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Topic: An analysis into the American Civil War using the historical institutionalism framework

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Declaration

I declare that this assignment is my own work and does not involve plagiarism or collusion. The sources of other people's work have been appropriately referenced, failing which I am willing to accept the necessary disciplinary action(s) to be taken against me.

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Abstract (Not more than 150 words giving a rough outline of your research)

This research paper focused on the topic of the American Civil War, particularly into the main reasons which caused the war and the impacts the aftermath of the war had on the country. Moreover, as the historical institutionalism framework is an emerging framework used in the field of political science, it was utilised in this research paper to try and account for the events occurred during and after the war.

Chapter 1: Introductory Chapter**1. Background**

Frequently described as an integral part of the United States of America's history and key in deciding how the country should operate, the American Civil War occurred from 12 April 1861 and lasted till 9 May 1865. 4 years of killings, massacres and bloodshed, the American Civil War was dominated and fought by two sides: Northern states which showcased full commitment and loyalty to then President Abraham Lincoln and Southern states which had previously seceded themselves to organise the formation of the Confederate States of America. With decades of tension existing between the northern and southern states, the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln in 1861 was seen to be the breaking point, leading to a brutal war which eventually culminated in 620000 soldiers and till date, still remains as the most pernicious war which America had experienced.

The civil war primarily aimed to address 2 significant issues at hand: If the United States should have a contemporary change and be divided into its sovereign states which did not have a collective government asserting control over, or remaining as an undivided nation with a ruling party. Moreover, the war also sought to address the enslavement policy in the United States of America, especially when one half the country (the South) was still enslaving black people at that time to raise productivity while the other half (the North) enjoyed rapid development and were sufficiently well-established to not having to rely on slaves anymore. After the war, to which the North managed to come out victorious, it resulted in ground-breaking changes to America which would set its path to becoming the world's most prosperous economy. With the Southern states defeated and in ruins, Abraham Lincoln announced in 1861 that the country would no longer underpin slavery in its working industries, but rather undergo a paradigm shift into supporting free-labour and entrepreneurism. Through such a change, America hence set forth on its journey towards developing its economy into one of the world's best by rapidly expanding its industries with free labour and building trade ties with other countries across the globe.

As Mark Twain once quoted on this civil war, it "uprooted institutions that were centuries old, changed the politics of a people, and wrought so profoundly upon the entire national character that the influence cannot be measured short of two or three generations" (Twain, 1873), depicting the profound impacts the American Civil War has had.

1.2 Rationale

It should be acknowledged that the topic of American Civil War has been extensively covered, with much research being conducted to gain a deeper insight into why the American Civil War occurred and its repercussions on the country.

As such, this research paper aims to place its main focus on the theme of change of continuity, analysing how the American Civil War occurred in the first place and how it has transformed the way America has functioned in modern times.

Moreover, the historical institutionalism framework is a new institutionalist social science approach which could potentially be beneficial when applied in the context of the American Civil War to analyse why certain events happened. Besides, applying the framework in this setting can also help in discovering how relevant and feasible it can be when put into use to analyse historical movements.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What were the reasons behind the American Civil War?
2. To what extent has the American Civil War reshaped America in modern society? (change and continuity)
3. To what extent can the historical institutionalism framework be applied when analysing the American Civil War?

1.4 Thesis Statement

The American Civil War was mainly caused by differing opinions regarding the use of black slavery, with the end of the war signifying a successful eradication of the use of slavery in America and transforming its economy to a developed one, which helped kickstart its journey to becoming the world's most prosperous economy.

1.5 Scope of Research / Delimitation(s)

The main research being invested into should start from 1787, where the Southern states firmly believed that the future of slavery has been resolved in the Constitutional compact of 1787. In the compact, the Southern states emphasised on the country's need for slaveholders and black slaves to facilitate their agricultural system and ensure the production was able to meet the people's requirements. Not only was such a view considered racist, it clashed with the political ideologies of the Northern states, where they wished to increasingly promote capitalism and eventually free the black people from the shackles of slavery. As such, with the Constitutional compact of 1787, tensions started to develop between both sides, hence research should be started from that year to examine why the tensions escalated and subsequently culminated in the American Civil War.

