Chapter 14

**[[Big Idea:** What significant changes occurred between 1861 and 1865, and how did military and political goals affect social, economic, and cultural life?]]

Clara Barton—a Union nurse and founder of the American Red Cross—believed the Civil war enhanced the status of American women. “At the war’s end,”she said, “was at least fifty years in advance of the normal position which continued peace would have assigned her.” But was that actually the case? Women certainly took on more responsibilities during the war. In the absence of husbands and sons, they kept farms and shops going, took jobs in manufacturing, and entered new professions such as nursing. But many of these changes proved to be temporary and failed to spark a permanent rise in women’s status.After the war male legislators rebuffed women’s efforts to win the vote or enter specialized fields, such as law and medicine.

Other changes were equally ambiguous. Emancipation dramatically altered the civic status of the nation’s black population, as 4 million enslaved people (13 percent of the population) became free. The rewards of freedom, such as enjoyment of personal liberty and family security, were immense. But racism and racial violence continued, and most former slaves remained poor and landless agricultural tenants and laborers.

However, the war did create a new party system that, essentially, continued the war’s sectional divisions. For the next eighty years, Republicans controlled most of the northeastern and midwestern states and the Democrats dominated the “Solid South,” as it was called. The parties battled initially over rights to be accorded to blacks. Subsequently, they fought over the tariff and other economic legislation enacted by Republican-dominated wartime congresses.

The war itself yielded surprisingly little economic progress. Many industries expanded to provide weapons, clothes, and food for the millions of troops. But the war sharply limited cotton production and exports, destroyed the South’s industrial centers, and pulled northern workers and capital from long-term productive activities.

Nonetheless, by enhancing the political power of the north’s capitalist class, the Civil War laid the legal and entrepreneurial foundations for a second industrial revolution—in steel, coal, chemicals, copper—and the creation of great private fortunes. The world of 1870 was far different from that of 1840. What Mark Twain labeled “The Gilded Age” replaced the Age of the Jacksonian Common Man.