

# Civil War in the Southeast

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



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Many sites in the Southeast Region of the National Park System played a significant role during the turbulent years of the American Civil War. These sites address the causes and coming of the war, events on both homefront and battlefield, and the continuing struggle for civil rights.

The Civil War marked a major turning point for the United States. Historians have called it the most important event in American history. From this defining

struggle (1861–1865) emerged a nation much different from the one created by the revolution of 1776.

The cost of this conflict, which took the lives of more than 620,000 Americans, may best be appreciated on its battlefields. Some 10,500 conflicts raged across the severed nation, 384 of which have been designated "principal battles" of the war. Most of these are represented in red on the map below. Their stories may be found at [www.nps.gov/history/hps/abpp/civil.htm](http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/abpp/civil.htm).

Many well-known battles were fought in the area between the rival capitals of Washington, D.C., and Richmond, Virginia. This narrow corridor, bounded by the Appalachian Mountains and the Chesapeake Bay, formed the heart of the Civil War's Eastern Theater.

Beyond the Appalachians lay the war's Western Theater. Bounded by the Ohio and Mississippi rivers and the Gulf of Mexico, this far-flung area was equally important to the overall strategy of the war. Defending this huge

territory constantly strained Confederate resources. As the Confederacy's untouched core grew smaller, troops from the Western Theater expanded their fight into the Southeast's seaboard states.

To visit the national parks and heritage areas in the Southeast Region, both battlefields and beyond, is to understand the impact of the war and its continuing relevance today.



## "Unvexed to the sea..."

At the time of the Civil War, the Mississippi River was a critical avenue of commerce enabling the rich agricultural products of the upper Midwest to reach world markets. When Confederate forces closed the river to navigation, they threatened to strangle those northern commercial interests. For Lincoln, the capture of Vicksburg was central to wresting control of the river from the Confederacy: "Vicksburg is the key! The war can never be brought to a close until that key is in our pocket..."

In March 1863, Union Major General Grant began a brilliant campaign which, following the Confederate retreat from the Battle of Champion Hill, resulted in a prolonged siege of the heavily fortified city. With Vicksburg's surrender on July 4 and the fall of Port Hudson, Louisiana, five days later, the Confederacy was cut in half. A relieved Lincoln remarked, "The Father of Waters again goes unvexed to the sea." Combined with the Confederate defeat at Gettysburg the previous day, the capture of Vicksburg marked a major milestone on the road to Union victory.

## Up the Tennessee River to "Bloody Shiloh"

The February 1862 capture of Fort Henry, Fort Heiman, and Fort Donelson by joint army-navy operations under Union Brigadier General Ulysses S. Grant and Flag-Officer Andrew H. Foote opened the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers to deep penetration by Union forces. On April 6–7, Grant repelled a surprise attack on his camp at Pittsburg Landing by General Albert Sidney Johnston. Grant's stubbornness at the Battle of Shiloh set the stage for a Union advance into the Mississippi River Valley through the railroad junction of Corinth.

## Atlanta's Fall: Driving a Wedge through the Heart of the South

The hard-fought victory at Stones River in the dead of winter 1862 paved the way from Tennessee to Georgia, launching the Union effort to tear the Confederacy apart. In November 1863, Union Major General Grant reversed the Confederate victory at Chickamauga the previous September with a dramatic win of his own on Chattanooga's Missionary Ridge. The following spring, Union Major General William T. Sherman followed the Western and Atlantic Railroad southeast towards Atlanta. By seizing this key southern transportation hub, he hoped to split the remaining Confederacy, destroy its food supply, and capture the Deep South's war-making industrial capacity.

The Atlanta Campaign saw over a dozen major battles. Confederate success, such as at Kennesaw Mountain on June 27, 1864, could not prevent the fall of Atlanta. On September 1, evacuating Confederates burned Atlanta's military facilities and supplies. Union troops occupied the city on September 2, providing a big boost for Lincoln's re-election bid. By the end of the year, Sherman reached Savannah to end his destructive March to the Sea.