There will also be research conducted with regards to the impacts of the Civil War, and what impacts it has had in modern America. Moreover, the historical institutionalism framework will be probed further to investigate how it can be utilised to analyse the American Civil war and how suitable it is to account for certain events which transpired during the war.

1.6 Significance of Research / Usefulness

This research paper aims to revisit the reasons triggering the American Civil War and the ramifications it has brought about to modern America, which allows one to realise how certain historical events and movements possess the ability to shape how a country functions in modern times.

Besides, one will be able to gain a better understanding of the tenets of the historical institutionalism framework, and how different perspectives and frameworks can be applied when attempting to analyse historical events.

1.7 Limitations

Due to a surfeit of sources regarding the American Civil War, some might present a biased point of view and seek to indirectly voice out their support for one side. As such, while conducting this research, the sources being employed have to be chosen carefully lest it reveals conflicting interests.

Besides, unlike other social sciences approaches, the basic premise of the historical institutionalism framework foregrounds that the emphasis should be on the “empirical questions, the historical orientation and the attention to the ways in which certain events had shaped behaviour and outcomes.” (Steinmo, 2008). Therefore, for this theory to be utilised to justify the causes and events of the American Civil War, it first affirms that many outcomes are possible and that any event could have had a particular huge impact on the development of the American Civil War.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1: Factors leading to the American Civil War

The cause of the American Civil War has long been a hot topic for debate, with a multitude of reasons such as slavery, political ineptitude and abolitionist activism being utilised to account for the start of the war. Moreover, even till today, new hypotheses and critiques of the American Civil War continue to emerge at an unprecedented rate, with researchers keen to provide different perspectives and opinions on the causes of this event. In fact, it has been mentioned that “the debate among scholars does not appear to be diminishing or approaching any consensus of interpretation” (Gunderson, 1974), suggesting how there is still a strong interest among researchers in examining the causes of the Civil War and not solely basing it on a few factors.

However, it is essential to note not all causes are of equal magnitude and that “if the relative importance of the various causes followed a pattern like so many other phenomena in the world- some stochastic form of inequality, one would expect a small number of causes to dominate its importance” (Gunderson, 1974). In other words, while no causes proposed by one should be entirely discredited, one should also acknowledge that some factors did play a more pivotal role in leading to the civil war. In fact, recent researches have been directed towards one factor whereby many believe was crucial in resulting in the start of the civil war- Economics of Slavery (which is also what this research paper revolves around).

2.1.1: Slavery applied in the context of the civil war

In the 18th and 19th century, the Southern states of America had placed an emphasis on the use of slavery for labour services to increase productivity all around. In retrospect, such a move by the southern states should not have been considered to be surprising as it has historically been proven to be somewhat effective- with the use of slavery, “the average productivity of American labour has managed to constantly increase over time whereby the labourer, or in the case of a slave, his owner- has received correspondingly higher rewards for his effort”. (Coski, 2020). Furthermore, as the use of slavery had proved its effectiveness in Southern states throughout the times, “an enormous vested interest had been developed in its ownership by 1860”. (Gunderson, 1974). This only goes to imply that a strong advocacy for the abolishment of slavery will merely be met with a strong opposition for such a movement, especially when one considers how “antebellum southerners had accumulated substantial holdings in slaves” (Gunderson, 1974) and stood to suffer immensely if the use of slavery was no longer permitted. On the other hand, the Northern states did not echo similar sentiments. By the 1860s elections, they have distanced themselves almost entirely from the use of slavery as they strongly believed that such an action was a violation of basic human rights and a morally incorrect move to maximise profits. As such, they advocated for legislation “such as prohibition of slavery from the western territories” (Rugemer, 2009). However, as mentioned previously, the enactment of the law banning slavery only heavily compromised the interests of the employers in the Southern states and that they would require

