

# 15

## Crucible of Freedom: Civil War, 1861–1865



**GERTRUDE CLANTON THOMAS**  
IN THE 1850s (Private Collection)

## “EVENTS TRANSCENDING IN

importance anything that has ever happened within the recollection of any living person in *our* country, have occurred since I have written last in my journal,” wrote Georgia matron Gertrude Clanton Thomas in July 1861. “*War has been declared.*” Fort Sumter in South Carolina had surrendered; Lincoln had called for seventy-five thousand troops; four more southern states—Virginia, North Carolina, Arkansas, and Tennessee—had left the Union;

and the newly formed Confederate government had moved from Montgomery, Alabama, to Richmond, Virginia. “So much has taken place,” Gertrude Thomas declared, that “I appear to be endeavoring to recall incidents which have occurred many years instead of months ago.”

At her marriage in 1852, Gertrude Thomas had become mistress of a small estate, Belmont, about six miles south of Augusta, Georgia. The estate and thirty thousand dollars’ worth of slaves had been part of her dowry. While her husband, Jefferson Thomas, farmed plantation land he had inherited in a nearby county, Gertrude Thomas supervised the work force at Belmont and wrestled with her position on slavery. “[T]he institution of slavery degrades the white man more than the Negro,” she had declared in 1858; “all southern women are abolitionists at heart.” After secession, her doubts about slavery persisted. “[T]he view has gradually become fixed in my mind that the institution of slavery is not right,” she confided to her journal during the war. “[T]o hold men and women in *perpetual* bondage is wrong.” Other times, more practical concerns about slaves emerged. “I do think that if we had the same [amount] invested in something else as a means of support,” Gertrude Thomas wrote, “I would willingly, nay gladly, have the responsibility of them taken off my shoulders.”

But slavery was the basis of Gertrude Thomas’s wealth and social position; she disliked it not because it oppressed the enslaved but because it posed problems for the slave-owning elite. When war began, Gertrude and Jefferson Thomas fervently supported the newborn Confederacy. Jefferson Thomas enlisted in a cavalry company, and served until 1862, when, passed over for promotion, he hired a substitute. During his months of service in Virginia, Jefferson Thomas longed for swift triumph. “I wish . . . this war was over and that I was home and that every Yankee engaged in it was at the bottom of the ocean,” he wrote to his wife in 1861. Gertrude Thomas loyally boosted the Confederate cause. “Our country is invaded—our homes are in danger—We are deprived . . . of that

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**UNION SOLDIERS** Soldiers of the 5<sup>th</sup> Ohio Cavalry moved through the South in 1864 with Union General William T. Sherman. (Ronn Palm Museum of Civil War Images, Gettysburg, PA)

glorious liberty for which our Fathers fought and bled and shall we finally submit to this? Never!” she declared. “We are only asking for self-government and freedom to decide our own destinies. We claim nothing of the North but—to *be let alone*.”

As war raged on, Gertrude Thomas longed for its end. “God speed the day when our independence shall be achieved, our southern confederacy acknowledged, and peace be with us again,” she wrote in her journal. But peace came at a price. In the last year of war, Union invasions damaged the plantations run by Jefferson Thomas and threatened the property near Augusta as well. The Civil War’s end brought further hardship to the Thomas family, which lost a small fortune of fifteen thousand dollars in Confederate bonds and ninety slaves. One by one, the former slaves left the Belmont estate, never to return. “As to the emancipated Negroes,” Gertrude Thomas told her journal in May 1865, “while there is of course a natural dislike to the loss of so much property, in my inmost soul, I cannot regret it.”

In their determination and militance, the Thomases were not alone. When Fort Sumter fell, Union and Confederate volunteers like Jefferson Thomas responded to the rush to arms that engulfed both regions. Partisans on both sides, like Gertrude Thomas, claimed the ideals of liberty, loyalty, and patriotism as their own. Like the Thomas family, most Americans of 1861 harbored what turned out to be false expectations.

Few volunteers or even politicians anticipated a protracted war. Most northern estimates ranged from one month to a year; rebels, too, counted on a speedy victory.

Neither side anticipated the carnage that war would bring; one out of every five soldiers who fought in the Civil War died in it. Once it became clear that war would extend beyond a few battles, leaders on both sides considered strategies once unpalatable or even unthinkable. The South, where government had always tread lightly on the citizenry, found that it had to impose a draft and virtually extort supplies from civilians. By the war’s end, the Confederacy was even ready to arm its slaves in an ironically desperate effort to save a society founded on slavery. The North, which began the war with the limited objective of overcoming secession and explicitly disclaimed any intention of interfering with slavery, found that in order to win, it had to shred the fabric of southern society by destroying slavery. For politicians as well as soldiers, the war defied expectations and turned into a series of surprises. The inseparable connection of Union war goals and the emancipation of slaves was perhaps the most momentous surprise.

“We will be held responsible before God if we don’t do our part.”

## FOCUS Questions

- What advantages did each combatant, Union and Confederate, possess at the start of the Civil War?
- How successfully did the governments and economies of the North and South respond to the pressures of war?
- How did the issue of emancipation transform the war?
- What factors determined the military outcome of the war?
- In what lasting ways did the Civil War change the United States as a nation?

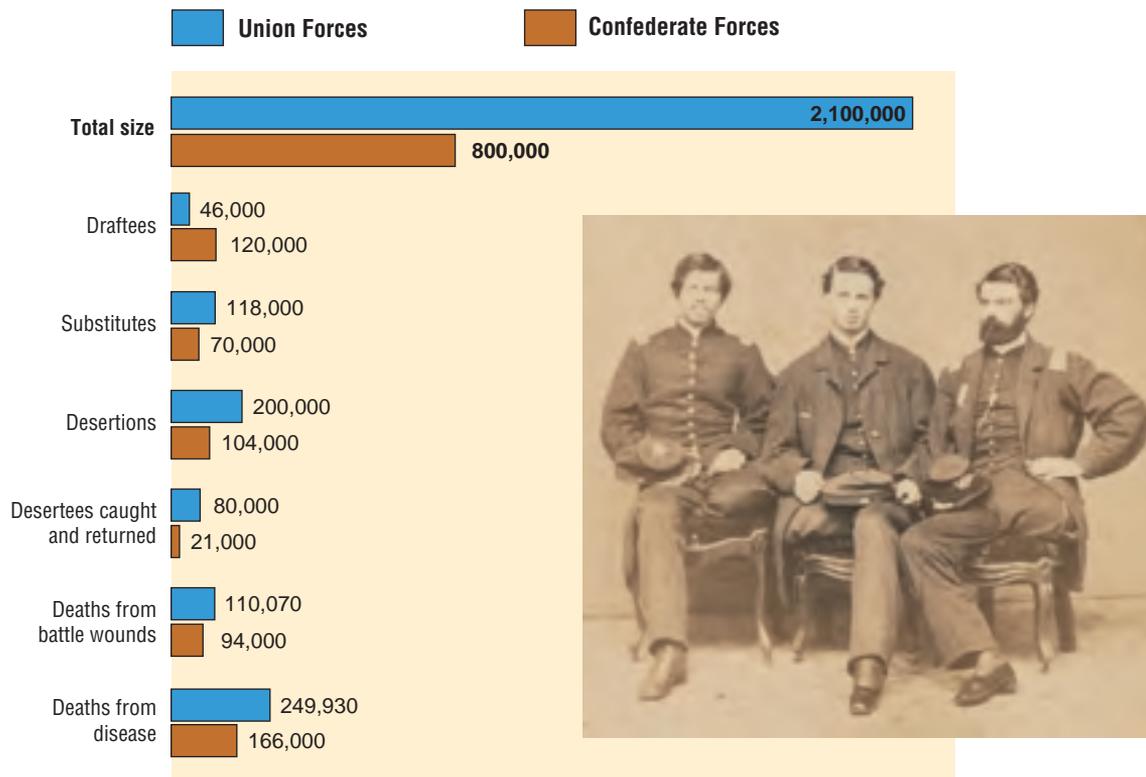
## Mobilizing for War

North and South alike were unprepared for war. In April 1861, the Union had only a small army of sixteen thousand men scattered all over the country, mostly in the West. One-third of Union army officers had resigned to join the Confederacy. The nation’s new president, Abraham Lincoln, struck many observers as a yokel. That such a government could marshal its people for war seemed doubtful. The federal government had levied no direct taxes for decades and had never imposed a draft. The Confederacy, even less prepared, had no tax structure, no navy, only two tiny gunpowder factories, and poorly equipped, unconnected railroad lines.

During the first two years of war, both sides would have to overcome these deficiencies, raise and supply large armies, and finance the war’s heavy costs. In each region, mobilization expanded the powers of government to an extent that few had anticipated.

## Recruitment and Conscription

The Civil War armies were the largest organizations ever created in America; by the war’s end, over 2 million men served in the Union army and 800,000 in the Confederate army (see Figure 15.1). In the first flush of enthusiasm, volunteers rushed to the colors. “We will be held responsible before God if we don’t do our part,” declared a New Jersey recruit. “I go for wiping them out,” a Virginian told his governor.



**FIGURE 15.1 OPPOSING ARMIES OF THE CIVIL WAR** “They sing and whoop, they laugh: they holler to de people on de ground and sing out ‘Good bye,’” remarked a slave watching rebel troops depart. “All going down to die.” As this graph shows (see also Figure 15.3), the Civil War had profound human costs. In both the North and South, hardly a family did not grieve for a lost relative or friend. Injured veterans became a common sight in cities, towns, and rural districts well into the twentieth century. This photograph shows Union volunteers with amputations performed by U.S. surgeons during the Civil War.

At first, raising armies depended on local efforts rather than on national or even state direction. Citizens opened hometown recruiting offices, held rallies, and signed up volunteers; regiments usually consisted of soldiers from the same locale. Southern cavalymen provided their own horses, and uniforms everywhere depended mainly on local option. In both armies, the troops themselves elected officers up to the rank of colonel.

This informal and democratic way of raising and organizing soldiers could not long withstand the stress of war. As early as July 1861, the Union began examinations for officers. Also, as casualties mounted, military demand soon exceeded the supply of volunteers. The Confederacy felt the pinch first and in April 1862 enacted the first **conscription** law in American history. It required all able-bodied white men aged eighteen to thirty-five to serve in the military for three years. Subsequent amendments made the age limits seventeen and fifty.

The Confederacy’s Conscription Act antagonized southerners. Opponents charged that the draft was a despotic assault on state sovereignty and that the law would “do away with all the patriotism we have.”

Exemptions for many occupations, from religious ministry to shoemaking, aggrieved the nonexempt. So did a loophole, closed in 1863, that allowed the well-off to hire substitutes. One amendment, the so-called 20-Negro law, exempted an owner or overseer of twenty or more slaves from service. Although southerners widely feared loss of control over slaves if all able-bodied white men were away in the army, the 20-Negro law led to complaints about “a rich man’s war but a poor man’s fight.”

Despite opposition, the Confederate draft became increasingly hard to evade; this stimulated volunteering. Only one soldier in five was a draftee, but 70 to 80 percent of eligible white southerners served in the Confederate army. An 1864 law that required all soldiers then in the army to serve for the duration of the war ensured that a high proportion of Confederate soldiers would be battle-hardened veterans.

Once the army was raised, it needed supplies. At first, the South relied on arms and ammunition imported from Europe, weapons confiscated from federal arsenals, and guns captured on the battlefield. These stopgap measures bought time to develop an industrial base. By 1862, southerners had a competent

head of ordnance (weaponry), Josiah Gorgas. The Confederacy assigned ordnance contracts to privately owned factories like the Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond, provided loans to establish new factories, and created government-owned industries like the giant Augusta Powder Works in Georgia. The South lost few, if any, battles for want of munitions.

Supplying troops with clothing and food proved more difficult. Southern soldiers frequently lacked shoes; during the South's invasion of Maryland in 1862, thousands of Confederate soldiers remained behind because they could not march barefoot on Maryland's gravel-surfaced roads. Late in the war, Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia ran out of food but never out of ammunition. Southern supply problems had several sources: railroads that fell into disrepair or were captured, an economy that relied more heavily on producing tobacco and cotton than growing food, and Union invasions early in the war that overran the livestock and grain-raising districts of central Tennessee and Virginia. Close to desperation, the Confederate Congress in 1863 passed the Impressment Act, an unpopular law that authorized army officers to take food from reluctant farmers at prescribed prices and to impress slaves into labor for the army, a provision that provoked yet more resentment.

The industrial North had fewer supply problems. But recruitment was another matter. When the initial tide of enthusiasm for enlistment ebbed, Congress followed the Confederacy's example and turned to conscription with the Enrollment Act of March 1863; every able-bodied white male citizen aged twenty to forty-five now faced the draft.

Like the Confederate conscription law of 1862, the Enrollment Act granted exemptions, although only to high government officials, ministers, and men who were the sole support of widows, orphans, or indigent parents. It also offered two means of escaping the draft: substitution, or paying another man who would serve instead; and commutation, paying a \$300 fee to the government. Enrollment districts often competed for volunteers by offering cash payments (bounties); dishonest "bounty jumpers" repeatedly deserted after collecting payments. Democrats charged that conscription violated individual liberties and states' rights. Ordinary citizens resented the commutation and substitution provision and leveled their own "poor man's fight" charges. Still, as in the Confederacy, the law stimulated volunteering. Only 8 percent of Union soldiers were draftees or substitutes.

## Financing the War

The recruitment and supply of huge armies lay far beyond the capacity of American public finance at the start of the war. In the 1840s and 1850s, the

federal government met its meager revenue needs from tariff duties and income from public land sales. During the war, however, annual federal expenditures gradually rose, and the need for new sources of revenue became urgent. Yet neither Union nor Confederacy initially wished to impose taxes, to which Americans were unaccustomed.

Both sides therefore turned to war bonds; that is, to loans from citizens to be repaid by future generations. Patriotic southerners quickly bought up the Confederacy's first bond issue (\$15 million) in 1861. That same year, a financial wizard, Philadelphia banker Jay Cooke, urged the northern public to buy a much larger bond issue (\$150 million). But bonds had to be paid for in gold or silver coin (specie), which was in short supply. Soaking up most of its available specie, the South's first bond issue threatened to be its last. In the North, many hoarded their gold rather than spend it on bonds.

Grasping the limits of taxes and of bond issues, both sides began to print paper money. Early in 1862, Lincoln signed into law the **Legal Tender Act**, which authorized the issue of \$150 million of so-called greenbacks. Christopher Memminger, the Confederacy's treasury secretary, and Salmon P. Chase, his Union counterpart, shared a distrust of paper money, but as funds dwindled each came around to the idea. The availability of paper money made it easier to pay soldiers, levy taxes, and sell war bonds. Yet doubts about paper money lingered. Unlike gold and silver, which had established market values, the value of paper money depended mainly on public confidence in the government that issued it. To bolster that confidence, Union officials made the greenbacks legal tender (that is, acceptable in payment of most public and private debts).

In contrast, the Confederacy never made its paper money legal tender; suspicions arose that the southern government lacked confidence in it. To compound the problem, the Confederacy raised less than 5 percent of its wartime revenue from taxes (compared to 21 percent in the North). The Confederacy did enact a comprehensive tax measure in 1863, but Union invasions and the South's relatively undeveloped system of internal transportation made tax collection a hit-or-miss proposition.

Confidence in the South's paper money quickly evaporated, and the value of Confederate paper in relation to gold plunged. The Confederate response—printing more paper money, a billion dollars by 1865—merely accelerated southern inflation. Whereas prices in the North rose about 80 percent during the war, the Confederacy suffered an inflation rate of over 9,000 percent. What cost a southerner one dollar in 1861 cost forty-six dollars by 1864.

