Confederate Flag in the US Capitol Hill

Why in news?

In the Capitol Hill violence, the image of a protestor carrying the Confederate flag gained attention as this is the first time that the Confederate flag had appeared inside the halls of the Capitol.

Why is it significant?

- The Confederate flag originated during the Civil War of 1861.
- But it emerged as a political symbol only in the 20th century in context of writing a new narrative remembering the war.
- The image is significant because the flag stands for white supremacy and the social and political exclusion of coloured people.

How did the Confederate flag originate?

- The flag represented the seven southern Confederate States of America (CSA).
- These seven states seceded from the union in 1861 after the election of Abraham Lincoln as the President.
- Four more states joined them later.
- Lincoln was in favour of banning slavery in US territories which were not states.
- The southern states are heavily dependent on slave labour.
- So, they saw the move as a grander plan to abolish slavery completely and thereby an attack on their constitutional rights.
- Consequently, a four-year war ensued that lasted from 1861 to 1865 and ended with the defeat of the Confederate states.
    - The Civil War is known to have been the costliest and the deadliest war in America.
    - It led to the death of approximately 620,000 soldiers, and leaving millions more injured, with large parts of the South in ruins.
- In 1862, while the war was on, Lincoln issued a preliminary Emancipation Proclamation freeing the slaves in Confederate states.
    - He described it as a military measure, and the slaves in the union states were not freed.
    - However, the Emancipation Proclamation played a decisive role in

eventually ending slavery in America.

How did the flag emerge as a political symbol after the war?

- For about a decade after the war ended, the US military occupied much of the South to help it rebuild and become part of the Union again.
- The period of reconstruction, as it was called, fuelled resentment among the whites. It continues till date.
- Thereby, the post-Civil War South embraced the Confederate flag as a symbol of their 'lost cause'.
- By the end of the century, the flag became a symbol of honouring the Confederate dead and also a romanticised version of the cause of the Civil War.
- By the mid-20th century, the Confederate flag had come to symbolise resistance against laws of segregation.
    - In 1948, there was a Southern regional split in the Democratic party.
    - The Dixiecrats, as the new party was called, were against president Harry S Truman's efforts at addressing the civil rights of African Americans.
    - The Dixiecrats wanted to retain racial segregation.
    - The Confederate flag was very prominent in the Dixiecrat campaign during the 1948 presidential election.
    - It was also used frequently by the white supremacist groups like the Ku Klux Klan.
- In the mid-20th century, as the Civil Rights movement gained pace, the Confederate flag acquired more prominence.

Source: The Indian Express

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