

# The American Civil War as Political Event

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## Introduction

The American Civil War (ACW) is, without a doubt, the single most significant event in US political history. Beyond its immediate destruction and devastation, the war led to the expansion of citizenship and enfranchisement rights to Black men, the creation of a new constitutional system founded on federal guarantees for due process and the incorporation of constitutional protections, the construction of a new currency and banking system, the entrenchment of the Republican party, the opening of the territorial trans-Mississippi West to political incorporation in the Union, and a dramatically expanded state bureaucracy.

While it is easy to attribute to the war transformative change, a question emerges - how did the Civil War, specifically, generate such change? Scholars have long emphasized how war “makes” states and how the emergency powers, tax and extraction efforts, the creation of new technologies of coercion, and organization building associated with fighting allow for social change. In other words, we have fairly strong meso-level theory about the changes of war, one that scholars of American political development have used to help understand state-making and organizational change in the late nineteenth century US (Bensel 1990). But two issues remain somewhat undertheorized. First, are the micro-mechanisms whereby fighting on the battlefield, deployment of troops, and internal progression of warfighting concatenates into these social transformations. Second, are the macro-level

## References

Bensel, Richard Franklin. 1990. *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859-1877*. New York: Cambridge University Press.