By raising taxes, floating bonds, and printing paper money, both North and South broke with the hard-money, minimal-government traditions of American public finance. For the most part, these changes were unanticipated and often reluctant adaptations to wartime conditions. But in the North, Republicans took advantage of the southern Democrats' departure from Congress to push through one measure that they and their Whig predecessors had long advocated, a system of national banking. Passed in February 1863 over Democratic opposition, the **National Bank Act** established criteria by which a bank could obtain a federal charter and issue national bank notes (notes backed by the federal government). It also gave private bankers an incentive to purchase war bonds. The North's ability to revolutionize its public finance system reflected both long experience with complex financial transactions and political cohesion in wartime.

### Political Leadership in Wartime

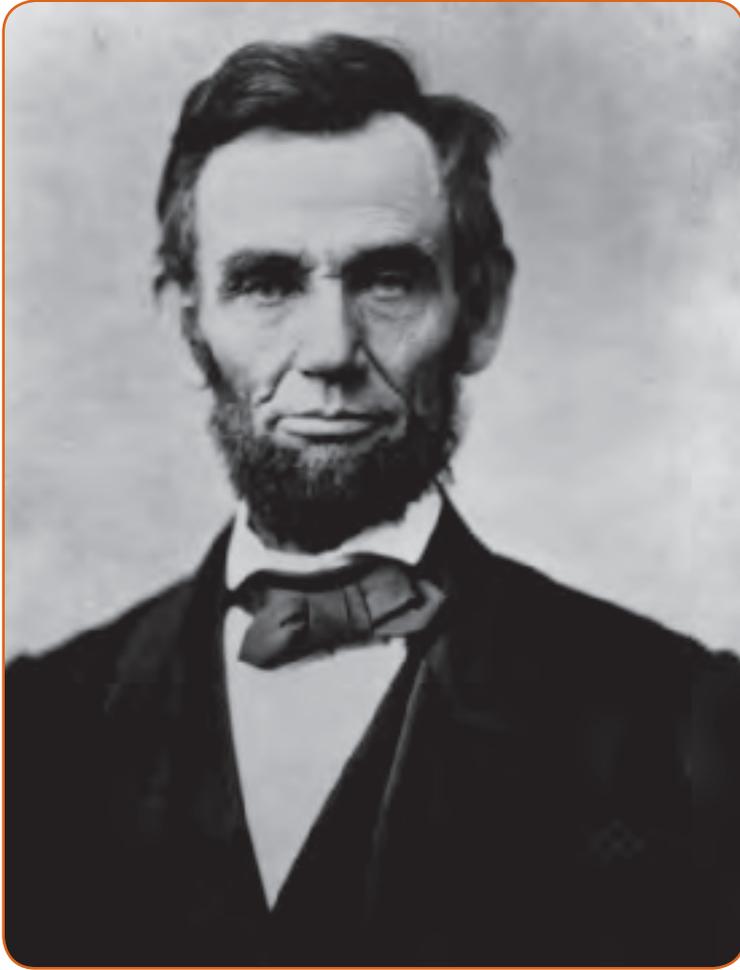
The Civil War pitted rival political systems as well as armies and economies against each other. The South entered the war with several

political advantages. Lincoln's call for militiamen to suppress the rebellion had transformed Southern waverers into tenacious secessionists. "Never was a people more united or more determined," a New Orleans woman wrote in the spring of 1861. Southerners also claimed a strong leader. A former secretary of war and U.S. senator from Mississippi, President **Jefferson Davis** of the Confederacy possessed experience, honesty, courage, and what one officer described as "a jaw sawed in *steel*."

In contrast, the Union's list of political liabilities seemed long. Loyal but contentious, northern Democrats disliked conscription, the National Bank Act, and abolition of slavery. Among Republicans, Lincoln had trouble commanding respect. Unlike Davis, he had served in neither the cabinet nor the Senate; his informal western manners dismayed easterners. Northern setbacks early in the war convinced most Republicans in Congress that Lincoln was ineffectual. Criticism of Lincoln sprang from **Radical Republicans**, a group that included Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase, Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, and Representative Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania. On some issues, the Radicals cooperated with



**JEFFERSON DAVIS AND VARINA DAVIS** Jefferson Davis and his wife, Varina Howell Davis, around the time of their marriage in the 1840s. (*Museum of the Confederacy*)



**ABRAHAM LINCOLN** A portrait of Lincoln made in the Washington, D. C. studio of photographer Alexander Gardner in November, 1863, eleven days before the president gave the Gettysburg Address. (*Library of Congress*)

Lincoln. But they assailed him early in the war for failing to make emancipation a war goal and later for being too eager to readmit the conquered rebel states into the Union.

Lincoln's distinctive style of leadership at once encouraged and disarmed opposition among Republicans. Self-contained until ready to act, he met complaints with homespun anecdotes that caught opponents off guard. The Radicals often saw Lincoln as a prisoner of the party's conservative wing; conservatives complained he was too close

to the Radicals. But Lincoln's cautious reserve left open his lines of communication with both wings of the party and fragmented his opposition. He also co-opted some of his critics, including Chase, by bringing them into his cabinet.

Stephens sniped at Davis as “weak and vacillating, timid, petulant, peevish, obstinate.”

In contrast, Jefferson Davis had a knack for making enemies. A West Pointer, he would rather have led the army than the government. His cabinet endured frequent resignations; the Confederacy had five secretaries of war in four years. Davis's relations with his vice president, Alexander Stephens of Georgia, verged on disastrous. A wisp of a man, Stephens weighed less than a hundred pounds, but he compensated for his slight physique with an acidic tongue. Leaving Richmond, the Confederate capital, in 1862, Stephens spent most of the war in Georgia, where he sniped at Davis as “weak and vacillating, timid, petulant, peevish, obstinate.”

The clash between Davis and Stephens also involved an ideological division, a rift, in fact, like that at the heart of the Confederacy. The Confederate Constitution, drafted in February 1861, explicitly guaranteed state sovereignty and prohibited the Confederate Congress from enacting protective tariffs or supporting internal improvements (measures long opposed by southern voters). For Stephens and other influential Confederates—among them the governors of Georgia and North Carolina—the Confederacy existed not only to protect slavery but, equally important, to enshrine the doctrine of states' rights. In contrast, Davis's main objective was to secure the independence of the South from the North, if necessary at the expense of states' rights.

This difference between Davis and Stephens somewhat resembled the discord between Lincoln and northern Democrats. Like Davis, Lincoln believed that victory demanded a strong central government; like Stephens, northern Democrats resisted governmental centralization. But Lincoln could control his foes more skillfully than Davis because, by temperament, he was more suited to conciliation and also because the nature of party politics in the two sections differed.

In the South, the Democrats and the remaining Whigs agreed to suspend party rivalries for the duration of the war. Although intended to promote southern unity, this decision actually encouraged disunity. Without the organization that party rivalry provided, southern politics disintegrated along personal and factional lines. Lacking a party system to back him, Davis could not mobilize votes to pass measures that he favored nor depend on the support of party loyalists.

In contrast, in the Union, northern Democrats' organized opposition to Lincoln tended to unify the Republicans. After Democrats in 1862 won control of five states (including Lincoln's Illinois), Republican leaders learned a lesson: no matter how much they disdained Lincoln, they had to rally behind him or risk losing office. Ultimately,

the Union developed more political cohesion than the Confederacy, not because it had fewer divisions but because it managed its divisions more effectively.

## Securing the Union's Borders

Even before large-scale fighting began, Lincoln moved to safeguard Washington, which was bordered by two slave states (Virginia and Maryland) and filled with Confederate sympathizers. A week after Fort Sumter, a Baltimore mob attacked a Massachusetts regiment bound for Washington, but enough troops slipped through to protect the capital. Lincoln then dispatched federal troops to Maryland, where he suspended the writ of *habeas corpus* (a court order requiring that the detainer of a prisoner bring that person to court and show cause for his or her detention); federal troops could now arrest prosecession Marylanders without formally charging them with specific offenses. Cowed by Lincoln's bold moves, the legislatures of Maryland and Delaware (another border slave state) rejected secession.

Next, Lincoln authorized the arming of Union sympathizers in Kentucky, a slave state with a Unionist legislature, a secessionist governor, and a thin chance of staying neutral. Lincoln also stationed troops under General Ulysses S. Grant just across the Ohio River from Kentucky, in Illinois. When a Confederate army invaded Kentucky early in 1862, Grant's soldiers drove it out. Officially, at least, Kentucky became the third slave state to declare for the Union. The fourth, Missouri, faced four years of fighting between Union and Confederate troops, and between bands of guerrillas and bushwhackers, a name for Confederate guerrillas who lurked in the underbrush. These included William Quantrill, a rebel desperado, and his murderous apprentices, Frank and Jesse James. Despite savage combat and the divided loyalties of its people, Missouri never left the Union. West Virginia, admitted to the Union in 1863, would become the last of five border states, or slave states that remained in the Union. (West Virginia was established in 1861, when thirty-five counties in the mainly nonslaveholding region of Virginia west of the Shenandoah Valley refused to follow the state's leaders into secession.)

By holding the first four border slave states—Maryland, Delaware, Kentucky, and Missouri—in the Union, Lincoln kept open his routes to the free states and gained access to the river systems in Kentucky and Missouri that led into the heart of the Confederacy. Lincoln's firmness, particularly in Maryland, scotched charges that he was weak-willed. The crisis also forced the president to exercise long-dormant powers. In the case *Ex parte Merryman*

(1861), Chief Justice Roger B. Taney ruled that Lincoln had exceeded his authority in suspending the writ of *habeas corpus* in Maryland. The president, citing the Constitution's authorization of the writ's suspension in "Cases of Rebellion" (Article I, Section 9), insisted that he, rather than Congress, would determine whether a rebellion existed; he ignored Taney's ruling.

## In Battle, 1861–1862

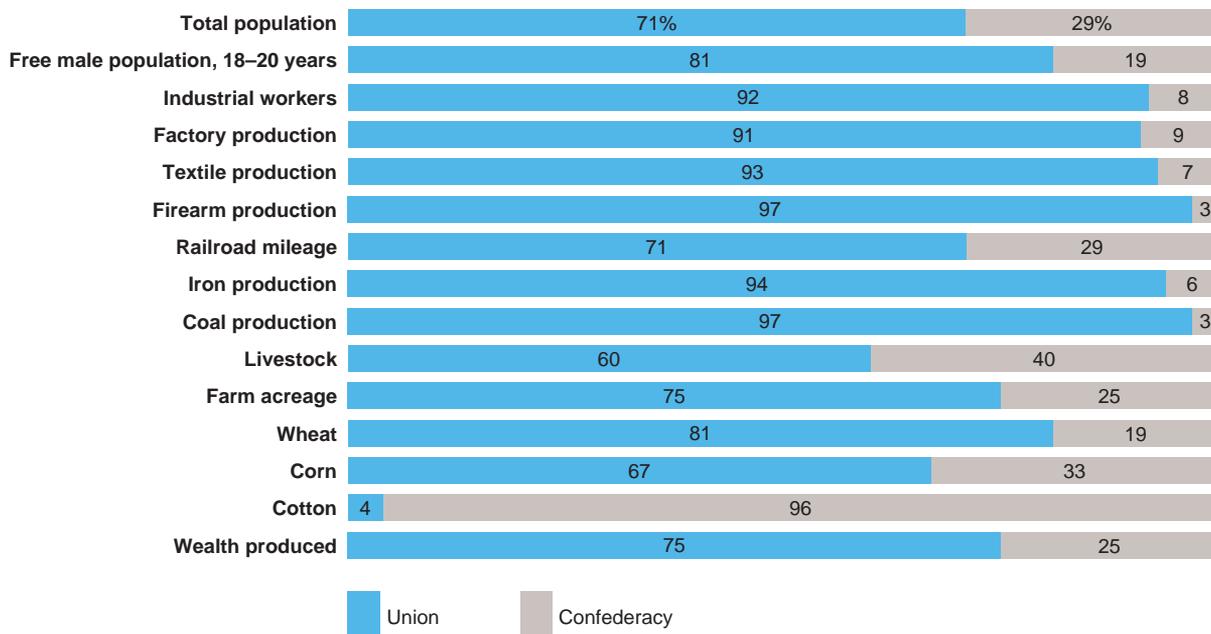
The Civil War was the first war to rely extensively on railroads, the telegraph, mass-produced weapons, joint army-navy tactics, iron-plated warships, rifled guns and artillery, and trench warfare. All of this lends some justification to its description as the first modern war. But to the participants, slogging through muddy swamps and laden with equipment, the war hardly seemed modern. In many ways, the soldiers had the more accurate perspective, for the new weapons did not always work, and both sides employed tactics that were more traditional than modern.

## Armies, Weapons, and Strategies

Compared to the Confederacy's 9 million people, one-third of them slaves, the Union had 22 million people in 1861 (see Figure 15.2). The North also had 3.5 times as many white men of military age, 90 percent of all U.S. industrial capacity, and two-thirds of its railroad track. Yet the Union faced a daunting challenge: to force the South back into the Union. The South, in contrast, fought merely for its independence. To subdue the Confederacy, the North would have to sustain offensive operations over a vast area.

Measured against this challenge, the Union's advantages in population and technology shrank. The North had more men, but needed to defend long supply lines and occupy captured areas; consequently, it could commit a smaller proportion to frontline duty. The South, which relied on slaves for labor, could assign a higher proportion of white men to combat. The North required, and possessed, superior railroads, though it had to move troops and supplies huge distances, and guerrillas could easily sabotage northern lines; the South could shift troops relatively short distances within its defensive arc without using railroads. Finally, southerners had an edge in soldiers' morale, for Confederate troops battled on home ground. "No people ever warred for independence," a southern general acknowledged, "with more relative advantages than the Confederates."

"No people ever warred for independence with more relative advantages than the Confederates."



**FIGURE 15.2 COMPARATIVE POPULATION AND ECONOMIC RESOURCES OF THE UNION AND THE CONFEDERACY, 1861** At the start of the war, the Union enjoyed huge advantages in population, industry, railroad mileage, and wealth, and—as it would soon prove—a superior ability to mobilize its vast resources. The Confederacy, however, enjoyed the many advantages of fighting a defensive war.

The Civil War witnessed experiments with various newly developed weapons, including the submarine, the repeating rifle, and the multibarreled Gatling gun, the forerunner of the machine gun. More important was the perfection in the 1850s of a bullet whose powder would not clog a rifle's spiraled internal grooves after a few shots. Like the smoothbore muskets that both armies had employed at the start of the war, most improved rifles had to be reloaded after each shot. But the smoothbore had an effective range of only eighty yards; the Springfield or Enfield rifles widely employed by 1863 could hit targets accurately at up to four hundred yards.

The rifle's development challenged long-accepted military tactics, which stressed the mass infantry charge against an opponent's weakest point. Pre-war military manuals assumed that defenders armed with muskets would fire only a round or two before being overwhelmed. Armed with rifles, however, a defending force could fire several rounds before closing with the enemy. Attackers would now rarely get close enough to thrust bayonets; fewer than 1 percent of the casualties in the Civil War resulted from bayonet wounds.

Thus, the rifle produced some changes in tactics. Both sides came to grasp the value of trenches, which provided defenders protection against withering rifle fire. By 1865, trenches pockmarked the

landscape in Virginia and Georgia. Also, growing use of the rifle forced generals to rely less on cavalry. Traditionally, cavalry had ranked among the most prestigious components of an army, in part because cavalry charges were effective and in part because the cavalry helped maintain class distinctions within the army. More accurate rifles reduced cavalry effectiveness by increasing the firepower of foot soldiers. Thus both sides relegated cavalry to reconnaissance missions and raids on supply trains.