a long period of time to regain previous profit rates achieved through the use of slavery. As a result, in response to the movement by the Northern states, the Southern states “countered by demanding a slave code, a guarantee that the federal government would protect property in slaves wherever located in the nation” (Gunderson, 1974). With a huge conflict of interest, it is evident that it was a paramount task for the government at that time to achieve a compromise which accommodated the opinions of both parties. In addition, the breaking point arrived when the Republican Party won the elections in the late 1860s and asserted control over the government. Being an advocate for the abolishment of slavery themselves, the Southern states soon found it even more difficult that their wish of a ‘slave code’ would be achieved, and that if “this property right was to become dependent on national (and now hostile) support, the values of slaves would be correspondingly reduced”. (Gunderson, 1974) As such, it had become more apparent that the Southern states were unlikely to be granted their wishes and that support was increasingly swayed towards the movement to abolish slavery in America. This was further supplemented by the fact that the Republican government was antagonistic towards slavery, which made it even harder for the Southern states to engage in negotiations to attain their goals. Thus, the one and probably only way for the Southern states to have a chance of making their voices heard was to resort to a civil war against the Northern states. By launching a civil war against the North, it inevitably increased the chances of the government acceding to the wishes of the South to prevent further casualties and destruction in the country.

2.2: The historical institutionalism framework

The primary aim of historical institutionalism is to shed light on key topics which are of interest to the general populace and other scholars in the field of research. In contemporary political science, historical institutionalism can be said to be defined by several key features. Firstly, historical institutionalism places significant emphasis on the chronological order of events, “specifying sequences and tracing transformations and processes of varying scale and temporality” (Pierson, Skocpol, n.d.) Furthermore, historical institutionalism does not focus on one particular event which could have potentially affected the outcome of a cause or movement, but rather synthesises many events together to provide a more balanced perspective and derive a multi-view conclusion. In the words of Pierson and Skocpol, both of whom are researchers from Harvard University who delved further into the field of historical institutionalism, such a framework “analyse macro contexts and hypothesise about the combined effects of institutions and processes” (Pierson, Skocpol, n.d.). Evidently, historical institutionalism makes the assumption beforehand that no event should be left out when examining a particular movement, and that all events possess the ability to influence what had actually occurred during the movement itself.

Of course, a large majority of pre-existing frameworks have its own benefits and drawbacks, and this applies to historical institutionalism as well. For historical institutionalism, past research has proved that it is useful and effective in analysing broad topics or social structures people are enmeshed in. The reason is, historical institutionalism “avoids academic navel gazing and addresses real-world questions of interest to educated public and university students” (Pierson, Skocpol, n.d.), which aligns with what was aforementioned above.

Historical institutionalism does not place excessive focus on one event or issue, but rather aims to look at the bigger picture through different lenses and attempt to draw a conclusion based on a multitude of opinions gathered together.

In addition, the historical institutionalism framework aims to bring out the importance of history rather than treating it as mere occurrences of the past. This framework foregrounds that “to understand an interesting outcome or set of arrangements usually mean to analyse processes over a substantial stretch of years, maybe even decades” (Pierson, Skocpol, n.d.) which only goes to suggest that historical events do play an essential role in determining what

was occurring in the present. By involving events of the past, it has been proven to be useful in allowing for the “detailed examination of processes that can facilitate the evaluation of claims about causal mechanisms” (Fioretos, 2011). With a special attention being paid to the relationship between a set of events, it allows one to comprehend better on certain occurrences and ensure no valuable outcomes or hypotheses are gone unobserved.

2.3: Contrasting approaches to the historical institutionalism framework

One contrasting approach to historical institutionalism is the rational choice institutionalism framework. In recent decades, the rational choice theory has also surfaced as one of the most influential subfields in the area of political science. The “Rational Choice theory contends that political behaviour is best explained through the application of its supposedly value-neutral assumption that posits man as a self-interested, purposeful and maximizing being.” (Spring, 1991). As such, this framework foregrounds that results of political movements are determined by voters who have conducted their own needs analysis before exercising their voting rights on an option which favours them the most. Therefore, voters might have differing vested interests which indubitably leads to a clash of opinions, hence leading to the development of certain political movements. On the other hand, the historical institutionalism framework “probes (into) uneasy balances of power and resources, and sees institutions as the developing product of struggle among unequal actors” (Steinmo, 2008). In other words, while the rational choice theory seeks to focus on the people themselves, the historical institutionalism framework places precedence on how “multiple institutional realms and processes interact with one another, often creating unintended openings for people who trigger changes” (Pierson, Skocpol, n.d.)

