the camp meeting was exhilarating. At the largest revivals 25 to 40 preachers simultaneously sermonized to the multitude. The meeting went on day and night for a week or more. Conversions were fervent. Many Americans went just for the entertainment and the opportunity to steal, pick pockets, jeer preachers, drink heavily, and meet members of the opposite sex. The excesses of the camp meeting eventually led to a negative reaction. In place of the revival the Methodists, and later other Protestant groups, developed the circuit rider parson. He was a minister who was assigned to visit ten or twenty settlements on regular bases that were too poor or too small to support a permanent preacher.

### ***Lesson 4:3 Causes of the Civil War:***

#### **Objectives:**

- Understand that the North began to develop as an urban, industrial society dominated by industrial capitalists and with a large working class. The South remained an agricultural society based on slave labor. These differences increased regional conflict.
- Understand that Southerners realized that slavery needed to expand to survive. Northerners opposed the spread of slavery into the Western territories because they wanted western land to be farmed by free whites and not black slaves.