

Ques: American Civil War was a capitalist revolution. Examine this statement.

Answer: Hardly did any destructive event produce such a productive impact as did the American Civil War. It removed the hurdles in the way of socio-economic change in the USA.

The Liberation movement made American colonies an independent nation but the nation remained to be internally divided between industrialized North and agrarian south.

Up to the mid 19th century, the USA was capable of launching an industrial revolution provided two major impediments had to be removed. The first one was the slavery system. The slavery system run counter to the principle of free wage labour which is an important ingredient in industrialization. The second one was protection to the industries of northern states vis-à-vis European products. But southern states had remained to be rigid and uncompromising on both issues.

Finally, civil war removed both the hurdles simultaneously preparing the way of capitalist transformation of USA. After the abolition of slavery, even southern states moved towards industrialization.

Consequently, it led to the economic integration of the USA. Likewise, the USA could develop essential economic infrastructure including trans-national railways.

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Finally, the government could enthusiastically give protection to American industries. It is a very interesting episode in the economic history of the world that when in other parts of the world free trade policy was being promoted, USA strictly followed the protectionist policy for nearly next five decades. It is a major factor behind the emergence of the USA as the most powerful economy in the world.

The myth of the American boom as a result of civil war has been supported even by a reputed author, Robert J. Gordon, in his recently published text 'The Rise and Fall of American Growth. In this text, he highlighted the period between 1870 and 1970 as a period of a great economic boom.

Thus American civil war can be characterized as a capitalist revolution as well.