Still, the introduction of the rifle did not totally invalidate traditional tactics. On the contrary, historians now contend, high casualties reflected the long duration of battles rather than the new efficacy of rifles. The attacking army still stood an excellent chance of success if it achieved surprise the South's lush forests provided abundant opportunities for an army to sneak up on its foe. For example, at the Battle of Shiloh in 1862, Confederate attackers surprised and almost defeated a larger Union army despite the rumpus created by green rebel troops en route to the battle, many of whom fired their rifles into the air to see if they would work.

Lack of any element of surprise could doom an attacking army. At the Battle of Fredericksburg in December 1862, Confederate troops inflicted appalling casualties on Union forces attacking uphill over open terrain, and at Gettysburg in July 1863, Union riflemen and artillery shredded charging

southerners. But generals might still achieve partial surprise by hitting an enemy before it had concentrated its troops; in fact, this is what the North tried to do at Fredericksburg. Because surprise often proved effective, most generals continued to believe their best chance of success lay in striking an unwary or weakened enemy with all the troops they could muster rather than in relying on guerilla or trench warfare.

Much like previous wars, the Civil War was fought basically in a succession of battles during which exposed infantry traded volleys, charged, and countercharged. Whichever side withdrew from the field usually was considered the loser, though it frequently sustained lighter casualties than the supposed victor. Both sides had trouble exploiting their victories. As a rule, the beaten army moved back a few miles from the field to lick its wounds; the winners stayed in place to lick theirs. Politicians on both sides raged at generals for not pursuing a beaten foe, but it was difficult for a mangled victor to gather horses, mules, supply trains, and exhausted soldiers for a new attack. Not surprisingly, for much of the war, generals on both sides concluded that the best defense was a good offense.

To the extent that the North had a long-range strategy in 1861, it lay in the so-called **Anaconda plan**. Devised by a hero of the Mexican-American War, General Winfield Scott, the plan called for the Union to blockade the southern coastline and to thrust, like a snake, down the Mississippi River. Sealing off and severing the Confederacy, Scott expected, would make the South recognize the futility of secession and end the war quickly. However, although Lincoln quickly ordered a blockade of the southern coast, the North lacked the troops and naval flotillas to seize the Mississippi in 1861. So while the Mississippi remained an objective, northern strategy did not unfold according to a specific blueprint like the Anaconda plan.

Early in the war, the pressing need to secure the border slave states, particularly Kentucky and Missouri, dictated Union strategy west of the Appalachian Mountains. Once in control of Kentucky, northern troops plunged southward into Tennessee. The Appalachians tended to seal this western theater off from the eastern theater, where major clashes of 1861 occurred.

## Stalemate in the East

The Confederacy's decision in May 1861 to move its capital from Montgomery, Alabama, to Richmond, Virginia, shaped Union strategy. "Forward to Richmond" became the Union's first war cry. Before they could reach Richmond, one hundred miles



**"SCOTT'S GREAT SNAKE," 1861** General Winfield Scott's scheme to surround the South and await a seizure of power by southern Unionists drew scorn from critics who called it the Anaconda plan. In this lithograph, the "great snake" prepares to push down the Mississippi, seal off the Confederacy, and crush it. (*Library of Congress*)

southwest of Washington, Union troops had to dislodge a Confederate army brazenly encamped at Manassas Junction, Virginia, only twenty-five miles from the Union capital (see Map 15.1). Lincoln ordered General Irvin McDowell to attack his former West Point classmate, Confederate general P.G.T. Beauregard. In the resulting **First Battle of Bull Run** (or First Manassas), amateur armies clashed in bloody chaos under a blistering July sun. Well-dressed, picnicking Washington dignitaries witnessed the carnage, as Beauregard routed the larger Union army.

After Bull Run, Lincoln replaced McDowell with General George B. McClellan as commander of the Army of the Potomac, the Union's main fighting force in the East. Another West Pointer, McClellan had served with distinction in the Mexican-American War. A master of administration and training, he could turn a ragtag mob into a disciplined fighting force. His soldiers adored him, but Lincoln quickly became disenchanted. Lincoln believed the key to a Union victory lay in simultaneous, coordinated attacks on several fronts so that the North could exploit its advantage in manpower and resources. McClellan, a proslavery Democrat, hoped for a relatively bloodless Southern defeat, followed by readmission of the Confederate states with slavery intact.



**MAP 15.1 THE WAR IN THE EAST, 1861–1862** Union advances on Richmond were turned back at Fredericksburg and the Seven Days’ Battles, and the Confederacy’s invasion of Union territory was stopped at Antietam.

In the spring of 1862, McClellan got a chance to implement his strategy. After Bull Run, the Confederates had pulled back to block the Union onslaught against Richmond. Rather than directly attack the Confederate army, McClellan decided to move his army by water to the tip of the peninsula formed by the York and James Rivers and then move northwestward up the peninsula to Richmond. McClellan’s plan had several advantages. Depending on water transport rather than on railroads exposed to Confederate cavalry, the McClellan strategy reduced the vulnerability of northern supply lines. Approaching Richmond from the southeast, it threatened the South’s supply lines. By aiming for the Confederate capital rather than for the Confederate army stationed to its northeast, McClellan hoped to maneuver the southern troops into a futile attack on his army.

At first, the massive Peninsula Campaign unfolded smoothly. Three hundred ships transported seventy thousand men and huge stores of supplies to the tip of the peninsula. Reinforcements swelled McClellan’s army to one hundred thousand. By late May, McClellan was within five miles of Richmond. But then he hesitated. Overestimating Confederate strength, he refused to launch a final attack without further reinforcements, which were turned back by Confederate general Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson in the Shenandoah Valley.

While McClellan delayed, General **Robert E. Lee** took command of the Confederacy’s Army of Northern Virginia. A foe of secession and so courteous that at times he seemed too gentle, Lee possessed the qualities that McClellan most lacked: boldness and a willingness to accept casualties. Seizing the initiative, Lee attacked McClellan in late June 1862. The ensuing Seven Days’ Battles, fought in the

forests east of Richmond, cost the South nearly twice as many men as the North and ended in a virtual slaughter of Confederates. Unnerved by mounting casualties, McClellan sent increasingly panicky reports to Washington. Lincoln, who cared little for McClellan's peninsula strategy, ordered McClellan to call off the campaign and return to Washington.

With McClellan off the scene, Lee and his lieutenant, Stonewall Jackson, boldly struck north and, at the Second Battle of Bull Run (Second Manassas), routed a Union army under General John Pope. Lee's next stroke was even bolder. Crossing the Potomac River in early September 1862, he invaded western Maryland, where the forthcoming harvest could feed his troops. Lee could now threaten Washington, indirectly relieve pressure on Richmond, improve the prospects of peace candidates in the North's fall elections, and possibly induce Britain and France to recognize Confederate independence. But McClellan met Lee at the **Battle of Antietam** (or Sharpsburg) on September 17. A tactical draw, Antietam proved a strategic victory for the North: Lee subsequently canceled his invasion and retreated south of the Potomac.

Heartened by Northern success, Lincoln then issued the Emancipation Proclamation, a war measure that freed all slaves under rebel control. The toll of 24,000 casualties at Antietam, however, made it the bloodiest day of the entire war. One part of the battlefield, a Union veteran recalled, contained so many bodies that a man could have walked through it without stepping on the ground.

Complaining that McClellan had "the slows," Lincoln faulted his commander for not pursuing Lee after Antietam. McClellan's replacement, General Ambrose Burnside, thought himself unfit for high command. He was right. In December 1862, Burnside led 122,000 federal troops against 78,500 Confederates at the Battle of Fredericksburg. Burnside captured the town of Fredericksburg, northeast of Richmond, but then sacrificed his army in futile charges up the heights west of the town. Even Lee shuddered at the carnage. "It is well that war is so terrible, or we should grow too fond of it," he told an aide. Richmond remained, in the words of a southern song, "a hard road to travel." The war in the East had become a stalemate.

## The War in the West

The Union fared better in the West. There, the war ranged over a vast terrain that provided access to rivers leading directly into the South. The West also spawned new leadership: In the war's first year, an obscure Union general, **Ulysses S. Grant**, won



**MAP 15.2 THE WAR IN THE WEST, 1861–1862** By the end of 1862, the North held New Orleans and the entire Mississippi River except for the stretch between Vicksburg and Port Hudson.

attention. A West Point graduate, Grant had fought in the Mexican-American War and retired from the army in 1854 with a reputation for heavy drinking. He then failed in farming and business. When the Civil War began, he gained an army commission through political pressure.

In 1861–1862, Grant retained control of two border states, Missouri and Kentucky. Moving into Tennessee, he captured two strategic forts, Fort Henry on the Tennessee River and Fort Donelson on the Cumberland. Grant then headed south to attack Corinth, Mississippi, a major railroad junction (see Map 15.2).

"It is well that war is so terrible, or we should grow too fond of it."



**THE BATTLE OF ANTIETAM** A painting of the Antietam battlefield by James Hope, a Union soldier of the Second Vermont Infantry, shows three brigades of Union troops advancing under Confederate fire. In the photograph of Antietam, dead rebel gunners lie next to the wreckage of their battery. The building in both painting and photograph, a Dunker church, was the scene of furious fighting. (*Antietam National Battlefield, Sharpsburg, MD and Library of Congress*)

In early April 1862, to defend Corinth, Confederates under generals Albert Sidney Johnston and P.G.T. Beauregard surprised Grant's army, encamped near a church named Shiloh twenty miles north of the town, in southern Tennessee. Hoping to whip Grant before Union reinforcements arrived, Confederates exploded from the woods near Shiloh before breakfast and almost drove the federals into the Tennessee River. Beauregard cabled Richmond with news of Confederate triumph. But Grant and his lieutenant, **William T. Sherman**—a West Point graduate and Mexican-American war veteran who had most recently run a southern military academy—steadied the Union line. Union reinforcements arrived at night, and a

federal counterattack drove the Confederates from the field the next day. Although Antietam would soon erase the distinction, the **Battle of Shiloh** was the bloodiest in American history to that date. Of the seventy-seven thousand men engaged, twenty-three thousand were killed or wounded, including Confederate general Albert Sidney Johnston, who bled to death from a leg wound. Defeated at Shiloh, the Confederates soon evacuated Corinth.

To attack Grant at Shiloh, the Confederacy had stripped the defenses of its largest city, New Orleans. A combined Union land-sea force under General Benjamin Butler, a Massachusetts politician, and Admiral David G. Farragut, a Tennessean loyal to the Union, seized the opportunity. Farragut

took New Orleans in late April and soon conquered Baton Rouge and Natchez as well. Meanwhile, another Union flotilla moved down the Mississippi and captured Memphis in June. Now the North controlled the entire river, except for a two-hundred-mile stretch between Port Hudson, Louisiana, and Vicksburg, Mississippi.

Union and Confederate forces also clashed in 1862 in the trans-Mississippi West. On the banks of the Rio Grande, Union volunteers, joined by Mexican-American companies, drove a Confederate army from Texas out of New Mexico. A thousand miles to the east, in northern Arkansas and western Missouri, armies vied to secure the Missouri River, a crucial waterway that flowed into the Mississippi. In Pea Ridge, Arkansas, in March 1862, forewarned northern troops scattered a Confederate force of sixteen thousand that included three Cherokee regiments. (Indian units fought on both sides in Missouri, where guerrilla combat raged until the war's end.)

These Union victories changed the nature of the trans-Mississippi war. As the rebel threat faded, regiments of western volunteers that had mobilized to crush Confederates turned to fighting Indians. Conflict between Union forces and Native Americans erupted in Minnesota, Arizona, Nevada, Colorado, and New Mexico, where California volunteers and the New Mexico cavalry, led by Colonel Kit Carson, overwhelmed the Apaches and Navajos. After 1865, federal troops moved west to complete the rout of the Indians that had begun in the Civil War.

## The Soldiers' War

Civil War soldiers were typically volunteers from farms and small towns who joined companies of recruits from their locales. Many who enrolled in 1861 and 1862—those who served at Shiloh and Antietam—reenlisted when their terms expired and became the backbones of their respective armies. Local loyalties spurred enrollment, especially in the South; so did ideals of honor and valor. Soldiers on both sides envisioned military life as a transforming experience in which citizens became warriors and boys became men. Exultant after a victory, an Alabama volunteer told his father, “With your first shot you become a new man.” Thousands of underage volunteers, that is, boys under eighteen, also served in the war; so did at least 250 women disguised as men.

Recruits were meshed into regiments and then sent to camps of instruction. Training was meager, and much of army life tedious and uncomfortable. Food was one complaint. Union troops ate beans, bacon, salt pork, pickled beef, and a staple called



**A UNION SOLDIER** Sarah Rosetta Wakeman, alias Private Lyons Wakeman, served in the Union army disguised as a man. She joined the 153rd Regiment, New York State Volunteers. (Courtesy of Jackson K. Doane)

hardtack, square flour-and-water biscuits that were almost impossible to crack with a blow. Confederate diets featured bacon and cornmeal, and as a southern soldier summed it up, “Our rations is small.” Rebel armies often ran out of food, blankets, clothes, socks, and shoes. On both sides, crowded military camps—plagued by poor sanitation and infested with lice, fleas, ticks, flies, and rodents—ensured soaring disease rates and widespread grievances. A sergeant from New York, only partly in jest, described his lot as “laying around in the dirt and mud, living on hardtack, facing death in bullets and shells, eat up by wood-ticks and body-lice.”

Dreams of military glory swiftly faded. For most soldiers, Civil War battles meant inuring themselves

to the stench of death. “Soldier,” a Confederate chaplain told his troops in 1863, “your business is to die.” Soldiers rapidly grasped the value of caution in combat. According to a northern volunteer, “The consuming passion is to get out of the way.” Others described the zeal aroused by combat. “[Y]ou know that every shot you fire into them sends some one to eternity,” a New Jersey artilleryman recalled, “but still you are prompted by a terrible desire to kill all you can.” The deadly cost of battle fell most heavily on the infantry, in which at least three out of four soldiers served. Although repeating rifles had three or four times the range of the old smoothbore muskets, a combination of inexperience, inadequate training, and barriers of terrain curbed their impact. Instead, masses of soldiers faced one another at close range for long periods, exchanging fire until one side or the other gave up and fell back. The high casualty figures at Shiloh and Antietam reflected not advanced technology but the armies’ inability to use it effectively. “Our victories... seem to settle nothing,” a southern officer wrote in 1862. “It is only so many killed or wounded, leaving the war of blood to go on.” Armies gained efficiency in battle through experience, and only late in the war.

In their voluminous letters home (Civil War armies were the most literate armies that had ever existed), volunteers discussed their motives as soldiers. Some Confederates enlisted to defend slavery, which they paired with liberty. “I choose to fight for southern rights and southern liberty” against the “vandals of the North” who were “determined to destroy slavery,” a Kentucky Confederate announced. “A stand must be made for African slavery or it is forever lost,” wrote a South Carolinian. A small minority of northern soldiers voiced antislavery sentiments early in the war: “I have no heart in this war if the slaves cannot go free,” a soldier from Wisconsin declared. Few Union recruits, however, initially shared this antipathy to slavery, and some voiced the opposite view. “I don’t want to fire another shot for the negroes and I wish all the abolitionists were in hell,” a New York soldier declared. But as war went on, northern soldiers accepted the need to free the slaves, sometimes for humanitarian reasons. “Since I am down here I have learned and seen more of what the horrors of slavery was than I ever knew before,” an Ohio officer wrote from Louisiana. Others had more practical goals. By the summer of 1862, Union soldiers in the South had become agents of liberation; many who once had damned the “abolitionist war” now endorsed emancipation as part of the Union war effort. As an Indiana soldier declared, “Every negro we get strengthens us and weakens the rebels.”

## Ironclads and Cruisers: The Naval War

By plunging its navy into the Confederacy like a dagger, the Union exploited a clear-cut advantage. The North began the war with over forty active warships against none for the South, and by 1865 the United States had the largest navy in the world. Steamships could penetrate the South’s excellent river system from any direction.