## Charleston: "A hotbed of secession"

After South Carolina became the first state to leave the Union in December 1860, Charleston became an important Atlantic Ocean port city for the fledgling Confederate States of America. Tensions escalated in the weeks before President Abraham Lincoln took office as Federal forces refused to abandon Fort Sumter, located at the mouth of Charleston Harbor. On April 12, 1861, Confederate batteries opened fire on the fort, triggering Lincoln's call for Federal troops to put down the rebellion. Although the harbor was closed by Union blockade in 1863 and the city and its surrounding fortifications were repeatedly targeted by the Union army and navy, Charleston did not fall to Federal forces until the last months of the war.

## General Scott's Great Snake

In the early days of the Civil War, Union General-in-Chief Winfield Scott proposed a two-pronged strategy for subduing the Confederacy: an advance down the Mississippi River to cut the South in two and a blockade of the Confederacy's coastline stretching over 3000 miles from Virginia to Texas. Critics called Scott's idea the Anaconda Plan, likening it to the coils of an anaconda suffocating its victim. The snake image caught on, giving the proposal its popular name.

However, sealing off the South's many ports and inlets proved a difficult task. At first, small but swift blockade runners routinely slipped past slower Union war vessels to bring Southerners critical goods such as boots, Enfield rifles, and medical supplies. But by war's end, the Union blockade had halted the export of cotton and reduced southern trade by two-thirds. Several coastal fortifications preserved by the NPS help interpret the blockade, such as Fort Pulaski, Fort Jefferson in Dry Tortugas, and Fort Pickens at Gulf Islands. Inlets along the Cape Hatteras coastline also played a role in this strategy.

## National Heritage Areas

Committed to protecting and promoting the cultural, historical and natural assets of a region, National Heritage Areas play a vital role in maintaining both the physical character and the cultural legacy of the United States. [www.nps.gov/history/heritageareas](http://www.nps.gov/history/heritageareas)

Established primarily for its nature preserve, the **Arabia Mountain NHA** in Georgia also preserves the Flat Rock community settled by freedmen and women, one of the plantations they worked, and a cemetery in which they are buried.

Though known mostly for preserving Cajun culture, the Atchafalaya Basin was on the front lines of the war. The **Atchafalaya NHA** in Louisiana interprets several major battles including Port Hudson, one of the first involving African American soldiers.

Augusta Canal's power and water transportation factored into Confederate military leaders' selection of this Georgia city as the location for its Powder Works, which produced nearly three million pounds of gunpowder. **Augusta Canal NHA** interprets this story and preserves the 153-foot refinery chimney, the only remnant of the complex.

Africans, both enslaved and free, found their way into western North Carolina to work the small farms and in trades that developed in the fertile mountain valleys.

After emancipation, many purchased or were given land to farm and developed their own communities. A number of their traditions—notably food and music—have become an integral part of Appalachian culture and are interpreted in the **Blue Ridge NHA**.

Cane River plantations show the evolution of southern agriculture from slavery to tenant farming and sharecropping through mechanization. The Red River Campaign traversed the area, leaving behind burned fields and homes and a community in tatters.

The **Cane River NHA** in Louisiana tells the stories of the cultural, economic, and political struggles of Creole people and newly freed enslaved people after emancipation.

The Gullah-Geechee people descend from enslaved Africans from west and central Africa. Brought to North America and forced to work on the plantations of the coast, they retained many aspects of their heritage due to the geographic barriers of the landscape and a strong sense of place and family. The **Gullah-Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor** reaches from

North Carolina to Florida and interprets the history from slavery through civil rights.

The Delta swamp was cleared for cotton plantations and worked by sharecroppers, both African American and white. The **Mississippi Delta NHA** encompasses the City of Vicksburg and interprets the important Civil War events there. It also includes a number of critical civil rights sites, telling the stories of Emmett Till and Fannie Lou Hamer through Stokely Carmichael.

