**How Much Unity in These States?**

**Subject area/course:** Social Sciences, U.S. History

**Grade level/band**: 11–12

**STUDENT PROMPT SECTION**

1. **Task context**:

The United States Civil War (1861-65) was a monumentally significant event that changed the nation and the way we live in many substantial ways. It cost well over a half million lives. Approximately one in 50 Americans died as a result of this conflict, making it the most costly war the nation has ever fought. The Civil War ended the tragic institution of slavery, but stopped far short of insuring basic equality and freedom for all Americans. It also propelled the Industrial Age in the United States and set the country on course to become the most powerful nation in the world. As a result of the Civil War, the nation’s leaders made several significant changes to the United States Constitution in the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments.

When the late, great historian of the Civil War, Shelby Foote, was asked, “What, in your opinion, was the most significant outcome of the Civil War,” he explained:

*Before the war, it was said, "the United States are." Grammatically, it was spoken that way and thought of as a collection of independent states. And after the war, it was always "the United States is," as we say today without being self-conscious at all. And that sums up what the war accomplished. It made us an "is."*

In this straightforward response, he expressed a profound truth that affects our lives today in numerous and significant ways.

The Civil War limited the ability of the individual states to determine their own economic, political and social institutions. It forced every state to recognize certain essential elements of human equality and freedom. Through the clauses of the 14th Amendment, ratified in 1868, state and local governments have, over time, been forced to extend most of the same protections and rights guaranteed to American citizens through the Constitution to all residents of their states and local communities. A concept of national citizenship, with uniform rights and protections has emerged. The critical catalyst for this was the American Civil War.

Your task will be to assess the changes brought about by the Civil War that have affected your life and assumptions of government power and authority. Have these changes enhanced or limited your individual freedom and opportunity? How has the transition from the United States as a group of largely independent units to a unified country under national rights, national freedoms, and national citizenship shaped your concept of what it means to be an American? After completing your paper analyzing the changes brought about by the Civil War, you should be prepared to discuss the impact the Civil War has had on your life in a classroom discussion.

1. **The task**:

After reading and considering several secondary and primary accounts of the U.S. Civil War and its outcomes, write a 3-page paper that:

* Analyzes the significant changes brought about by the American Civil War
* Compares the issues of the Civil War era with similar issues of today that raise related Constitutional issues
* Considers the pertinent national, social and political issues of today in terms of the changes brought about by the Civil War-era Amendments, giving the national government the dominant role over the individual states.

Your paper should:

* Be organized, neat, and coherent.
* Employ standard English grammar, punctuation and usage.
* Use discipline-specific vocabulary.
* Explain and support your points with evidence from your research (both primary and secondary sources).
* Cite your sources correctly in the text of your paper and create a Works Cited page using MLA format or another style that your instructor selects.

1. **Materials/resources**:

You are free to use any valid source, both print and Internet, but be sure to achieve a reasonable balance among types of sources. You must utilize at least three primary sources, in addition to any secondary sources used. Your bibliography should be in standard MLA style. Bibliographies are in addition to the three pages of text required for this assignment.

1. **Time requirements**:

You will have about a week to complete independent research and write various drafts of your paper. After submitting your paper, you will spend one class session discussing and comparing ideas and opinions with your classmates.