Yet the Union navy faced an extraordinary challenge: to blockade the South’s thirty-five hundred miles of coast. Early in the war, small, sleek Confederate blockade-runners darted with impunity in and out of southern harbors. The North gradually tightened the blockade by outfitting tugs, whalers, excursion steamers, and ferries as well as frigates to patrol southern coasts. The proportion of Confederate blockade-runners that made it through dropped from 90 percent early in the war to 50 percent by 1865. Northern seizure of rebel ports and coastal areas diminished the South’s foreign trade even more. In daring amphibious assaults of 1861 and 1862, the Union captured the excellent harbor of Port Royal, South Carolina, the coastal islands off South Carolina (Map 15.3), and most of North Carolina’s river outlets. Naval patrols and amphibious operations reduced the South’s ocean trade to one-third its prewar level.

Despite meager resources, the South strove to offset the North’s naval advantage. Early in the war, the Confederacy raised the scuttled Union frigate *Merrimac*, sheathed its sides with an armor of ironplate, rechristened it *Virginia*, and dispatched it to attack wooden Union ships in Hampton Roads, Virginia. The *Merrimac* destroyed two northern warships but met its match in the hastily built Union ironclad the *Monitor*. In the first engagement of ironclads in history, the two ships fought an indecisive battle on March 9, 1862. The South constructed other ironclads and even the first submarine, which dragged a mine through water to sink a Union ship off Charleston in 1864; the “fish” failed to resurface and went down with its prey. But the South never built enough ironclads to overcome Northern supremacy in home waters. Nor did Confederate success on the high seas—where wooden, steam-driven commerce raiders wreaked havoc on the Union’s merchant marine—tip the balance of war in the South’s favor: the North, unlike its foe, did not depend on imports for war materials. The South would lose the naval war.

## The Diplomatic War

While armies and navies clashed in 1861–1862, conflict developed on a third front, diplomacy. At the war’s start, the Confederacy sought European



**SAILORS ON THE MONITOR** Union sailors on the deck of the USS *Monitor* in 1862. Typically, when photographers arrived, crew members posed near the turret by themselves, apart from officers. (*Library of Congress*)

recognition of its independence. Southern confidence ran high. Planning to establish a colonial empire in Mexico, Napoleon III of France welcomed a permanent division of the United States. The French and British upper classes seemed sympathetic to the South and eager for the downfall of the brash Yankee republic. Furthermore, influential southerners contended, an embargo of cotton exports would bring Britain to its knees. Britain, dependent on the South for four-fifths of its cotton, they reasoned, would break the Union blockade and provoke war with the North rather than endure an embargo.

Leaving nothing to chance, the Confederacy in 1861 dispatched emissaries James Mason to Britain and John Slidell to France to lobby for recognition of an independent South. But their ship, the *Trent*, fell into Union hands, and when the pair ended up in Boston as prisoners, British tempers exploded. Considering one war at a time enough, President Lincoln released Mason and Slidell. But settling the *Trent* affair did not eliminate friction between the United States and Britain. Union diplomats protested the construction in British shipyards of two Confederate commerce raiders, the *Florida* and the

*Alabama*. In 1863, the U.S. minister to London, Charles Francis Adams (the son of former president John Quincy Adams), threatened war if two British-built ironclads commissioned by the Confederacy, the so-called Laird rams, were turned over to the South. Britain capitulated to Adams's protests and purchased the rams for its own navy.

On balance, the South fell far short of its diplomatic objectives. Although recognizing the Confederacy as a belligerent, neither Britain nor France ever recognized it as a nation. Basically, the Confederacy overestimated the power of its vaunted “cotton diplomacy.” Southern threats to Britain about an embargo of cotton exports failed: Planters conducted business as usual by raising cotton and trying to slip it through the blockade. Still, the South's share of the British cotton market slumped from 77 percent in 1860 to only 10 percent in 1865. Forces beyond Southern control had weakened British demand. Bumper cotton crops in the late 1850s had glutted the British market by the start of the war and Britain had found new suppliers in Egypt and India. Gradually, too, the North's tightened blockade restricted southern exports.

The South also exaggerated Britain's stake in helping the Confederacy. As a naval power that had frequently blockaded its own enemies, Britain's diplomatic interest lay in supporting the Union blockade in principle; from Britain's standpoint, to help the South break the blockade would set a precedent that could easily boomerang. Finally, although France and Britain often considered recognizing the Confederacy, the timing never seemed quite right. Union success at Antietam in 1862 and Lincoln's subsequent issuance of the **Emancipation Proclamation** dampened Europe's enthusiasm for recognition at a crucial juncture. By transforming the war into a struggle to end slavery, the Emancipation Proclamation stirred pro-Union feeling in anti-slavery Britain, particularly among liberals and the working class. The proclamation, declared Henry Adams (diplomat Charles Francis Adams's son) from London, "has done more for us here than all of our former victories and all our diplomacy."

## Emancipation Transforms the War, 1863

"I hear old John Brown knocking on the lid of his coffin and shouting 'Let me out! Let me out!'" abolitionist Henry Stanton wrote to his wife after the fall of Fort Sumter. "The Doom of Slavery is at hand." In

1861, this prediction seemed wildly premature. In his inaugural that year, Lincoln had stated bluntly, "I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the states where it exists." Yet in two years, the North's priorities shifted. A mix of necessity and conviction

thrust emancipation to the forefront of northern war goals.

The rise of emancipation as a war goal reflected the changing character of the war. As the struggle dragged on, demands intensified in the North for the prosecution of "total war"—a war that would shatter the social and economic foundations of the Confederacy. Even northerners who saw no moral value in abolishing slavery started to recognize the military value of emancipation as a tactic to cripple the South.

### From Confiscation to Emancipation

Union policy on emancipation developed in stages. As soon as northern troops began to invade the South, questions arose about the disposition of

captured rebel property, including slaves. Slaves who fled behind the Union lines were sometimes considered "contraband"—enemy property liable to seizure—and were put to work for the Union army. Some commanders viewed this practice as a useful tool of war; others did not, and the Lincoln administration was evasive. To establish an official policy, Congress in August 1861 passed the first Confiscation Act, which authorized the seizure of all property used in military aid of the rebellion, including slaves. Under this act, slaves who had been employed directly by the Confederate armed forces and who later fled to freedom became "captives of war." But nothing in the act actually freed these individuals, nor did the law apply to fugitive slaves who had not worked for the Confederate military.

Several factors underlay the Union's cautious approach to the confiscation of rebel property. Officially maintaining that the South could not legally secede, Lincoln argued that southerners were still entitled to the Constitution's protection of property. The president also had practical reasons to walk softly. He did not want to alienate slaveholders in the border states or proslavery Democrats in the North. If the Union tampered with slavery, these Democrats feared, southern blacks might come north and compete with white workers. Aware of such fears, Lincoln assured Congress in December 1861 that the war would not become a "remorseless revolutionary struggle."

From the start of the war, however, Radical Republicans pushed Lincoln to adopt a policy of emancipation. Radicals agreed with black abolitionist Frederick Douglass that "to fight against slaveholders without fighting against slavery, is but a half-hearted business." Each Union defeat, moreover, reminded northerners that the Confederacy, with a slave labor force in place, could commit a higher proportion of its white men to battle. The idea of emancipation as a military measure thus gained increasing favor in the North, and in July 1862 Congress passed the second Confiscation Act. This law authorized the seizure of the property of all persons in rebellion and stipulated that slaves who came within Union lines "shall be forever free." The law also authorized the president to employ blacks as soldiers.

Nevertheless, Lincoln continued to stall, even as pressure for emancipation rose. "My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or destroy slavery," Lincoln told anti-slavery journalist Horace Greeley. "If I could save the Union with out freeing *any* slave, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing *all* the slaves, I would do it; and if I could do it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that." Yet Lincoln had always loathed slavery, and by the spring of 1862, he

"I hear old John Brown knocking on the lid of his coffin and shouting 'Let me out! Let me out!'"

had accepted the Radical position that the war must lead to its abolition. He hesitated principally because he did not want to be stamped by Congress into a measure that might disrupt northern unity; he was also reluctant to press the issue while Union armies reeled in defeat. After failing to persuade the Union slave states to emancipate slaves in return for federal compensation, Lincoln drafted a proclamation of emancipation, circulated it within his cabinet, and waited for a right moment to announce it. Finally, after the Union victory in September 1862 at Antietam, Lincoln issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, which declared all slaves under rebel control free as of January 1, 1863. Announcing the plan in advance softened the surprise, tested public opinion, and gave the states still in rebellion an opportunity to preserve slavery by returning to the Union—an opportunity that none, however, took. The final Emancipation Proclamation, issued on January 1, 1863, declared “forever free” all slaves in areas in rebellion.

The proclamation had limited practical impact. Applying only to rebellious areas where the Union had no authority, it exempted the Union slave states and those parts of the Confederacy then under Union control (Tennessee, West Virginia, southern Louisiana, and sections of Virginia). Moreover, it mainly restated what the second Confiscation Act had already stipulated: if rebels’ slaves fell into Union hands, those slaves would be free. Yet the proclamation was a brilliant political stroke. By issuing it as a military measure in his role as commander-in-chief, Lincoln pacified northern conservatives. Its aim, he stressed, was to injure the Confederacy, threaten its property, heighten its dread, sap its morale, and hasten its demise. By issuing the proclamation himself, Lincoln stole the initiative from the Radicals in Congress and mobilized support for the Union among European liberals far more dramatically than could any act of Congress. Furthermore, the proclamation pushed the border states toward emancipation: by the end of the war, Maryland and Missouri would abolish slavery. Finally, it increased slaves’ incentives to escape as northern troops approached. Fulfilling the worst of Confederate fears, it enabled blacks to join the Union army.

The Emancipation Proclamation did not end slavery everywhere or free “all the slaves.” But it changed the war. From 1863 on, the war for the Union would also be a war against slavery.

## Crossing Union Lines

The attacks and counterattacks of opposing armies turned many slaves into pawns of war. Some slaves became free when Union soldiers overran

their areas. Others fled their plantations as federal troops approached to take refuge behind Union lines. A few were freed by northern assaults, only to be re-enslaved by Confederate counterthrusts. One North Carolina slave celebrated liberation on twelve occasions, as often as Union soldiers marched through his locale. By 1865, about half a million slaves were in Union hands.

In the first year of the war, when the Union had not yet established a policy toward “contrabands” (fugitive slaves), masters could retrieve them from the Union army. After 1862, however, slaves who crossed Union lines were considered free. Many freedmen served in army camps as cooks, teamsters, and laborers. Some worked for pay on abandoned plantations or were leased out to planters who swore allegiance to the Union. In camps or outside them, freedmen had cause to question the value of liberation. Deductions for clothing, rations, and medicine ate up most of their earnings. Labor contracts often tied them to their employers for long periods. Moreover, freedmen encountered fierce prejudice among Yankee soldiers, many of whom feared that emancipation would propel postwar blacks north. The best solution to the “question of what to do with the darkies,” wrote one northern soldier, “would be to shoot them.”

But this was not the whole story. Fugitive slaves who aided the Union army as spies and scouts helped to break down ingrained bigotry. “The sooner we get rid of our foolish prejudice the better for us,” a Massachusetts soldier wrote. Before the war’s end, northern missionary groups and freedmen’s aid societies sent agents south to work among freed slaves, distribute relief, and organize schools. In March 1865, just before hostilities ceased, Congress created the **Freedmen’s Bureau**, an agency responsible for the relief, education, and employment of former slaves. The Freedmen’s Bureau law also stipulated that forty acres of abandoned or confiscated land could be leased to each freedman or southern Unionist, with an option to buy after three years. This was the first and only time that Congress provided for the redistribution of confiscated Confederate property.

## Black Soldiers in the Union Army

In the war’s first year, the Union had rejected African-American soldiers. After the second Confiscation Act, Union generals formed black regiments in occupied New Orleans and on the Sea Islands off the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia. Only after the Emancipation Proclamation did large-scale enlistment begin. Prominent African-Americans such as Frederick Douglass worked as recruiting agents in



**FORDING THE RAPPAHANNOCK RIVER** When federal troops came within reach, those slaves who could do so liberated themselves by fleeing behind Union lines. These Virginia fugitives, lugging all their possessions, move toward freedom in the summer of 1862, after the Second Battle of Bull Run. (*Library of Congress*)

northern cities. Douglass linked black military service to black claims as citizens. “Once let the black man get . . . an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket, and there is no power on earth which can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship.” Union drafts now included blacks, and freedmen in refugee camps throughout the occupied South enlisted. By the war’s end, 186,000 African-Americans had served in the Union army, one-tenth of all Union soldiers. Fully half came from the Confederate states (see *Going to the Source*).

White Union soldiers often objected to black recruits on racial grounds. But some, including Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a liberal minister and former John Brown supporter who led a black regiment, welcomed black soldiers. “Nobody knows anything about these men who has not seen them in battle,” Higginson exulted after a successful raid in Florida in 1863. “There is a fierce energy about them beyond anything of which I have ever read, except it be the French Zouaves [French troops in North Africa].” Even Union soldiers who held blacks

in contempt came to approve of “anything that will kill a rebel.” All blacks served in separate regiments under white officers. Colonel Robert Gould Shaw of the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Infantry, an elite black regiment, died in combat—as did half his troops—in an attack on Fort Wagner in Charleston harbor in July 1863.

Black soldiers suffered a far higher mortality rate than white troops. Typically assigned to labor detachments or garrison duty, blacks were less likely than whites to be killed in action but more likely to die of illness in bacteria-ridden garrisons. The Confederacy refused to treat captured black soldiers as prisoners of war, a policy that prevented their exchange for Southern prisoners. Instead, Jefferson Davis ordered all blacks taken in battle to be sent back to the states from which they came, to be re-enslaved or executed. In a notorious incident, when Confederate troops under General Nathan Bedford Forrest captured Fort Pillow, Tennessee, in 1864, they massacred many black soldiers who had surrendered—an act that provoked outcries but no retaliation from the North.

Well into the war, African-American soldiers faced inequities in pay. White soldiers earned \$13 a month plus a \$3.50 clothing allowance; black privates received only \$10 a month, with clothing deducted. “We have come out like men and we expected to be treated as men but we have bin

“Nobody knows anything about [black soldiers] who has not seen them in battle. There is a fierce energy about them beyond anything of which I have ever read.”

## A Union Commander Praises Black Troops

Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823–1911) of Massachusetts—liberal minister, abolitionist, supporter of John Brown, and mentor of poet Emily Dickinson—accepted an offer in 1862 to command the First South Carolina Volunteers, the Union’s first African-American regiment. Higginson led his troops, all former

slaves, on skirmishes in Georgia and Florida; the regiment also took part in a larger Union attack in South Carolina. Looking back on his war experience, Higginson praised the admirable traits of his troops. He also stressed the strategic significance of African-American soldiers (and their commanders).

I often asked myself why it was that, with this capacity of daring and endurance, they had not kept the land in a perpetual flame of insurrection; why, especially since the opening of the war, they had kept so still. The answer was to be found in the peculiar temperament of the [race], in their religious faith, and in the habit of patience that centuries had fortified. . . .

It always seemed to me that, had I been a slave, my life would have been one long scheme of insurrection. But I learned to respect the patient self-control of those who had waited till the course of events should open a better way. When it came, they accepted it. Insurrection on their part would at once have divided the Northern sentiment; and a large part of our army would have joined with the Southern army to hunt them down. By their waiting till we needed them, their freedom was secured.

Two things chiefly surprised me in their feeling toward their former masters—the absence of affection and the absence of revenge. . . . I never heard one speak of the masters except as natural enemies. Yet they were perfectly discriminating as to individuals; many of them claimed to have kind owners, and some expressed gratitude toward them for particular favors received. It was not the individuals, but the ownership, of which they complained. That they saw to be a wrong which no special kindnesses could right. On this, as on all points connected with slavery, they understood the matter as clearly

as [William Lloyd] Garrison or [Wendell] Phillips. . . . After all, personal experience is the best logician. . . .

