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ENC1101 **A (grade)**

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Civil

On November 6, 1860 Abraham Lincoln was elected the sixteenth President of the United States of America. His election would set off a series of events in the months to come, starting with the secession of South Carolina (Freeman par 1). Following South Carolina's secession in January of 1861, six other southern states would follow. Lincoln's firm opinion against secession would lead to the bloodiest war in American History. This War was obviously known as the Civil War. From 1861 to 1865 Americans would be divided among political lines that would tear the country apart. It is a shame that when I think of the word civil, even with its many meanings, the first thing that comes to mind is the Civil War.

Civil's literal translation "of citizens" is rarely used; instead civil has been defined about 20 other ways (OED). The ambiguity of the word has lead to many different definitions with both positive and negative connotations. According to *Oxford English Dictionary,* civil is mainly used as an adjective in the English Language. The first definition listed as an adjective is "of or belonging to citizens; consisting of citizens, or men dwelling together in a community" (OED). This definition when applied to the Civil War context makes sense. In the Civil War it was North versus the South, two distinguishably different communities of citizens. Also the definition includes "belonging to citizens" and the war was exactly that (OED). It required the resources, lives, and

unity of the communities in order to be successful. The first definition listed has somewhat of a positive connotation and represents unity. It is odd that a word with a positive connotation can precede the word War.

In 1592, Shakespeare uses the word in his famous play Romeo and Juliet, “Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean” (OED). Shakespeare’s fame was partially due to his incredible ability to reveal dual meanings through the use of puns. This quotation could be interpreted many different ways because of the ambiguity of civil. In this context, Shakespeare’s word choice doesn’t hint at the definition of “consisting of citizens” or “men dwelling together in a community.” Instead, it seems he tries to create a paradox using another definition of civil as “humane, gentle, or kind” (OED). It is even possible he intended to use civil as pertaining to “animals and things” in order to create paradox in his literature (OED). It would not be uncommon for him to refer to humans as animals in order to make a point. No matter what his intentions were, he helped show the ambiguity of the word civil.

Moving out of the sixteenth century and into more modern times, the word civil once again emerged in the twentieth century as a movement. The movement I am referring to is the Civil Rights movement that swept America in the late 50s and early 60s. The Civil Rights movement was a product of the Civil War. The movement was based on the 14th amendment, which guaranteed “equal protection of the laws” to all “persons born or naturalized in the United States” (“The Rights of African Americans” par 10). In John F. Kennedy’s address to Congress he requested “sweeping civil rights legislation to protect the rights of Negroes in voting, education, and employment” (OED). In this sense the word means “the rights of each citizen to liberty, equality, etc.”

(OED). The word's meaning changes significantly depending on context. In this case civil refers to an individual's rights, whereas before, it was inclusive for a whole community.

Within the Civil Right's movement, the supporters used certain mechanisms to achieve equality. Martin Luther King's March on Washington, the Rosa Parks incident, and the organized sit-ins were utilized very effectively. Collectively these methods are referred to as civil disobedience, which is "the refusal to obey the laws, tax demands, etc., of a government as part of a political campaign" (OED). This definition seems to deviate from the others. Although it seems like an oxymoron to be civil and disobedient, there is a very prominent example. Gandhi, possibly the most famous advocate of nonviolent protest, did more for Indian rights than anyone before him. He managed to do it in a "refined, polished, and polite" manner (OED). Martin Luther King Jr. would follow Gandhi's footsteps here in the United States with much of the same success.

It could be said that the synergism of the Civil War and Civil Rights movement have created a more civil nation. When referring to a civil nation, a new definition arises. A more civil nation has "proper social order; is orderly; and well-governed" (OED). In 1641 John Evelyn wrote about his city being a "quiet, clean, elegantly built, and civil place" (OED). When used in this manner, civil assumes a very positive connotation. So, in turn a more civil nation emerged from a history of civil disobedience and Civil War. Civil is by far the most diversely defined word I have ever found.

Civil has been found in spoken language as early as 1362 (OED). Apparently, for the last 600 years, its definitions have been growing more complex. By 1832, the word already had about 12 meanings "applied to all manners of objects which are perfectly

disparate" (OED). Nearly 200 years later and there are still new definitions being added to the list. Civil as War, civil in character, civil nations, civil disobedience, civil as community, and civil rights have such extremely different meanings, its unbelievable civil is just one word.

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