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Children in the American Civil War

While the Civil War continued on, many Americans were strongly affected by the violence and bloodshed but one group of victims who is often overlooked when analyzing the consequences of the Civil War is the children. These small victims had to labor and tend their households, risk their lives to go to war, or ended up with many family members dead. The Civil War was the bloodiest war in American history because it had the highest number of deaths than all of America's wars combined. The Civil War was a conflict between the Union (north) and the Confederates (south). The North did not have a need for slaves because their economy was built on factories and industry. However, the South required slaves because their lives depended on crops like tobacco grown in plantations. Therefore, the north and south had disagreements on whether newer states would allow slavery or not. When President Lincoln was elected, many of the southern states started to break off from the Union one by one. Overall, the Civil War was not only a fight over the slavery issue, but also a fight to keep the Union together. Although many people were affected by the war, one group that is sometimes forgotten is the children. The Civil War teaches humanity today that children are the greatest victims of war because they suffer for something they didn't start or had anything to do with; this is the heart-breaking truth that the most destructive and hopeless childhoods can be found during war.

Children at home

Children had to sew clothes, take care of animals, or take care of their siblings. Also, children were had to help soldiers by sewing goods for them such as clothes, towels, and socks (Bardaglio, “Children and the American Civil War”). The ones who mostly did the sewing were the mothers and the girls. Male children had to do the jobs their fathers once had done as men were gone to be soldiers in war. Therefore, children had to tend the animals (if they had animals), or had to help their mothers in fetching the water (Schwartz, “Children in the Civil War”). It became a little bit harder for children to take care of their siblings because during the Civil War, a lot of food was needed and they didn’t know how to feed their siblings. Another reason it became difficult was because sometimes the children who had to take care of their siblings had to do it all by themselves without a grown up since their parents were not there because they were working or fighting in the war.

Children on the battlefield

Children didn’t just stay home and help out with the household. They also participated in the war. Some children under 18 actually went to war (Schwartz, “Children in battlefield”). Kids under 18 still were not trained enough to fight and experiencing the war made them terrorized. Mostly the kids in the Civil War were boys that served as drummers, who would play the instruments for the army (“Kids in the civil war”). During the first few years of the war, there was no age requirement to become a musician in the army. Many that went to war as drummers were just young men or boys. The estimate of fifteen year olds in the army during the Civil War was about 100,000 but records show that 300 of them were 13 years old and 25 of them were 10 years old or younger (“1863 Civil War journey”). These figures show that the people who were on the battlefield included many children who were so young.

The effect of war on children

The effect of war on children is not unique to just the American Civil War. War has been affecting children throughout the world's history and is doing so in current events as well. In some ways, war might mean freedom for children, but at the same time, war means terror especially when war could lead them into danger or if it could make them end up working as soldiers. Some could or all be scared that they might die because there's killing around them and children are beginning to learn about the dangerous and sadness of the world. War can affect them with bad negative feelings such as killing because for example when you teach a small child how to handle a weapon and teach them how to shoot as well, it might damage the child's healthy development. War affects people as well but children might be more negatively affected than adults because being in an environment filled with death and destruction might affect their lives forever. For example, Dima experienced a huge impact from war because she was in the middle bombings, explosions and shootings. She had bombs near the car, and her dad lied dead on the floor ("Dima, 10"). Children in Syria are risking their lives in war and becoming very ill. The children get taken away because of the current civil war in Syria and they never got to see their parents again because the parents were gone. People that saw children in war helped them and saw how war changes a child's life. A child will be confused with all the chaos of the war. They also become more scared of their homeland. According to the American Psychological Association, there are an estimated 300,000 kids fighting in armies around the world today. This is dangerous because these children are carrying weapons and fighting in the battlefield. Many of the kids parents are killed right in front of them and they watch as their homes are destroyed. They are forced to join or run from the gunshots. All of these horrific situations make children feel that violence is normal, it disrupts their relationships, and gives them a negative outlook on

life (Smith, American Psychological Association). In fact, right now the war in Syria is still going on and the worst victims of the war continue to be the children. All of these examples point to the idea that war is very bad for children and it affects them powerfully.

Conclusion

After the American Civil War, many children had no fathers or brothers by the end of war. Some made it out alive, but by the time war was done many were dead or some were injured. The Civil War terrified and gave anxious worries to the children wondering when it would end. Children weren't like children after the Civil War ended because they now had to do grown up things. This is important because it explains that children were the ones who suffered most in the war. Today in this world, there is war in Syria, the Middle East, and now even in parts of Ukraine. All of these countries have children and those children are suffering. It's the same as the American Civil War, which was a nightmare for children. When events are happening today, this affects us because it affects the future generation. When wars happen today, it also makes us look at the past wars and try to learn from them but still war goes on, harming more and more children throughout the world.

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