No doubt there were reasons why this particular war was an especially favorable test of the [black] soldiers. They had more to fight for than the whites. Besides the flag and the Union, they had home and wife and child. They fought with ropes around their necks, and when orders were issued that the officers of [black] troops should be put to death on capture, they took a grim satisfaction. It helped their *esprit de corps* immensely. . . .

We who served with the black troops have this peculiar satisfaction, that, whatever dignity or sacredness the memories of the war may have to others, they have more to us. . . . [T]he peculiar privilege of associating with an outcast race, of training it to defend its rights. . . . this was our special meed [task]. The vacillating policy of the Government sometimes filled other officers with doubt and shame; until the Negro had justice, they were but defending liberty with one hand and crushing it with the other. From this inconsistency we were free. Whatever the Government did, we at least were working in the right direction. . . . We had touched the pivot of the war. . . . Till the blacks were armed, there was no guarantee of their freedom. It was their demeanor under arms that shamed the nation into recognizing them as men.

**Source:** *Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Army Life in a Black Regiment [1870]* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 192–193, 194–195, 205–206.

### QUESTIONS

1. In what ways did Higginson’s stance as an abolitionist affect his view of his troops?
2. Why (to Higginson) was the role of African American soldiers especially significant (“the pivot of the war”)?



Go to the website at [www.cengage.com/history/boyerending7e](http://www.cengage.com/history/boyerending7e) for additional primary sources on this period.

Treated more Like Dogs than men,” a black soldier complained to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. In June 1864, Congress belatedly equalized the earnings of black and white soldiers.

Although fraught with hardships and inequities, military service became a symbol of citizenship for blacks. It proved that “black men can give blows as well as take them,” Frederick Douglass declared. “Liberty won by white men would lose half its lustre.” Above all, the use of black soldiers, especially former slaves, struck a telling blow against the Confederacy. “They will make good soldiers,” General Grant wrote to Lincoln in 1863, “and taking them from the enemy weakens him in the same proportion they strengthen us.”

## Slavery in Wartime

Anxious white southerners on the home front felt perched on a volcano. “We should be practically helpless should the negroes rise,” declared a Louisiana planter’s daughter, “since there are so few men left at home.” When Mary Boykin Chesnut of South Carolina learned of her cousin’s murder in bed by two trusted house slaves, she became almost frantic. “The murder,” Chesnut wrote, “has clearly driven us all wild.” To control 3 million slaves, white southerners tightened slave patrols, moved entire plantations to relative safety from Union troops in Texas or in upland regions of the coastal South, and spread fear among

slaves. “The whites would tell the colored people not to go to the Yankees, for they would harness them to carts...in place of horses,” reported Susie King Taylor, a black fugitive from Savannah.

Some slaves remained faithful to their owners and helped hide family treasures from marauding Union soldiers. Others wavered between loyalty and hunger for freedom: one slave accompanied his master to war, rescued him when he was wounded, and then escaped on his master’s horse. Given a choice between freedom and bondage, slaves usually chose freedom. Few slaves helped the North as dramatically as Robert Smalls, a hired-out slave boatman who turned over a Confederate steamer to the Union navy, but most who had a chance to flee to Union lines did so. The idea of freedom was irresistible. On learning of his freedom from a Union soldier, a Virginia coachman dressed in his master’s clothes, “put on his best watch and chain, took his

stick, and . . . told him [the master] that he might for the future drive his own coach.”

Most slaves, however, lacked means of escape and remained under their owners’ nominal control. Despite fears of southern whites, no general uprising of slaves occurred; the Confederacy continued to impress thousands of slaves to toil in war plants, army camps, and field hospitals. But even slaves with no chance of flight were alert to the opportunity that war provided and swiftly tested the limits of enforced labor. As a Savannah mistress noted as early as 1861, the slaves “show a very different face from what they have had heretofore.” Moreover, wartime conditions reduced slave productivity. With most white men off at war, the master-slave relationship weakened. White women and boys on plantations complained of their difficulty in controlling slaves, who commonly refused to work, labored inefficiently, or destroyed property. A Texas wife contended that her slaves were “trying all they can, it seems to me, to aggravate me” by neglecting the stock, breaking plows, and tearing down fences. “You may give your Negroes away,” she finally wrote despairingly to her husband in 1864.

Whether southern slaves fled to freedom or merely stopped working, they acted effectively to defy slavery, liberate themselves from its regulations, and undermine the plantation system. Thus southern slavery disintegrated even as the Confederacy fought to preserve it. Hard-pressed by Union armies and short of manpower, the Confederate Congress in 1864 considered the drastic step of impressing slaves into its army as soldiers in exchange for their freedom at the war’s end. Robert E. Lee favored the policy on the grounds that if the Confederacy did not arm its slaves, the Union would. Others were adamantly opposed. “If slaves will make good soldiers,” a Georgia general argued, “our whole theory of slavery is wrong.” Originally against arming slaves, Jefferson Davis changed his mind in 1865. In March 1865, the Confederate Congress narrowly passed a bill to arm three hundred thousand slave soldiers, although it omitted any mention of emancipation. Since the war ended a few weeks later, however, the plan was never put into effect.

Although the Confederacy’s decision to arm the slaves came too late to affect the war, debate over arming them hurt southern morale. By then, the South’s military position had started to deteriorate.

## The Turning Point of 1863

In the summer and fall of 1863, Union fortunes dramatically improved in every theater of war. Yet the year began badly. The Northern slide, which had started with Burnside’s defeat at Fredericksburg, Virginia, in

A Virginia coachman “put on his best watch and chain, took his stick, and . . . told him [the master] that he might for the future drive his own coach.”



**MAP 15.3 THE SEA ISLANDS** The island chain was the site of unique wartime experiments in new social policies.



**SEA ISLAND TEACHERS AND WAGE LABOR** The arrival of the Union navy on the Sea Islands off the coast of Georgia and South Carolina in November 1861 liberated some ten thousand slaves, the first large group of enslaved people freed by the Civil War. The site of pioneer ventures in freedmen’s education, black wage labor, and land redistribution, the Sea Islands served as a wartime testing ground for new social policies. Here, teachers and missionaries who worked among ex-slaves gather in front of a stately home in Port Royal (top); the manager of a plantation near Beaufort, South Carolina, also on the island of Port Royal, shares the terms of a labor contract with former slaves, now free laborers, in 1863 (bottom). (*Western Reserve Historical Society and South Carolina Historical Society*)

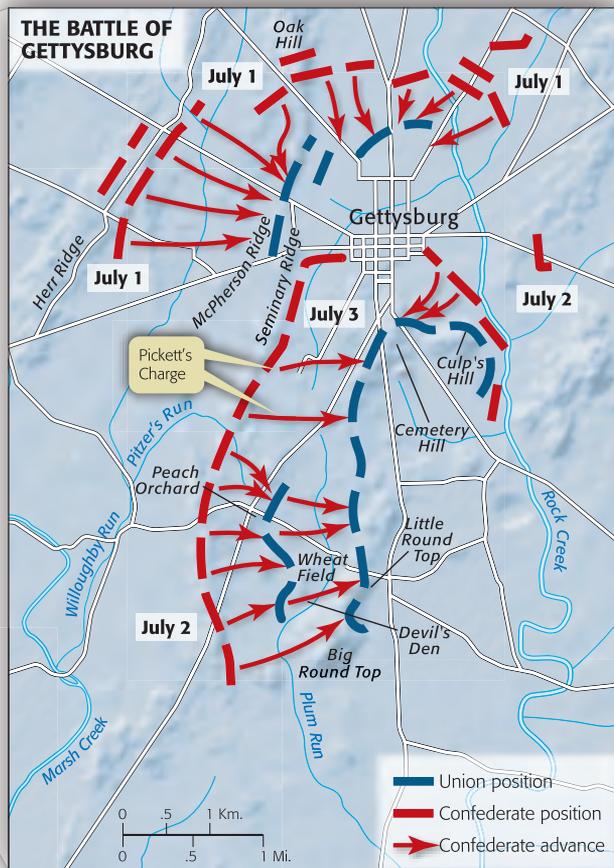


December 1862, persisted into the spring of 1863. Burnside’s successor, General Joseph “Fighting Joe” Hooker, a windbag fond of issuing pompous proclamations to his troops, suffered a crushing defeat in May 1863 at Chancellorsville, Virginia, where he was routed by Lee and Stonewall Jackson. Chancellorsville proved costly for the South—Confederate sentries accidentally killed Stonewall Jackson—but it humiliated the North; Hooker had twice as many men as Lee. Reports from the West brought no better news. Repulsed at Shiloh in western Tennessee, the Confederates still had a powerful army in central Tennessee under General Braxton Bragg. Furthermore, despite repeated efforts, Grant was unable to take Vicksburg; the two-hundred-mile stretch of the Mississippi between Vicksburg and Port Hudson remained in rebel hands.

Union fortunes rose after Chancellorsville when Lee decided to invade the North. Lee needed supplies that war-racked Virginia could no longer provide; he also hoped to draw Northern troops from

besieged Vicksburg to the eastern theater. Lee envisioned a major Confederate victory on northern soil that would increase the sway of pro-peace Democrats and gain European recognition of the Confederacy. Moving his seventy-five thousand men down the Shenandoah Valley, Lee pressed forward into southern Pennsylvania. Lincoln, rejecting Hooker’s plan to attack an unprotected Richmond, replaced Hooker with the more reliable George G. Meade.

Early in July 1863, Lee’s offensive ground to a halt at a Pennsylvania road junction, Gettysburg (see Map 15.4). Confederates foraging for shoes in the town stumbled into some Union cavalry. Soon both sides called for reinforcements, and the war’s greatest battle, the **Battle of Gettysburg**, began. On July 1, Meade’s troops installed themselves in hills south of town along a line that resembled a fishhook: the shank ran along Cemetery Ridge and a northern hook encircled Culp’s Hill. By the end of the first day, Meade’s army outnumbered the Confederates ninety thousand to seventy-five



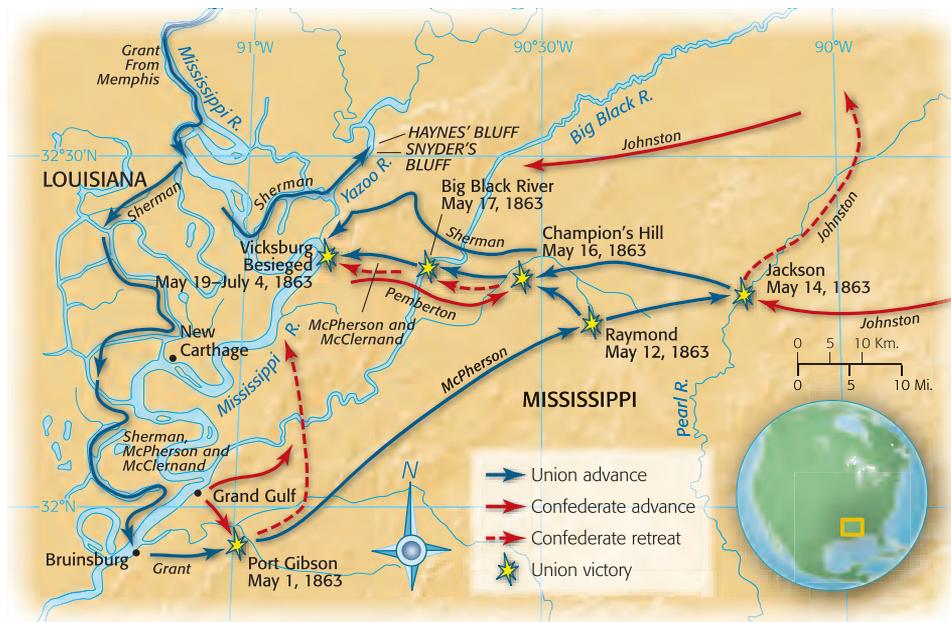
**MAP 15.4 GETTYSBURG, 1863** The failure of Pickett's charge against the Union center on July 3 was the decisive action in the war's greatest battle.

thousand. On July 2, Lee rejected advice to plant his army in a defensive stance between Meade's forces and Washington and instead attacked the Union flanks, with some success. But because Confederate assaults were uncoordinated, and some southern generals disregarded orders and struck where they chose, the Union moved in reinforcements and regained its earlier losses.

By the afternoon of July 3, believing that the Union flanks had been weakened, Lee attacked Cemetery Ridge in the center of the North's defensive line. After southern cannon shelled the line, a massive infantry force of fifteen thousand Confederates, Pickett's charge, moved in. But as Confederate cannon sank into the ground and fired too high, Union fire wiped out the rebel charge; rifled weapons proved their deadly effectiveness. At day's end, Confederate bodies littered the field. More than half of Pickett's troops were dead, wounded, or captured. When Lee withdrew to Virginia on July 4, he had lost seventeen generals and over one-third of his army. Total

Union and Confederate casualties numbered almost fifty thousand. Although Meade failed to pursue and destroy the retreating rebels, he had halted Lee's foray into the North; the Union rejoiced.

Almost simultaneously, the North won a strategic victory in the West, at the **Battle of Vicksburg**; here, Grant finally pierced Vicksburg's defenses (see Map 15.5). Situated on a bluff on the east bank of the Mississippi, Vicksburg was protected on the west by the river and on the north by hills, forests, and swamps. It could be attacked only over a thin strip of dry land to its east and south. Positioned to the north of Vicksburg, Grant moved his troops far to the west of the city and down to a point on the river south of Vicksburg. Meanwhile, Union gunboats and supply ships ran past the Confederate batteries overlooking the river at Vicksburg (sustaining considerable damage) to transport Grant's army across to the east bank. Grant then swung in a large semicircle, first northeastward to capture Jackson, the capital of Mississippi, and then



**MAP 15.5 THE WAR IN THE WEST, 1863: VICKSBURG** Grant first moved his army west of Vicksburg to a point on the Mississippi south of the town. Then he marched northeast, taking Jackson, and finally west to Vicksburg.

westward back to Vicksburg. After a six-week siege, in which famished soldiers and civilians in Vicksburg survived by eating mules and even rats, General John C. Pemberton surrendered his thirty-thousand-man garrison to Grant on July 4, the day after Pickett's charge at Gettysburg. Port Hudson, the last Confederate holdout on the Mississippi, soon surrendered to another Union army. "The Father of Waters flows unvexed to the sea," Lincoln declared.

A second crucial Union victory in the West soon followed. General William S. Rosecrans fought and maneuvered Braxton Bragg's Confederate army out of central Tennessee and into Chattanooga, in the southeastern tip of the state. Forced to evacuate Chattanooga, Bragg defeated the pursuing Rosecrans at the bloody Battle of Chickamauga (September 19–20, 1863) and drove him back into Chattanooga. The arrival of Grant and reinforcements from the Army of the Potomac broke Bragg's siege of Chattanooga in November. With Chattanooga secure, the way lay open for a Union strike into Georgia.

Union successes in the second half of 1863 stiffened Northern will to keep fighting and plunged some rebel leaders into despair. Hearing of Vicksburg's fall, Confederate ordnance chief Josiah Gorgas lamented, "Yesterday we rode the pinnacle of success—today absolute ruin seems our portion. The Confederacy totters to its destruction."

Totter it might, but the South was far from beaten. Although the outcome at Gettysburg quashed

southerners' hopes for victory on northern soil, Lee could still defend Virginia. The loss of Vicksburg and the Mississippi cut the Confederacy in half but the rebel states west of the river—Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas— could still provide soldiers. Even with the loss of Chattanooga, the Confederacy retained most of the Carolinas, Georgia, Florida, and Mississippi. Few thought the fate of the Confederacy had been sealed.

