

**Prompt:**Evaluate the extent to which the Civil War fostered change in the United States economy in the period from 1861 to 1900.

**Essay:**

The Civil War caused changes in the social and political climate of America. Despite these social changes, the economic situation of the country was not drastically altered. The North continued as an industrial and manufacturing economy. The South's economy adjusted but remained reliant on agriculture through systems like sharecropping. The railroads built during the Civil War to facilitate troop movements only solidified the Northern economic dominance that had existed before the war.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, the North reverted immediately to its manufacturing economy. During the war, many factories attempted to convert to manufacture guns, due to the Union's policy of buying guns from nearly any source, amateur or professional. Aside from that change, however, the war demanded a few breaks from the status quo. To supply the army with uniforms, the clothing manufacturing companies changed their products only slightly. In general, though, the economy and industry of the Northern states were already designed as if expressly to facilitate war, and so shifts were minimal.

In the South, the Civil War had a more drastic impact — namely through the abolition of slavery. One enduring concern of Reconstruction was the question of how to handle the recent influx in citizens and their lack of employment. However, to the dismay of blacks everywhere, a solution was devised independently of the government: sharecropping. Instead of enslavement, the black citizens of the Southern states were given a plot of land to tend (still owned by the original white slave masters). The blacks bought seeds and most other supplies from that man, often on credit. Through such a system, blacks were enslaved still, in all aspects but name. Their debt caused them to be perpetually unable to leave, and the prices for their crops (designated by the landowner) were coincidentally always too low to pay for their supplies, let alone their debt or subsistence. Truly, they were as thoroughly enslaved as they had been before the war, with the economic change being purely nominal.

During the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln prioritized the completion of various railroads as a war measure to facilitate troop movements. These railroads were, like their predecessors, one of the most significant aspects of the North's economic superiority over the South. Before the secession and the war, they were a common point of anger for Southerners. Being able to transport goods quickly and efficiently while also establishing a separate railroad industry (which immediately flourished) was an economic boon. The acceleration of railroad constructions during the war, then, did not

mark a change from pre-war situations. Instead, once again, the Civil War acted as a catalyst for acceleration, not change.

Prior to the Civil War, the North had been on a path to industrial supremacy, which would come to characterize it in the post-war era. That difference between the North and the South constituted a large part of the animosity on behalf of Southerners, who claimed the North would need slaves if not for their industries. The Civil War, though, did nothing to change the industrial economy of the North nor the agrarian economy of the South (which adapted to abolition through sharecropping and wage-slavery). The extent of the Civil War's effect on the economy, then, was limited to the inadvertent acceleration of the Industrial Revolution through the building of railroads—which had begun construction before the war.

**Feedback:**

A. Thesis/Claim (0–1 points): 1 The last two sentences of the first paragraph argue for a continued acceleration of the growth of the economies of North and South rather than drastic changes because of the Civil War and provide relevant categories of analysis (Northern industrialization and railroad construction and persisting Southern agrarianism). This constitutes an adequate line of reasoning. The response earned the thesis point.

B. Contextualization (0–1 points): 0 The response lacks a discussion of broader historical context that connects the events of the Civil War to prewar conditions or trends. It does not adequately situate the economic developments of the Civil War within a larger historical framework, such as the industrialization of the North or the agrarian system of the South before the war. As a result, the essay did not earn the point for contextualization.

C. Evidence (0–2 points): 2 This response does not sprinkle a large number of specific examples of evidence. The points on Reconstruction, sharecropping, and railroads earned the first point. The discussion of this evidence is well-done and strongly supports the thesis. For example, the response supports its argument that the “North remained an Industrial & Manufacturing economy” by offering examples such as efforts by manufacturers to convert to manufacturing guns, as well as clothing manufacturers changing their products only slightly to supply the army with uniforms. This linkage of

evidence and argument earned the second point, thus the response earned 2 points for use of evidence.

D. Analysis and Reasoning (0–2 points): 2 The response is supported throughout by statements that railroad construction accelerated, but did not change drastically, because of war. This earned the first point for analysis. Further, the response argues that there was continuity in both the course of economic development in the North and in the economy of the South because the region remained agrarian, though it changed in specific ways. This nuance earned the second point in the category. Thus the response earned 2 points for analysis and reasoning.

**Total Score: 5**