

# A NATION DIVIDED The American Civil War

# ON THE HOMEFRONT

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The Civil War presented numerous challenges and horrors for the soldiers who fought it, but it also had a huge impact on those who remained at home. Millions of Americans faced hardships on the **homefront**, and it is their struggles that show how completely the war affected people from all backgrounds.

With men serving in the army, women faced a daunting set of challenges. First and foremost, they worried about the safety of their loved ones, scanning **casualty** lists in fear of finding the names of fathers, sons, or husbands. Women also had to raise their children alone and complete the work normally done by the men, such as managing farms and businesses. Since large amounts of clothing, food, and other war goods were sent to the armies, shortages were common and **civilians**



Refugees Photo National Archives

from all walks of life were forced to do without.

Adding to the hardship was **foraging** by both armies. Women found their fences torn down for firewood or their farm animals **confiscated** to feed the army. This severely hurt their ability to survive on their own.

Because the homefront was divided politically during the Civil War, it presented a different set of dangers. In the North, Democrat politicians known as **copperheads** spoke out against the war. They opposed the draft laws, which led to draft riots in large Northern cities. In the South and in the Border States, those who supported the Union faced **retribution** from their Confederate neighbors.

Nowhere was this more evident than in Missouri, which became the site of intense **guerrilla** warfare. Although the Union retained control of Missouri during the Civil War, Missouri was home to many slave owners and secessionists who strongly sympathized with the South. They detested the Union and resented the Union Army's presence in Missouri. They also detested any neighbors who supported the Union.

This seething hatred resulted in the organization of **bushwhackers**, or roving gangs of guerrillas who operated

outside of the regular army. Fighting by ambush, they attacked army supply lines and committed **atrocities** against their neighbors. During a raid, bushwhackers typically murdered all adult males in a house, stole the horses and household valuables, and burned homes and farms. Revenge attacks by those who had been victims only escalated the violence.

Because most of the guerrillas were Southern sympathizers who disrupted the Union's purposes and goals, the Union Army took drastic steps to stop the bushwhackers.

In Missouri, the army declared **martial law**. This meant that the army became judge, jury, and executioner of suspected bushwhackers. Under martial law, bushwhackers were usually shot on sight instead of being taken prisoner like regular Confederate soldiers would have been.

The Union also punished civilians who helped the guerrillas. The most infamous case was Missouri's General Order No. 11. Under this order, all civilians in Bates, Cass, Jackson and Vernon counties were ordered to leave their homes, regardless of their loyalties. This order was an attempt to break up the network of civilians who helped bushwhackers operate by feeding, sheltering and supporting them.



The army's demands for food during the Civil War took a heavy toll on farm families, forcing some mothers to take their children and move from camp to camp in search of support. Pictured above is the camp of the 31st Pennsylvania near Washington, D.C., in 1862. Photo National Archives

Other civilians who feared Missouri's violent climate voluntarily left their homes. Due to this **exodus**, the population of many Missouri counties declined drastically during the 1860s.

The Civil War was a tumultuous time for the United States, and the terrible battlefield engagements were only part

of the story. The war waged on the homefront was at times equally brutal as millions of lives were disrupted by the horrors of war.



## TIMELINE OF EVENTS

## Did You Know?

Many women on the homefront served as nurses in the numerous hospitals devised to care for wounded soldiers. Dorothea Dix, who established a professional nursing corps for the army, required her nurses to be plain-looking and middle-aged.

### 1854

The Kansas-Nebraska Act leads to the "Bleeding Kansas" border war and the formation of the Republican Party.

### 1859

John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry increases tensions between the North and the South.

### 1860

Abraham Lincoln is elected President. South Carolina secedes from the Union.

### 1861

The Confederate States of America is formed. Fort Sumter is captured and the Civil War begins.

### 1862

Missouri is successfully defended by the Union at Pea Ridge, Ark. Union victory at Antietam leads Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation.

### 1863

Victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg turn the war in favor of the Union.

### 1865

Lee surrenders at Appomattox. Lincoln is assassinated at Ford's Theater.

### 1867

Radical Reconstruction begins in the South.

### 1877

The Compromise of 1877 ends Reconstruction. Without military support, Reconstruction governments collapse in the South.

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