## War and Society, North and South

Extending beyond battlefields, the Civil War engulfed two economies and societies. By 1863, stark contrasts emerged: superior resources enabled the Union to meet wartime demand as the imperiled Confederacy could not. But both regions experienced labor shortages and inflation; both confronted problems of disunity and dissent. In both societies, war impinged on everyday life. Families were disrupted and dislocated, especially in the South. Women on both sides assumed new roles at home, in the workplace, and in relief efforts.

### The War's Economic Impact: The North

War affected the Union's economy unevenly. Some industries fared poorly: deprived of raw

cotton, the cotton-textile industry went into a tailspin. But industries directly linked to the war effort, such as the manufacture of arms, shoes, and clothing, profited from huge government contracts; the Union army needed a million uniforms a year. Railroads flourished. Some privately owned lines, which had overbuilt before the war, doubled their volume of traffic. In 1862, the federal government itself went into the railroad business; it established the United States Military Railroads (USMRR) to carry troops and supplies to the front. By 1865, the USMRR was the world's largest railroad.

Republicans in Congress, now a big majority, actively promoted business growth. Overriding Democratic foes, they hiked the tariff in 1862 and again in 1864 to protect domestic industries. The Republican-sponsored Pacific Railroad Act of 1862 provided for the development of a transcontinental railroad, an idea that had foundered before the war on feuds over which route such a railroad should follow. With the South out of the picture and unable to demand a southern route, Congress chose a northern route from Omaha to San Francisco. Chartering the Union Pacific and Central Railroad corporations, Congress gave each large land grants and generous loans: more than 60 million acres and \$20 million. Issuance of greenbacks and the creation of national banking rules brought a measure of uniformity to the nation's financial system.

Republicans designed these measures to benefit all social classes, and partially succeeded. The **Homestead Act**, passed in 1862, embodied the party's ideal of "free soil, free labor, free men." It granted 160 acres of public land to settlers after five years of residence on the land. By 1865, twenty thousand homesteaders occupied new land in the West under the Homestead Act. Republicans also sponsored the **Morrill Land Grant Act** of 1862, which gave the states proceeds of public lands to fund the start of universities that offered "such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and mechanic arts." The law spurred the growth of large state universities, mainly in the Midwest and West, including Michigan State, Iowa State, and Purdue, among many others.

In general, however, the war benefited wealthy citizens more than others. Corrupt contractors grew rich by selling the government substandard merchandise such as the notorious "shoddy" clothing made from compressed rags, which quickly disintegrated. Speculators made millions in the gold market. Because the price of gold in relation to greenbacks rose whenever public confidence in the government fell, gold speculators

gained from Union defeats. Businessmen with access to scarce commodities also reaped astounding profits. Manpower shortages stimulated wartime demand for the mechanical reaper that Cyrus McCormick had patented in 1834. Paid for reapers in greenbacks, which he distrusted, McCormick at once reinvested them in pig iron and watched in glee as wartime demand almost doubled its price.

Ordinary Americans suffered. Higher protective tariffs, wartime excise taxes, and inflation bloated the prices of finished goods, while wages lagged 20 percent or more behind cost increases. Lagging wages became severe as boys and women replaced army-bound men in government offices and factories. For women employees, entry into government jobs—even at half the pay of male clerks—represented a major advance. But employers' access to low-paid labor undercut the bargaining power of men who remained in the work force.

Many workers decried low wages, and some, such as cigar makers and locomotive engineers, formed national unions, a process that would accelerate after the war. Employers denounced worker complaints as unpatriotic hindrances to the war effort, and in 1864, the government diverted troops from combat to put down protests in war industries from New York to the Midwest.

## The War's Economic Impact: The South

The war shattered the South's economy. Indeed, if both regions are considered together, the war retarded *American* economic growth. For example, American commodity output, which had registered huge increases of 51 percent and 62 percent in the 1840s and 1850s respectively, rose only 22 percent in the 1860s. This modest gain depended wholly on the North, for in the 1860s commodity output in the South actually *declined* 39 percent.

Multiple factors offset the South's substantial wartime industrial growth. War wrecked the South's railroads; invading Union troops tore up tracks, twisted rails, and burned railroad cars. Cotton production, once the foundation of southern prosperity, sank from more than 4 million bales in 1861 to three hundred thousand bales in 1865; Union invasions took their toll on production, particularly in Tennessee and Louisiana.

Union invaders also occupied the South's food-growing regions, and in areas under Confederate control, the manpower drain cut yields per acre of crops like wheat and corn; scarcities abounded. Agricultural shortages compounded severe inflation.



**SIX NORTH CAROLINA WOMEN** The departure of most men of military age to serve in the Confederate army reshaped southern households and the experience of family members. The faces of these young North Carolina women, in a portrait entitled “Confederate Belles,” reflect hardship, resolution, and no doubt changed expectations. (*Museum of the Confederacy*)

By 1863, salt selling for \$1.25 a sack in New York City cost \$60 in the Confederacy. Food riots erupted in 1863 in Mobile, Atlanta, and Richmond; in Richmond ironworkers’ wives paraded to demand lower food prices.

Part of the blame for Southern food shortages rested with planters. Despite government pleas to grow more food, many planters continued to raise cotton, with far-reaching consequences. To feed hungry armies, the Confederacy had to impress food from civilians, a policy that evoked resentment and spurred military desertions. Food-impressment agents usually concentrated on the easiest targets—farms run by the wives of active soldiers. “I don’t want you to stop fighting them Yankees,” wrote the wife of an Alabama soldier, “but try and get off and come home and fix us all up some and then you can go back.” By the end of 1864, half of the Confederacy’s soldiers were absent from their units.

The manpower drain that hampered food production reshaped the lives of southern white women. With three out of four white men in the military

over the course of the war, Confederate women found their locales transformed. “There is a vacant chair in every house,” mourned a Kentucky Confederate girl. Left in charge of farms and plantations, women faced new challenges and chronic shortages. As manufactured goods became scarce, southern homemakers wove cloth and devised replacements for goods no longer attainable, including inks, dyes, coffee, shoes, and wax candles. The war’s proximity made many Confederate women into refugees. Property destruction or even the threat of Union invasions drove families away from their homes; those with slave property to preserve, in particular, sought to flee before Union forces arrived. Areas remote from military action, especially Texas, were favored destinations. Disorienting and disheartening, the refugee experience sapped morale. “I will never feel like

“I don’t want you to stop fighting them Yankees, but try and get off and come home and fix us all up some and then you can go back.”

myself again,” a Georgia woman who had escaped from the path of Union troops wrote to her husband in 1864.

In one respect, the persistence of cotton growing helped the South: cotton became the basis for the Confederacy’s flourishing trade with the enemy. The U.S. Congress virtually legalized this trade in July 1861 by allowing northern commerce with southerners loyal to the Union. In practice, of

course, it proved impossible to tell loyalists from rebels; northern traders happily swapped bacon, salt, blankets, and other products for southern cotton. By 1864, traffic through the lines provided enough food for Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia. A northern congressman lamented that the Union’s policy was “to feed an army and fight it at the same time.”

Trading with the enemy alleviated Southern food shortages but damaged morale. The

prospect of traffic with Yankees gave planters an incentive to keep growing cotton, and fattened middlemen. “Oh! the extortioners,” complained a Confederate war office clerk in Richmond. “Our patriotism is mainly in the army and among the ladies of the South. The avarice and cupidity of men at home could only be exceeded by ravenous wolves.”

Copperheads charged that administration war policy would “exterminate the South,” make reconciliation impossible, and spark “terrible social change and revolution.”

## Dealing with Dissent

Both wartime governments faced mounting dissent and disloyalty. Among Confederates, dissent took two basic forms. First, a vocal group of states’ rights activists, notably Vice President Alexander Stephens and governors Zebulon Vance of North Carolina and Joseph Brown of Georgia, persistently attacked Jefferson Davis’s government as despotic. Second, pro-Union sentiment flourished among a segment of Confederate common people, particularly those in the Appalachian Mountain region that ran from western North Carolina through Tennessee into northern Georgia and Alabama. Nonslaveholding small farmers who predominated here saw Confederate rebellion as a slave owners’ conspiracy. Resentful of such measures as the 20-Negro exemption from conscription, they voiced reluctance to fight for what a North Carolinian called “an adored trinity,” of cotton, slaves, and “chivalry.” “All they want,” an Alabama farmer complained of the planters, “is to get you pupt up and to fight for their infurnal Negroes and after you do there fighting you may kiss there hine parts for o they care.”

On the whole, the Confederate government responded mildly to popular disaffection. In 1862, the Confederate Congress gave Jefferson Davis the power to suspend the writ of *habeas corpus*, but Davis used his power only sparingly.

Lincoln faced similar challenges in the North, where the Democratic minority opposed both emancipation and wartime growth of centralized power. Although “War Democrats” conceded that war was necessary to preserve the Union, “Peace Democrats” (called “Copperheads” by their opponents, to suggest resemblance to a species of easily concealed poisonous snakes) demanded a truce and a peace conference. They charged that administration war policy would “exterminate the South,” make reconciliation impossible, and spark “terrible social change and revolution.”

Strongest in the border states, the Midwest, and the northeastern cities, the Democrats mobilized support among farmers of southern background in the Ohio Valley and urban workers, especially recent immigrants, who feared job loss to free blacks. In 1863, this volatile brew of antagonisms exploded into antidraft protests in several cities. Most violent were the **New York City Draft Riots** in July. Enraged by the first drawing of names under the Enrollment Act and by a longshoremen’s strike in which blacks had been used as strikebreakers, mobs of Irish working class men and women roamed the streets for four days until suppressed by federal troops. The city’s Irish loathed the idea of being drafted to fight a war on behalf of the slaves who, once free, might migrate north to compete for jobs, and they resented the provision of the draft law that allowed the rich to purchase substitutes. The rioters lynched at least a dozen blacks, injured hundreds more, and burned draft offices, the homes of wealthy Republicans, and the Colored Orphan Asylum.

President Lincoln’s dispatch of federal troops to quash these riots typified his forceful response to dissent. Lincoln imposed martial law with far less hesitancy than Davis. After suspending the writ of *habeas corpus* in Maryland in 1861, he barred it nationwide in 1863 and authorized the arrest of rebels, draft resisters, and those engaged in “any disloyal practice.” The responses of Davis and Lincoln to dissent underscored the differences between the two regions’ wartime political systems. As we have seen, Davis lacked the institutionalization of dissent provided by party conflict and had to tread warily, lest his foes brand him a despot. In contrast, Lincoln and other Republicans used dissent to rally patriotic fervor against the Democrats.

Forceful as he was, Lincoln did not unleash a reign of terror against dissent. In general, the North preserved freedom of the press, speech, and assembly. Of some fifteen thousand civilians arrested

during the war, most were quickly released. A few cases aroused concern. In 1864, a military commission sentenced an Indiana man to be hanged for an alleged plot to free Confederate prisoners. The Supreme Court reversed his conviction two years later; it ruled that civilians could not be tried by military courts when the civil courts were open (*Ex parte Milligan*, 1866). Of more concern were arrests of politicians, notably Clement L. Vallandigham, an Ohio Peace Democrat. Courting arrest, Vallandigham challenged the administration, denounced the suspension of *habeas corpus*, proposed an armistice, and in 1863 was sentenced to jail for the war's duration by a military commission. When Ohio Democrats then nominated him for governor, Lincoln changed the sentence to banishment. Escorted to enemy lines in Tennessee, Vallandigham was left in the hands of bewildered Confederates and eventually fled to Canada. The Supreme Court refused to review his case.

## The Medical War

Wartime patriotism impelled civilians North and South, especially women, to work tirelessly to aid

soldiers. The **United States Sanitary Commission**, formed early in the war by civilians to help the Union's medical bureau, depended on women volunteers. Described by one woman as a "great artery that bears the people's love to the army," the commission raised funds at "sanitary fairs," bought and distributed supplies, ran special kitchens to supplement army rations, tracked down the missing, and inspected army camps. The volunteers' exploits became legendary. One poor widow, Mary Ann "Mother" Bickerdyke, served sick and wounded Union soldiers. When a doctor asked by what authority she demanded supplies, she shot back: "From the Lord God Almighty. Do you have anything that ranks higher than that?"

Women also reached out to the battlefield as nurses. Some thirty-two hundred women nurses served the Union and the Confederacy. Famous for her tireless campaigns on behalf of the insane, Dorothea Dix became head of the Union's nursing corps. Clara Barton, an obscure clerk in the U.S. Patent Office, found ingenious ways to channel medicine to the sick and wounded. Learning of Union movements before Antietam, Barton showed up at the battlefield on the eve of the clash with a



**ORGANIZERS OF THE NEW YORK SANITARY FAIR** These imposing New York women of 1864 ran an exceptionally profitable "Sanitary Fair," under the auspices of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, that raised over one million dollars for soldiers' relief. (*Western Reserve Historical Society*)



## The Camera and the Civil War

In October 1862, crowds gathered at photographer Mathew Brady's New York studio to gaze at war images, especially at gruesome views of corpses on the battlefield. "Mr. Brady has done something to bring home to us the terrible reality and earnestness of war," declared the *New York Times*. "You will see hushed, reverent groups standing around these weird copies of carnage, bending down to look at the dead. . . . These pictures have a terrible distinctness." Entrepreneurs like Brady and his staff of photographers played an innovative role in the Civil War. Just as new technologies reshaped military strategy, so did the camera transform the image of war. Some fifteen hundred wartime photographers, who took tens of thousands of photos in makeshift studios, in army camps, and in the field, brought visions of military life to people at home. The Civil War became the first heavily photographed war in history.

Invented in 1839, the camera had played a small part in the Mexican-American War (1846–1848) and the Crimean War (1854–1855), but the still unsophisticated nature of photography limited its influence. Photographs of the 1840s and 1850s were mainly daguerreotypes, reversed images (mirror images) on silver-coated surfaces of copper plates. The daguerreotype process required between fifteen and thirty minutes of



Two photographers attached to the Army of the Potomac pose in front of their makeshift studio. (US Army Military History Institute)



An etching of Mathew Brady's photographic gallery in New York City. Visitors crowded the staircase in the rear, left, to reach an upstairs gallery where Brady exhibited war photos in the fall of 1862. (Library of Congress)



Northern photographers who traveled south with the Union army were the first to take photos of African-American communities during the Civil War. Photographer Timothy O'Sullivan portrayed these former slaves on a plantation near Beaufort, South Carolina, in January 1863 as they celebrated the first "Emancipation Day," the day that Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. (*Collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum*)

exposure and produced only one image. Most daguerreotypes were stiff-looking portraits made in studios. Cheaper versions of daguerreotypes, ambrotypes (negatives on glass) and tintypes (negatives on iron), remained popular for years to come. In the 1850s, a new era of photography opened, with the development of the wet-plate or collodion process and the printing of photographs on paper. In the wet-plate process, the photographer coated a glass plate, or negative, with a chemical solution; exposed the negative (took the photo); and developed it at once in a darkroom. The new process required a short exposure time—a few seconds outdoors and up to a minute in doors—and lent itself to landscapes as well as portraits. Most important, the wet-plate process enabled photographers to generate multiple prints from a single negative. Professional photographers could now mass-produce prints of photos for a wide audience; the wet-plate process made photography not just a craft but a profitable enterprise.

Using both new methods and older ones, Civil War photographers churned out portraits of individual soldiers, often made in temporary tents in army camps; some were ambrotypes or tintypes, and others were cartes-de-visite, or mass-produced portraits mounted on cards). They produced images of political leaders and battle sites; some were stereographs, or two images, each made from the position of one eye, which, fused together, created a sense of spatial depth. Lugging their heavy equipment with them, including portable dark-boxes for developing images, wartime photographers competed both with one another and with sketch artists who also sought to record the war. Wood engravings derived from photographs appeared alongside lithographs in popular magazines such as *Harpers Weekly* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly*. Finally, the Union army used photography for military purposes. Photographers in the army's employ took photos of maps, battle terrain, bridges, armaments,

and even medical procedures. The Union army's Surgeon General commissioned and collected hundreds of photos to illustrate case studies and surgical techniques.

