Social, Racial, Economic and Political Complexities of American History (1840-1877)

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# *Introduction*

In American history from 1840 to 1877, the major event that changes the way of looking into American society is mainly based on some minor and major events. Those events tend to change the course of history and led the social, economic, political, and racial complexity on a new pathway. American Civil War is the main event that shapes the way we look at this part of history. It led to the abolition of slavery and most of the consequence it has on the economic, political, racial, and social side of America. Before the event of the American Civil War, the economy of the American class was based on slavery based labor and workers which was then changed. But even after this era the difference between the wages, rights, and social status of freed individual would never become the same as the American people. The course of history that led to change in the way American society lives afterward is also based on the political movements and complexity that they posed to American society and economy. We would be looking at all these parameters in the following passage.

Racial complexity

Racial inequality and race have shaped American society and history from beginnings. American society from its beginning was built on a cruel form of inequality, domination, and oppression which denies slaves freedom. Racism harms not only oppressed but also dominants. It is one of the racial critical complexities[[1]](#footnote-1). Racial boundaries are built in very different ways in American society for example if someone is black is considered to be of African background. After the Civil War, racial classification is based on the classical "one-drop rule". Slave law in 1850 was a strict law that was passed which denied the trial by the jury which led to riots. After the end of the American Civil War in 1865, slavery was abolished but its impact did not disappear. Slavery induces a long-lasting effect on American society even today. On paper, 14th Amendment was added in US Constitution in 1968 which guarantees equal citizenship, and later on, 15th amendment which was passed after two years, explicitly states that these rights are applied to people of all races and color. The official act of citizenship of second class becomes an important point in racial oppression after a decade of the United States Civil War.

Social Complexity

The level of prosperity in 20th, as well as 21st century, changes American society. Most of American history, barriers of social class were rigid fundamentally, with several public and private institutions enforce racial segregation based rules. It is noted by the historians that before 1850 that most people who went to the frontier were Eastern people[[2]](#footnote-2). Before the year 1850, there were few cities in America which were small cities and most people were rural inhabitants. Turner model suggests that the East American social structure was the same as that of class-based European structure, while socially, economically and politically, the West was more equality based structure. Due to economic expansion in era 1815-1860, American society sees many changes. Most changes were seen in Northern states which see the effect of the development of infrastructure. New York was the first state in 1848 to give property rights to women.

Political Complexity

Politically from 1840-1860, American politics were focused on two issues. The phenomenon of nation-building which belongs to the "Manifest Destiny" of America was to control territory to the west of Pacific and south in Mexico[[3]](#footnote-3). American Republicans and Federalists were replaced by Democratic Party. Mostly American politics and political parties’ remains polarized on the issue of slavery.

Economic Complexity

In the United States of America, 1840-1893 eras encompass great fluctuations in the American economy, but this era is also seen overall dynamic growth. Economic revival is seen in the 1840s after the panic of 1839. But due to Civil War economic disruption is seen and America has endured long effects of deflation after war[[4]](#footnote-4). In 1860, sales were the largest by basic meal and flour industry. A large shift has been seen from an agricultural country to an industrial country. By the year 1860 manufacturing was on worldwide second number behind France and Great Britain. Railroad and the telegraph connect the region. By 1869 completion of the transcontinental railroad has been done. About 16 percent of the population in the era of Abraham Lincoln was an urban area based and one-third of American income come was generated by manufacturing. Industry in the urban area was Northeast limited. 300,000 Europeans from 1845-1855, annually arrived in 300,000. Most of them were poor and residents of eastern cities. Slave system of labor was abolished after the U.S Civil War, making the cotton plantation of the south in less profit.

Conclusion

We have seen that most of the changes that led to political, social, economic, and racial complexity were redefined in the pre and post US Civil War era. Abolition of slavery has changed the American economy, society, racial status, and political movement but still, its long-lasting effects have been noted in the years to follow. Ideology and the institutionalization of the society and system of slaves that were a present half-century before the event of 1861 went to a low in 1865 and was changed and replaced with entrepreneurial capitalism free-labor ideology and institution. The flames of Civil war for worst or better forged the bases of modern USA. It was remarked by Mark Twain in 1873 that Civil War "cataclysm" is uprooted by centuries-old institutions and ideology, which changed people's politics and have a profound effect on national character. He said that this measure cannot be measured in a short span of two or three generations.

**End Notes**

1. David, Paul A. *Technical choice innovation and economic growth: essays on American and British experience in the nineteenth century*. Cambridge University Press, 1975.
2. Garner, Steve. "The uses of whiteness: what sociologists working on Europe can draw from US research on whiteness." *Sociology* 40, no. 2 (2006): 257-275.
3. Hartzell, Caroline, and Matthew Hoddie. "Institutionalizing peace: Power sharing and post‐civil war conflict management." *American Journal of Political Science* 47, no. 2 (2003): 318-332.
4. Williamson, Jeffrey G. *Late nineteenth-century American development: a general equilibrium history*. Cambridge University Press, 2008.

1. Garner, Steve. "The uses of whiteness: what sociologists working on Europe can draw from US research on whiteness." *Sociology* 40, no. 2 (2006): 257-275. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Williamson, Jeffrey G. *Late nineteenth-century American development: a general equilibrium history*. Cambridge University Press, 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Garner, Steve. "The uses of whiteness: what sociologists working on Europe can draw from US research on whiteness." *Sociology* 40, no. 2 (2006): 257-275. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. David, Paul A. *Technical choice innovation and economic growth: essays on American and British experience in the nineteenth century*. Cambridge University Press, 1975. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)