The **Mississippi Gulf Coast NHA** tells the story of Ship Island from which Admiral Farragut staged the capture of Mobile and New Orleans and from which an African American regiment of the Louisiana Native Guards was based. It also interprets Beauvoir, the last home of Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy.

The **Mississippi Hills NHA** was the location of several pivotal battles and maneuvers during the Civil War including the Battle of Corinth and the Battle of Brices Cross Roads.

Though the **Muscle Shoals NHA** primarily tells the story of how the rocky shoals on the Tennessee River affected America's settlement toward the southwest, it also preserves the home of Confederate General Joe Wheeler who was with President Jefferson Davis when they were captured. Wheeler's home typifies the slavery culture of the era.

Rice was the crop that produced enormous wealth in the Lowcountry for 200 years. Enslaved West Africans cleared the swamps to cultivate it. As cotton became king, it was

primarily their labor that produced it. Many sites in the **South Carolina National Heritage Corridor** tell of their pre- and post-War experiences at Military Heritage Sites throughout the 320-mile area.

Encompassing the entire state, the **Tennessee Civil War NHA** tells the whole story of America's greatest challenge, 1860-1875: the powerful stories of vicious warfare, the demands of the homefront and occupation, the freedom of emancipation and the enduring legacies of Reconstruction.

# America at War with Herself

## The Coming of the Civil War

The seeds of the American Civil War were sown during the Constitutional Convention of 1787. By then, slavery had become a grim reality in the new nation. Out of a total population of 3.8 million people, early census figures show more than 700,000 were enslaved, many of them concentrated in the nine-state area that makes up the National Park Service's Southeast Region. In South Carolina, for example, 43% of the population was enslaved.

Although not mentioned by name in the Constitution, slavery was an extremely contentious issue during the Constitutional Convention. The resulting document included compromises which failed to reconcile opposing opinions. The Constitution guaranteed the right to own private property, allowed the importation of slaves until 1808, and included a fugitive slave clause. A key compromise allowed states to count 3/5 of their enslaved population in apportioning representatives in Congress and the Electoral College. This gave the South much greater representation than its free population alone would have allowed.

The slavery debate set the stage for increasing conflict between free and slave states over the next seven decades. The question of expanding slavery into the western territories was a key issue, one revisited each time a new state sought admission to the Union. Southern concerns increased dramatically with the presidential election of 1860, amid fears the Republican candidate was a threat to slavery.

Melrose typifies the grand homes of affluent white landowners. The wealth of the South was built on the back of slave labor with cash crops like 'King Cotton.'

Formerly enslaved blacksmith Solomon Williams forged decorative crosses for the graves of loved ones.

Lincoln tried desperately to achieve a peaceful solution to secession, but when he decided to resupply the US army troops at Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor in April 1861, Confederate forces fired on the fort. Civil war had come.

Slave quarters on the Kingsley Plantation, Timucuan

THE UNION  
DISSOLVED!

Between Abraham Lincoln's election and inauguration, seven states (including six in the Deep South: South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Louisiana and Georgia) seceded from the Union, citing concerns over the preservation of slavery. After the firing on Fort Sumter and Lincoln's subsequent call for troops, two additional southeastern states—Tennessee and North Carolina—reversed their earlier votes against secession. Beyond the Southeast Region, three other states joined the Confederacy: Texas, Arkansas, and Virginia. Kentucky initially proclaimed its neutrality in this debate, but soon came under control of United States forces.

## The Hallowed Ground of Epic Battles

More than 620,000 Americans, Union and Confederate, lost their lives in the Civil War; many from battle wounds, many more from disease. They left behind them a grief-stricken nation which even 150 years later has not yet completely healed. The nation's first national cemeteries came into being as a direct result of this bloody conflict. Of the 14 national cemeteries administered by the National Park Service, half are located in the Southeast Region: Andersonville and Andrew Johnson (the only two currently active), Fort Donelson, Chalmette, Shiloh, Stones River, and Vicksburg.