Several factors limited the scope of Civil War photography. First, most camera work of the war years was northern; the Union blockade of the South, dwindling photographic supplies, and the sinking Confederate economy curbed southern photography. Photos of the South became part of the record mainly as Union forces invaded the Confederacy.

Second, no Civil War photos showed battles in progress; action photos were not yet possible. Instead, photographers rushed to arrive right after battles had ended, perhaps with cannon and smoke in the distance, to photograph casualties before bodies were removed. But limitations aside, the camera now served, in Mathew Brady's words, as "the eye of history." Americans of the Civil War era appreciated the minute detail of photographs and the camera's apparent truthfulness. They responded with emotion to the content of photographs—to the courage of soldiers, to the might of the Union army, and to the deadly toll of war.

Two postwar publications by photographers George N. Barnard and Alexander Gardner, Brady's large collection of glass negatives, a huge military archive, and thousands of soldiers' portraits remain part of the Civil War's photographic legacy. Only in 1888, when inventor George Eastman introduced roll film (made of celluloid, a synthetic plastic) and a simple box camera, the Kodak, did members of the general public, until then primarily viewers of photography, become photographers themselves.

## QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

- How do photographs affect people's perceptions of the past?
- In what ways does the camera change the historical record?

wagonload of supplies. When army surgeons ran out of bandages and started to dress wounds with corn husks, she raced forward with lint and bandages. After the war, in 1881, she would found the American Red Cross.

The Confederacy, too, had legendary nurses. One, Sally Tompkins, was commissioned a captain for her hospital work; another, Belle Boyd, a nurse and spy, once dashed through a field, waving her bonnet, to give Stonewall Jackson information. Danger stalked nurses in hospitals far from the

front. Author Louisa May Alcott, a nurse at the Union Hotel Hospital in Washington, D.C., contracted typhoid. Wherever they worked, nurses witnessed haunting sights. “About the amputating table,” one reported, “lay large piles of human flesh...the stiffened membranes seemed to be clutching oftentimes at our clothing.”

Pioneered by British reformer Florence Nightingale in the 1850s, nursing was a new vocation for women and to critics,

a brazen departure from women’s proper sphere. Male doctors were unsure how to react to women in the wards. Some saw the potential for mischief, but others viewed women nurses as potentially useful. The miasma theory of disease (see Chapter 11) won wide respect among physicians and stimulated valuable sanitary measures. In partial consequence, the ratio of disease to battle deaths was much lower in the Civil War than in the Mexican-American War. Still, for every soldier killed during the Civil War, two died of disease. “These Big Battles is not as Bad as the fever,” a North Carolina soldier wrote. Scientific investigations that would lead to the germ theory of disease were only starting in the 1860s. Arm and leg wounds frequently led to gangrene or tetanus, and typhoid, malaria, diarrhea, and dysentery raged through army camps.

Prison camps posed a special problem. Prisoner exchanges between North and South, at first common, collapsed by midwar, partly because the South refused to exchange black prisoners and partly because the North gradually concluded that exchanges benefited the manpower-short Confederacy more than the Union. As a result, the two sides had far more prisoners than either could handle; prisoners on both sides suffered. Miserable conditions plagued southern camps. Squalor and insufficient rations turned the Confederate prison camp at Andersonville, Georgia, into a virtual death camp; three thousand prisoners

a month (out of a total of thirty-two thousand) were dying there by August 1864. After the war an outraged northern public secured the execution of Andersonville’s commandant. Deterioration of the southern economy contributed massively to the wretched state of southern prison camps. Union camps, though not much better, had lower fatality rates.

## The War and Women’s Rights

Nurses and Sanitary Commission workers were not the only women to serve society in wartime. North and south, thousands of women took over jobs vacated by men in offices and mills. Home industry revived at all levels of society. In rural areas, where manpower dwindled, women often plowed, planted, and harvested. “Women were in the field everywhere,” an Illinois woman recalled. “No rebuffs could chill their zeal; no reverses repress their ardor.”

Few women worked more effectively for their region’s cause than Philadelphia-born Anna E. Dickinson. After losing her job in the federal mint (for denouncing General George McClellan as a traitor), Dickinson threw herself into hospital volunteer work and public lecturing. Her lecture “Hospital Life,” about soldiers’ suffering, won attention among Republican politicians. In 1863, hard-pressed by the Democrats, they invited Dickinson, then scarcely twenty-one, to campaign for Republicans in New Hampshire and Connecticut. Articulate and poised, Dickinson captivated her listeners. Soon Republican candidates who had dismissed the offer of aid from a woman begged her to campaign for them.

Northern women’s rights advocates hoped that the war would yield equality for women as well as freedom for slaves. Not only should a grateful North reward women for their wartime services, these women reasoned, but it should recognize the link between black rights and women’s rights. In 1863, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony organized the **Woman’s National Loyal League**. The league gathered four hundred thousand signatures on a petition calling for a constitutional amendment to abolish slavery; its founders used the organization to promote woman suffrage as well.

Despite high expectations, the war brought women little closer to economic or political equality. Women in offices and factories continued to earn less than men. Sanitary Commission workers and most wartime nurses, as volunteers, earned nothing. Nor did the war alter the prevailing definition of woman’s sphere. In 1860, that sphere already included charitable and benevolent activities; in

“About the amputating table lay large piles of human flesh...the stiffened membranes seemed to be clutching oftentimes at our clothing.”



**ANDERSONVILLE PRISON** Started in early 1864, the overcrowded Andersonville prison in southwest Georgia provided no shelter for its inmates, who built tentlike structures out of blankets, sticks, or whatever they could find. Exposure, disease, and poor sanitation contributed to a mortality rate almost double that in other Confederate prison camps. The prisoners in this unusual image, made by a Confederate photographer, barely had room to stand. (*Massachusetts Commandery Military Order of the Loyal Legion and the U.S. Army Military History Institute*)

wartime the scope of benevolence grew to embrace care for the wounded. Yet men continued to dominate the medical profession. The keenest disappointment of women's rights advocates lay in their failure to capitalize on rising abolitionist sentiment to secure the vote for women. Northern politicians saw little value in woman suffrage. The *New York Herald*, which supported the Loyal League's attack on slavery, dismissed its call for woman suffrage as "nonsense and tomfoolery." Stanton wrote bitterly, a few years later, "Women's cause is in deep water."

## The Union Victorious, 1864–1865

Despite successes at Gettysburg and Vicksburg in 1863, the Union stood no closer to taking Richmond at the start of 1864 than in 1861; most of the Lower South still remained under Confederate control. Union invasion had taken a toll on the South, but inability to destroy the main Confederate armies

eroded the Union's will to attack. War weariness strengthened Northern Democrats and jeopardized Lincoln's prospects for reelection.

The year 1864 was crucial for the North. While Grant dueled with Lee in the East, a Union army under William T. Sherman attacked from Tennessee and captured Atlanta in early September. Atlanta's fall boosted northern morale and helped to reelect Lincoln. The curtain now rose on the last act of war: after taking Atlanta, Sherman marched across Georgia and on into South Carolina; in Virginia, Grant backed Lee into trenches around Petersburg and Richmond and brought on the Confederacy's collapse.

### The Eastern Theater in 1864

Early in 1864, Lincoln made Grant commander of all Union armies and promoted him to lieutenant general. At first glance, the stony-faced, cigar-puffing

"Women's cause is in deep water."

Grant seemed an unlikely candidate for so exalted a rank, held previously only by George Washington. Grant's only distinguishing characteristics were his ever-present cigars and a penchant for whittling sticks into chips. But Grant's success in the West had made him the Union's most popular general. With his promotion, Grant moved his headquarters to the Army of the Potomac in the East and mapped a strategy for final victory.

Like Lincoln, Grant believed that the Union had to coordinate its attacks on all fronts in order to exploit its numerical advantage and prevent the South from shifting troops between eastern and western theaters. Accordingly, Grant planned a sustained offensive against Lee in the East while sending Sherman to attack in Georgia. Sherman's mission was to break up the Confederate army and "to get into the interior of the enemy's country...inflicting all the damage you can."

The war's pace quickened dramatically. In early May 1864, Grant led 118,000 men against Lee's sixty-four thousand in a forested area near Fredericksburg, Virginia, called the Wilderness. Checked by Lee in a series of bloody engagements (the Battle of the Wilderness, May 5–7), Grant then suffered new reverses at Spotsylvania on May 12 and Cold Harbor on June 3. These engagements were fierce; at Cold Harbor, Grant lost seven thousand men in a single hour. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., a Union lieutenant and later a Supreme Court justice, wrote home how "immense the butcher's bill has been." Instead of recoiling, Grant persisted; he forced Lee to pull back to the trenches guarding Petersburg and Richmond.

Once entrenched, Lee could no longer swing around to the Union rear, cut Yankee supply lines, or as at Chancellorsville, surprise the Union's main force. Lee dispatched General Jubal A. Early on raids down the Shenandoah Valley, which served Confederates as a granary and an indirect way to menace Washington. Grant countered by ordering General Philip Sheridan to march through the valley from the north and "lay it waste." By September 1864, Sheridan controlled the Shenandoah Valley.

While Grant and Lee grappled in the Wilderness, Sherman led ninety-eight thousand men into Georgia. Opposing him with fifty-three thousand Confederate troops (soon reinforced to sixty-five thousand), General Joseph Johnston retreated toward Atlanta. Johnston planned to conserve strength for a final defense of Atlanta while forcing Sherman to extend his supply lines. Dismayed by Johnston's defensive strategy, Jefferson Davis replaced him with the adventurous John B. Hood. Hood, who had lost the use of

an arm at Gettysburg and a leg at Chickamauga, had to be strapped to his saddle; but for all his disabilities, he liked to take risks. In a prewar poker game, he had bet \$2,500 with "nary a pair in his hand." Hood gave Davis what he wanted, a series of attacks on Sherman's army. But Sherman pressed forward against Hood's depleted army. Unable to defend Atlanta's supply lines, Hood evacuated the city, which Sherman took on September 2, 1864.

## The Election of 1864

Atlanta's fall came at a timely moment for Lincoln, who faced a tough reelection campaign. Lincoln had secured the Republican renomination with difficulty. Radical Republicans, who had flayed Lincoln for delay in declaring emancipation a war goal, now spurned his plans to restore the occupied parts of the Confederacy to the Union. The Radicals insisted that only Congress, not the president, could set requirements for readmission of conquered areas; they found Lincoln's standards too lenient and endorsed treasury secretary Salmon P. Chase for the nomination. Democrats, meanwhile, had never forgiven Lincoln for making emancipation a war goal. Peace Democrats now demanded an immediate armistice, followed by negotiations between North and South.

Facing formidable challenges, Lincoln benefited from both his own resourcefulness and his foes' problems. Chase's challenge failed, and by the time of the Republican convention in July, Lincoln's managers held control. To isolate the Peace Democrats and attract prowar Democrats, Republicans formed a temporary organization, the National Union party, and replaced Lincoln's vice president, Hannibal Hamlin, with a prowar southern Unionist, Democratic Senator Andrew Johnson of Tennessee. This tactic helped exploit the widening split among the Democrats, who nominated George B. McClellan, former commander of the Army of the Potomac. But McClellan, saddled with a Copperhead platform, spent much of his campaign distancing himself from his party's peace-without-victory plank.

Despite disarray among Democrats, as late as August 1864, Lincoln seriously doubted his reelection. Leaving little to chance, he arranged for furloughs so that Union soldiers, most of whom supported him, could vote in states lacking absentee ballots. But the timely fall of Atlanta aided him even more; it punctured the northern antiwar movement and saved Lincoln's presidency. With 55 percent of the popular vote and 212 out of 233 electoral votes, Lincoln swept to victory.

**TABLE 15.1 EMANCIPATION OF SLAVES IN THE ATLANTIC WORLD: A SELECTIVE LIST**

HAITI	1794	A series of slave revolts began in St. Domingue in 1791 and 1792, and spread under the leadership of Toussaint L'Ouverture. In 1794, the French Republic abolished slavery in all French colonies. In 1804, St. Domingue became the independent republic of Haiti.
BRITISH WEST INDIES	1834	Parliament in 1833 abolished slavery gradually in all lands under British control, usually with compensation for slave owners. The law affected the entire British Empire, including British colonies in the West Indies such as Barbados and Jamaica. It took effect in 1834.
MARTINIQUE AND GUADELOUPE	1848	Napoleon had restored slavery to these French colonies in 1800; the Second French Republic abolished it in 1848.
UNITED STATES	1865	The Thirteenth Amendment, passed by Congress in January 1865 and ratified in December 1865, freed all slaves in the United States. Prior to that, the second Confiscation Act of 1862 liberated those slaves who came within Union lines, and the Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863, declared free all slaves in areas under Confederate control.
CUBA	1886	In the early 1880s, the Spanish Parliament passed a plan of gradual abolition, which provided an intermediate period of "apprenticeship." In 1886, Spain abolished slavery completely. Cuba remained under Spanish control until the end of the Spanish-American War in 1898.
BRAZIL	1888	Brazil, which had declared its independence from Portugal in 1822, passed a law to effect gradual emancipation in 1871, and in 1888, under the "Golden Law," abolished slavery completely.

The convention that nominated Lincoln had endorsed a constitutional amendment to abolish slavery, which Congress passed early in 1865. The **Thirteenth Amendment** would be ratified by the end of the year (see Table 15.1).

### Sherman's March Through Georgia

Meanwhile, Sherman gave the South a new lesson in total war. After evacuating Atlanta, Hood led his Confederate army north toward Tennessee in the hope of luring Sherman out of Georgia. Refusing to chase Hood around Tennessee, Sherman proposed to abandon his supply lines, march his army across Georgia to Savannah, and live off the countryside. He would break the South's will to fight, terrify its people, and "make war so terrible... that generations would pass before they could appeal again to it."