The Historical Institutionalism framework is thus being utilised here because when applied into the context of the American Civil War, it was due to several conflicting interests which exacerbated the poor relationship between the Northern and Southern states, eventually culminating in the civil war. Since the Historical Institutionalism framework focuses on analysing how such events interacted with each other and eventually leading to the war, this framework is thus utilised in this research paper instead of the Rational Choice framework.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The historical institutionalism framework will be inculcated into this research project as during a war, any events (including minor ones) are able to influence the entire outlook of the war, thus such a framework has the potential to be extremely germane in explaining why the Northern states eventually came out victorious.

To collate data for this aspect, I would explore the reasons which culminated in the war, any events (whether minor/major) which occurred during the war and basing off the framework, investigate if it had played a part in contributing to the result of the war.

This framework will also be applied when investigating how the Civil War has played a role in shaping modern America. To do so, research will be conducted towards how particular incidents during the civil war might have affected how the American society functions today.

Chapter 4: Discussion and Interpretation

4.1: Post-War amendments

After the civil war, there were three amendments passed which “accomplished the most radical and rapid social and political change in American history” (McPherson, 2010).

Firstly, with the South defeated during the war, the American government was able to call for the abolishment of slavery through the 13th amendment. Such an immediate move after the war can be interpreted as a strong desire within the American government to progress on from the use of slavery in the working fields, and there are a few reasons to account for this. Needless to say, the question of human rights and discriminating against the slaves was a huge factor in influencing the government to carry out concrete action in getting rid of slavery. On top of this, by reducing the dependency on slavery, it enabled the country to

place a greater emphasis on free trade which promised greater economic benefits. Such benefits were already evident in the midst of the civil war- During the war, “The Union’s (North) industrial and economic capacity soared” (Arrington, n.d.) while “ a smaller industrial base, fewer rail lines, and an agricultural economy in the South based upon slave labour made mobilization of resources more difficult”. (Arrington, n.d.) As such, the Union’s advantages in factories, railroads and manpower placed the South at a major disadvantage, and was crucial in eventually allowing the North to gain victory. With the strengths of a free trade economy being portrayed during the war, it was thus no surprise that the government lobbied for the abolishment of slavery which allowed more focus to be placed on further expanding free trade in the country. By opening the borders of the country, it hence enabled the government to forge partnerships with other countries and give rise to a stronger economy which could also ensure protection if any wars occurred in the future.

Secondly, the granting of equal citizenship and voting rights to former slaves was also passed through the 14th and 15th amendment respectively. Initially, this seemed possible to be implemented successfully as the American government looked to be decisive and willing to take concrete action in ensuring the slaves were no longer mistreated. However, due to strong opposition from the South, “this transformation of more than 4 million slaves into citizens with equal rights became the central issue of the troubled 12-year Reconstruction period after the Civil War” (McPherson, 2010). As such, little progress was made and this eventually led to the promise of equal rights being largely abandoned. Thus, while the original intentions were there, the amendments did not manage to come to fruition due to the heavy refusal of the South to cooperate. However, it should also be noted that the passing of the 14th and 15th amendments signified a start in working towards equal rights for all citizens regardless of race, ethnicity or religion. In fact, these amendments were “revived by the civil rights movement, which reached a milestone in 2008 with the election of an African American President who took the oath of office with his hand on the same Bible that Abraham Lincoln used for that purpose in 1861” (McPherson, 2010). Hence, it is evident that the amendments made after the civil war were still somewhat effective, as it helped to lay a foundation which was eventually utilised by future generations in achieving the goal of equal rights.

4.2: A new political system

The impact of the civil war on America’s politics is summarised perfectly by McPherson in his magazine “Out of War, a New Nation” (2010): “The United States went to war in 1861 to preserve the Union; it emerged from the war in 1865 having created a nation.”. In fact, before 1861, the United States was “referred to as a plural noun (ie. The United States are a republic)” (McPherson, 2010) but after the war, this term was used as a single noun. As such, this goes to show that the original intentions of the American government entering the war was to protect the interests of the Union by suppressing the South’s insistence in utilising slavery and preventing their rebellion movement from gaining any further traction. However, upon the surrender of the South, the “loose union of states had become a single nation” (Arrington, n.d.), which goes to suggest how the war had actually assisted in unifying the nation. Moreover, this was also portrayed by how Lincoln had addressed the country. In his first inaugural address, he used the word “union” 20 times and did not recognise the country as a “nation” once. However, in his Gettysburg Address in November 1863, he had shied away from the word “Union”, but rather recognised the country as a “nation” for numerous times. This henceforth implies how the war had managed to provide a new sense of freedom and nationhood in the country, allowing it to be less divided as before. As such, with the defeat of the south, it had helped the country to become more united and strengthened the country’s political stability.

