



# Slavery

The compromise allows people who disagree to continue to disagree but jointly arrive at a course of action. In this way, things get done.

The American Constitution was born out of compromise. As such, it contained several flaws. The concept that all men were born with certain inalienable rights was proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence but when the constitution was written slavery was allowed and only white males were given the right to vote. Women, Blacks and Native Americans were not given the right to vote. In many states, only white males who owned property had the right to vote. (Owning property was a requirement needed to vote with the Pilgrims.)

The problem with a compromise form of government is that it is good for legislating laws dealing with commerce, crime, money and so forth. It is much more difficult for deciding moral questions. Moral questions demand an absolute answer. This is why so many wars have been fought over religion. Slavery is a moral issue. It took a bloody civil war to settle this issue in the United States. 500,000 lives were lost during the civil war if one considers both sides. (for comparison 50,000 American lives were lost in WWI.)

Slavery had great commercial implications as well, but its existence is a moral issue. In 1865, when the civil war ended, 4 million slaves were freed and the loss in capital, by the slave owners, was 2 billion dollars. To put it in perspective, slavery was the single biggest capital investment in the US at the time. The second biggest was the railroads at just under one billion dollars. The budget of the US government in 1860, just before the civil war, was 60 million dollars.

It was not until 1920 that women were given the right to vote and 1970 when impediments to prevent voting such as the poll tax started to be eliminated.

Lincoln proclaimed the Emancipation Proclamation to end slavery in the United States could have included voting rights to all but it was a compromise. It was not issued as a moral declaration but to provide a reason to continue the civil war. It changed the civil war from a war to end secession to a total war of out and out victory.

At the beginning of the Civil War, Lincoln hoped that the South would change their mind and rejoin the Union. When he realized that they were not going to give up until defeated he changed it into a war over slavery. To be sure, slavery was an issue before the Civil War but ending slavery was not the main reasons for starting it. The war was started to preserve the Union and ended by deciding the moral question of slavery.

The genius of the American constitution is that it functions by compromise. All forms of action, moral and otherwise can be dealt with but it sometimes takes a long time for things to get done.