A major Confederate victory occurred at Chickamauga Creek on September 18-20, 1863, when Confederates exploited a gap accidentally created in Union lines. In commemoration of the battles at Chickamauga and Chattanooga, this land became the first National Military Park in 1890.

Andersonville, Confederate prison

The burning of Columbia, South Carolina, February, 1865.

## The War beyond the Major Battlefields

While deaths on distant battlefields affected many families in the North, the disastrous impact of the war was felt the hardest in the South. People's homes and homelands were destroyed on both sides of the conflict, but particularly in the South where so much of the war was waged. Civilians, both free and enslaved, suffered the effects of battle, disease, and deprivation.

The war and the upheaval of the economy brought many changes to America, such as unprecedented numbers of women entering the workforce at plantation, farm, and factory.

With men off to war, women filled traditional male roles, managing property and businesses and working outside the home to provide income for their families.

In spring 1864, Union General Sherman started the Atlanta Campaign from Tennessee to Georgia, including the March to the Sea where his orders were to "enforce devastation upon anyone who resists."

Dr. King delivered his 'I Have a Dream' speech on August 28, 1963. Congress enacted the Civil Rights Act the next year. Landmarks of his life are preserved at Martin Luther King NHS.

## From Civil War to Civil Rights

What began as a war to preserve the Union became a war of emancipation and then evolved into a century-long struggle for civil rights. Prior to emancipation, many enslaved people sought freedom through the Underground Railroad and the establishment of settlements such as the Freedmen's Colony commemorated at Fort Raleigh and the Corinth Contraband Camp memorial park, a part of Shiloh. These areas tell how a newly freed people took the first steps toward gaining equal rights. After the war, they built their own communities at places like Fazendeville at Jean Lafitte and the Settlement at Cumberland Island. Andrew Johnson NHS presents the story of the issues facing the country during this difficult time of Reconstruction. Many newly found rights and hopes were dashed by Jim Crow laws and discrimination. The journey toward equality reached its climax in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s but is not yet complete today.

The Tuskegee Airmen were the first African American military aviators in the United States armed forces. During World War II, they faced racial discrimination both within and outside the army but nonetheless flew with distinction.

**Why Does the Civil War Matter Today?**

The United States as we know it today is a result of the Civil War. The Civil War was fought over conflicting issues of liberty. The cost was high, but the war resolved many issues that divided the nation. The war confirmed the Union. Before 1861, people referred to "the United States are..." Today we say "the United States is."

The war established the sovereign relationship between the federal government and individual states.

The 13th Amendment to the US Constitution, ratified in December 1865, prohibits slavery in all states and territories.

The 14th Amendment to the US Constitution, ratified in July 1868, extends citizenship to all persons born or naturalized in the U.S., regardless of race; forbids any state to make or enforce laws that abridge the rights of citizens; and ensures due process and equal protection under the law for all citizens.

The 15th Amendment to the US Constitution, ratified in March 1870, guarantees the right to vote to all male citizens regardless of "race, color or previous conditions of servitude."

Other issues remain unresolved. The debate continues, as it should in a democracy, until we meet the challenge of Abraham Lincoln's new birth of freedom, and all citizens enjoy equal protection under the law.

Both free African Americans and the newly emancipated joined the fight. These 180,000 men guarded key posts and fought in battles such as Tupelo and Brices Cross Roads. One-third of them died in the war.

Previously enslaved man Lewis Adams advocated establishing a Normal School for Colored Teachers at Tuskegee, Alabama in 1881. Under its first principal, Booker T. Washington, it became a symbol of African American achievement. Shown is a typical laboratory setting from around 1905.

A teacher helps her student learn to read at the Corinth Contraband Camp.