Moreover, the Civil War also helped to address “two fundamental, festering problems left unresolved by the American Revolution and the Constitution” (Rugemer, 2009). Firstly, the

war managed to resolve the issue of whether the American Republic could survive in an era where kings, monarchs and oligarchies were prevalent. By 1865, at the end of the civil war, there were no “disaffected states or regions which tried to secede” (McPherson, 2010), showing how the war had managed to preserve the nation and ensured that it would not succumb to any overthrowing and revolutions. Of course, credit has to be attributed to Lincoln administration, which remained firm and strong through the war to deter the threat from the South and hence establishing America as a country that would not fall to any anarchy or dictatorship in the future. This could also be seen through Lincoln’s speech at Gettysburg, where he alluded the civil war to a “testing whether a government of the people, by the people, for the people” would survive or “perish from the earth”, and the end result was that it did not perish. Instead, the civil war had allowed America to come through stronger and more united than before.

4.3: Applying the Historical Institutionalism Framework

Since historical institutionalism refers to the study of how “historical orientations structure and shape behaviour and outcomes” (Stienmo, 2008), this can be applied in the aftermath of the civil war, particularly the passing of the 14th and 15th amendment which promised equal rights for the slaves. While the end goal did not necessarily materialise at that point in time as the Black people in America continued to be discriminated against, the fact that those 2 amendments were passed had signified the beginning of the campaign towards equal rights. Previously, slaves in America were mistreated and subjected to gruelling working conditions by their employers, especially in the Southern states. As such, with the passing of the 14th and 15th amendments, it marked a gradual shift in the attitudes of several citizens (particularly the slaves), as some began to feel they were empowered to advocate and fight for their rights. As mentioned above, this change in the behaviour was also crucial in leading to the start of the civil rights movement in the 1950s, with the African Americans believing that it was time for America to end legalised racial discrimination under the Jim Crow laws and put a halt to prejudices against them. Thus, this ties in with the concept of the historical institutionalism framework, as the 14th and 15th amendments represented a start among the African Americans in their fight for equal rights, and was subsequently picked up by the people involved in the civil rights movement to achieve greater success. On the other hand, had the Southern states gained victory in the civil war, such movements could have never materialised, especially when one considers how “racial caste and slave labour dominated the United States government during most of that time and the territory of the slave states also considerably exceeded that of the free states” (McPherson, 2010). Thus, the victory of the Union (the North) was pivotal as the amendments that were subsequently passed under the Union government paved the way for important revolutionary movements and had a significant bearing on future generations.

Apart from this, the historical institutionalism framework could also be applied in the context of how America’s economy functioned after the civil war. With the North establishing victory, the Lincoln administration immediately embarked upon facilitating greater free trade in the country and forging new partnerships with other nations. As such, this laid down a strong foundation for America as it continued to expand its trade agreements with other countries as time passed on, with some of the agreements even lasting till today. In fact, if the South had prevailed during the war, “the United States might never have emerged as the world’s largest economy and foremost democracy by the late 19th century” (McPherson, 2010). Therefore, this shows how the victory of the North was significant in propelling America to becoming the biggest economy in the world, as their victory allowed the country to expand its trade partnerships and enjoy greater economic benefits.

Before 1861 two socioeconomic and cultural systems had competed for dominance within the body politic of the United States: an agricultural society based on slavery versus an

entrepreneurial capitalist society based on free labour. Although in retrospect the triumph of free-labour capitalism seems to have been inevitable, that was by no means clear for most of the antebellum era.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Based on findings in this research paper, the main reason as to why the civil war occurred was due to a clash of ideology between the North and South on how America's labour force should operate, with the former arguing that free trade labour should be prioritised while the latter insisting that utilizing slaves is more productive. Ultimately, the North came out victorious and this is where the historical institutionalism framework came into play, as what the American government were pursuing after the civil war had a direct impact on future generations in the country. Thus, in the context of the American civil war, the historical institutionalism framework was relatively useful in analysing how certain events and policies affected the course of action in the country in the next few generations.

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