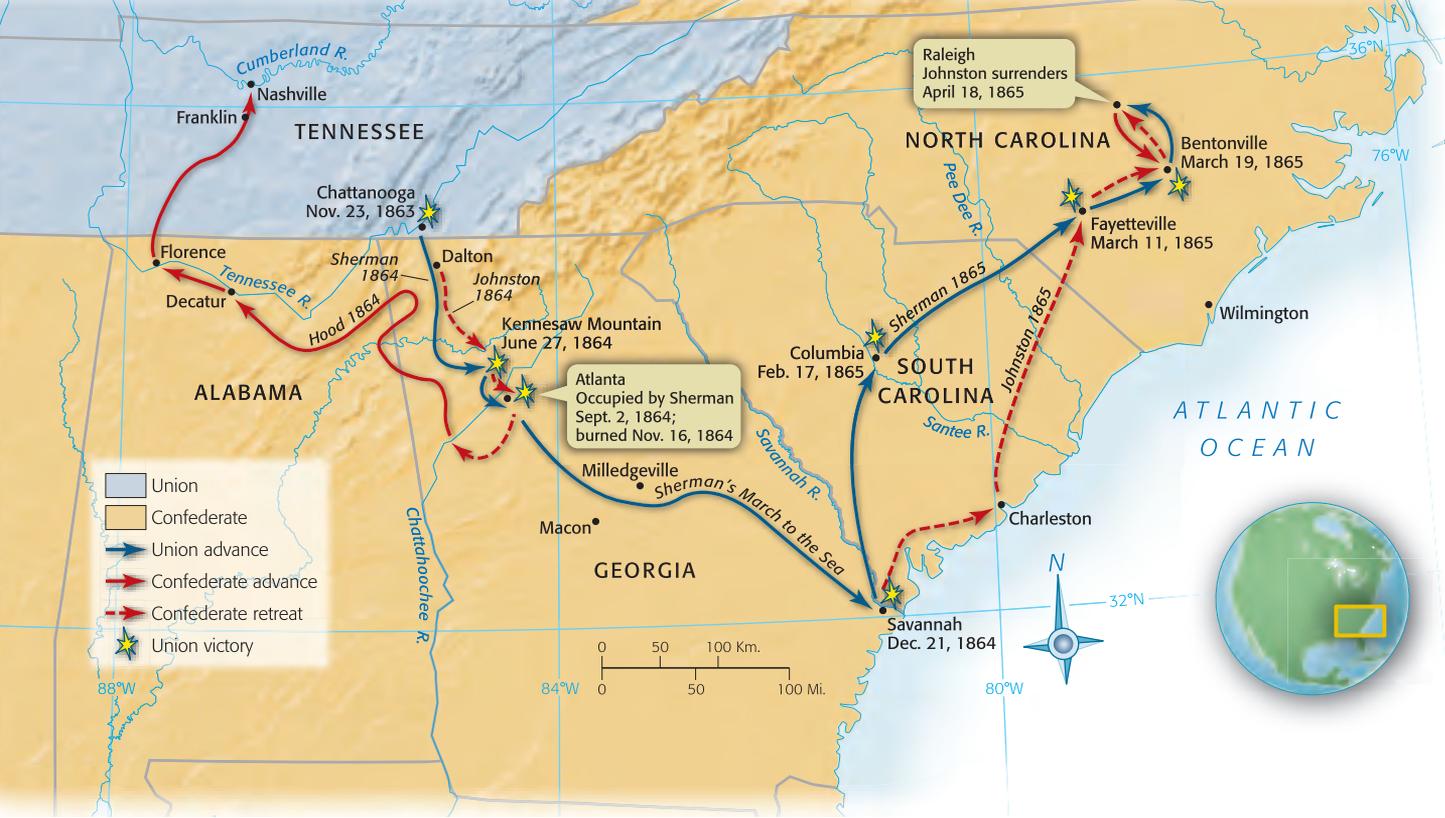
Sherman began by burning much of Atlanta and forcing most of its civilian population to leave. This harsh measure relieved him of the need to feed and garrison the city. Then, sending enough troops north to stop Hood in Tennessee, he led the bulk of his army, sixty-two thousand men, on a 285-mile trek to Savannah (see Map 15.6). Soon thousands of slaves followed the army. "Dar's de

man dat rules the world," a slave cried on seeing Sherman.

Sherman's four columns of infantry, augmented by cavalry screens, moved on a front sixty miles wide and at a pace of ten miles a day. They destroyed everything that could aid southern resistance—arsenals, munitions plants, cotton gins, cotton stores, crops, livestock, and railroads. Ripping up tracks, Union soldiers heated rails in giant fires and twisted them into "Sherman neckties." Although told not to destroy civilian property, foragers ransacked and sometimes demolished homes. Indeed, havoc seemed a vital part of Sherman's strategy. By the time he reached Savannah, he estimated that his army had destroyed about a hundred million dollars' worth of property.

After taking Savannah in December 1864, Sherman's army wheeled north toward South Carolina, the first state to secede and, in Sherman's view, one "that deserves all that seems in store for her." His columns advanced unimpeded to Columbia, South Carolina's capital, where looters, slaves, and soldiers of both sides razed much of the city. Sherman then headed for North Carolina.

Sherman would "make war so terrible... that generations would pass before they could appeal again to it."



**MAP 15.6 SHERMAN'S MARCH THROUGH THE SOUTH, 1864-1865**



**NEW HOPE CHURCH, GEORGIA** General Sherman's campaign through Georgia and South Carolina in 1864 turned parts of the landscape into rubble. This scene of devastation in Georgia, captured by northern photographer George N. Barnard in 1866, suggests the impact of war on the southern environment. (*Library of Congress*)

By spring 1865, his army had left behind over four hundred miles of ruin. Other Union armies moved into Alabama and Georgia and took thousands of prisoners. Northern forces had penetrated the entire Confederacy, except for Texas and Florida, and crushed its wealth. "War is cruelty and you cannot refine it," Sherman wrote. "Those who brought

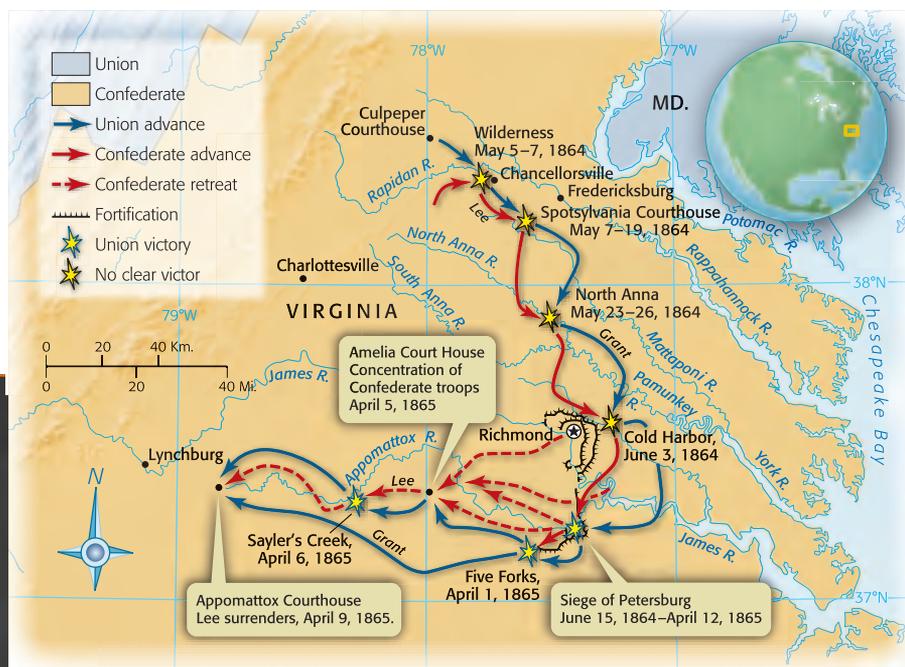
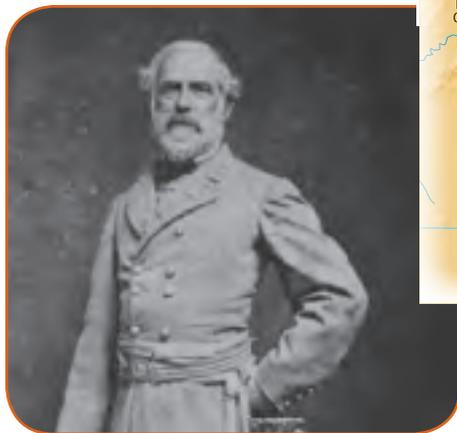
war into our country deserve all the curses and maledictions a people can pour out."

## Toward Appomattox

While Sherman headed north, Grant renewed his assault on the entrenched Army of Northern Virginia. His objective was Petersburg, a railroad hub south of Richmond (see Map 15.7). Although Grant had previously failed to overwhelm Confederate defenses in front of Petersburg, the devastation wrought by Sherman's army crippled Confederate morale: rebel desertions reached epidemic proportions. Late in March 1865 Grant, reinforced by Sheridan, swung his forces around the western flank of Petersburg's defenders. Lee could not stop him. On April 2, Sheridan smashed the rebel flank at the Battle of Five Forks. A courier bore the grim news to Jefferson Davis, attending church in Richmond: "General Lee telegraphs that he can hold his position no longer."

Davis left his pew, gathered his government, and fled the city. In the morning of April 3, Union troops entered Richmond, pulled down the Confederate flag, and ran up the Stars and Stripes over the capitol. Explosions set by retreating Confederates left the city "a sea of flames." Fires damaged the Tredegar Iron Works. Union troops liberated the town jail, which housed slaves awaiting sale, and its rejoicing inmates poured into the streets. On April 4,

**MAP 15.7 THE FINAL VIRGINIA CAMPAIGN, 1864–1865** Refusing to abandon his campaign in the face of enormous casualties, Grant finally pushed Lee (below) into defensive fortifications around Petersburg, whose fall doomed Richmond. When Lee tried to escape to the west, Grant cut him off and forced his surrender. (*Library of Congress*)



Lincoln toured the city and, for a few minutes, sat at Jefferson Davis's desk.

Lee made a last-ditch effort to escape Grant and reach Lynchburg, sixty miles west of Petersburg. He planned to use rail connections there to join General Joseph Johnston's army, which Sherman had pushed into North Carolina. But Grant and Sheridan choked off Lee's escape route, and on April 9 Lee bowed to the inevitable. He asked for terms of surrender and met Grant in a private home in the village of **Appomattox Court House**, Virginia, east of Lynchburg. While stunned troops gathered outside, Lee appeared in full dress uniform, with a sword. Grant entered in his customary disarray, smoking a cigar. The final surrender occurred four days later: Lee's troops laid down their arms between federal ranks. "On our part," wrote a Union officer, "not a sound of trumpet... nor roll of drum; not a cheer... but an awed stillness rather." Grant paroled Lee's twenty-six thousand men and sent them home with their horses and mules "to work their little farms." Remnants of Confederate resistance collapsed within a month. Johnston surrendered to Sherman on April 18, and Davis was captured in Georgia on May 10.

Grant returned to a jubilant Washington, and on April 14 turned down a theater date with the Lincolns. That night at Ford's Theater, an

unemployed pro-Confederate actor, John Wilkes Booth, entered Lincoln's box and shot him in the head. Waving a knife, Booth leaped onstage shouting the Virginia state motto, "*Sic semper tyrannis*" ("Such is always the fate of tyrants") and then fled, despite a broken leg. That same night, a Booth accomplice stabbed Secretary of State Seward, who later recovered; a third conspirator, assigned to Vice President Johnson, failed to attack. Union troops hunted down Booth in Virginia within two weeks and shot him to death. Of eight accused accomplices, four were hanged and the rest imprisoned. On April 15, Lincoln died, and Andrew Johnson became president. Six days later, Lincoln's funeral train departed on a mournful journey from Washington to Springfield, Illinois, with crowds of thousands gathering at stations to weep as it passed.

## The Impact of the War

The Civil War took a larger human toll than any other war in American history. The 620,000 soldiers who lost their lives nearly equaled the number of American soldiers killed in all the nation's earlier and later wars combined (see Figure 15.3). The death count stood at 360,000 Union soldiers and 260,000 Confederates. Most families suffered losses.



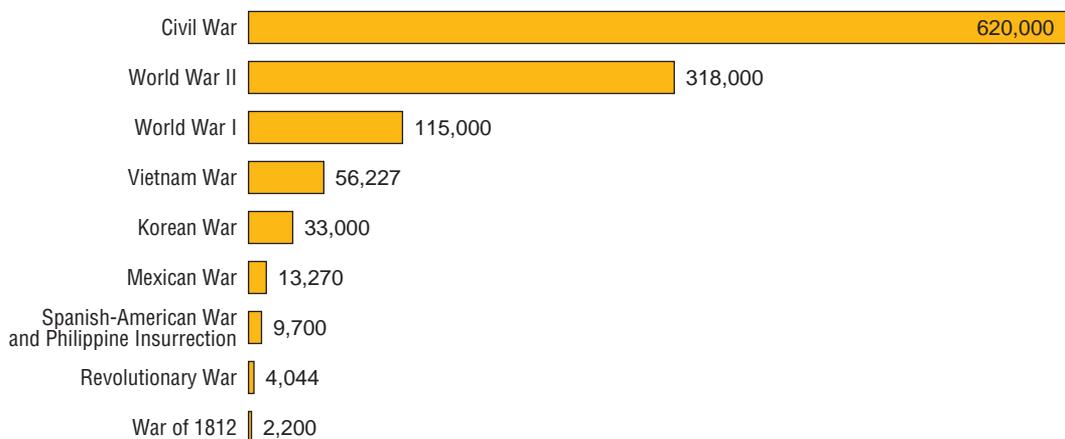
**GRANT IN 1864** Exuding determination and competence, General Ulysses S. Grant posed in front of his tent in 1864. Within a year, Grant's final assault on Petersburg and the Union army's triumphant march into Richmond would bring the war to an end. (*National Archives*)

Vivid reminders of the price of Union remained for many years; armless and legless veterans gathered at regimental reunions; and monuments to the dead arose on village greens. Soldiers' widows collected pensions well into the twentieth century.

The war's costs were staggering, but war did not ruin the national economy, only the southern part of it. Vast Confederate losses, about 60 percent of southern wealth, were offset by northern advances. At the war's end, the North had almost all of the nation's wealth and capacity for production. Spurring economic modernization, the war provided a friendly climate for industrial development and capital investment. No longer the largest slave-owning power in the world, the United States would now become a major industrial nation.

The war had political as well as economic ramifications. It created a "more perfect Union" in place of the prewar federation of states. The doctrine of states' rights did not disappear, but talk of secession stopped; states would never again exercise their antebellum range of powers. The national banking system, created in 1863, gradually supplanted state banks. Greenbacks provided a national currency. The federal government had exercised powers that many in 1860 doubted it possessed. By ending slavery and imposing an income tax, it asserted power over kinds of private property once thought untouchable.

Finally, the Civil War fulfilled abolitionist prophecies as well as Unionist goals. Freeing 3.5 million slaves and expediting efforts by slaves to liberate themselves, the war produced the very sort of radical upheaval in southern society that Lincoln had originally said it would not induce.



**FIGURE 15.3 CIVIL WAR DEATHS COMPARED TO U.S. DEATHS IN OTHER WARS**

# CHRONOLOGY

# 1861–1865

**1861**

President Abraham Lincoln calls for volunteers to suppress the rebellion (April).  
Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina join the Confederacy (April–May).  
Lincoln imposes a naval blockade on the South (April).  
U.S. Sanitary Commission formed (June).  
First Battle of Bull Run (July).  
First Confiscation Act (August).

**1862**

Legal Tender Act (February).  
George B. McClellan's Peninsula Campaign (March–July).  
Battle of Shiloh (April).  
Confederate Congress passes the Conscription Act (April).  
David G. Farragut captures New Orleans (April).  
Homestead Act (May).  
Seven Days' Battles (June–July).  
Pacific Railroad Act (July).  
Morrill Land Grant Act (July).  
Second Confiscation Act (July).  
Battle of Antietam (September).  
Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation (September).  
Battle of Fredericksburg (December).

**1863**

Emancipation Proclamation issued (January).  
Lincoln suspends writ of *habeas corpus* nationwide (January).

**1863 (Cont.)**

National Bank Act (February).  
Congress passes the Enrollment Act (March).  
Battle of Chancellorsville (May).  
Woman's National Loyal League formed (May).  
Battle of Gettysburg (July).  
Surrender of Vicksburg (July).  
New York City draft riots (July).  
Battle of Chickamauga (September).

**1864**

Ulysses S. Grant given command of all Union armies (March).  
Battle of the Wilderness (May).  
Battle of Spotsylvania (May).  
Battle of Cold Harbor (June).  
Surrender of Atlanta (September).  
Lincoln reelected (November).  
William T. Sherman's march to the sea (November–December).

**1865**

Congress passes the Thirteenth Amendment (January).  
Sherman moves through South Carolina (January–March).  
Grant takes Richmond (April).  
Robert E. Lee surrenders at Appomattox (April).  
Lincoln dies (April).  
Joseph Johnston surrenders to Sherman (April).

## CONCLUSION

When war began in April 1861, both sides were unprepared, but each had distinct strengths. The Union held vast advantages of manpower and resources, including most of the nation's industrial strength and two-thirds of its railroads. The North, however, faced a stiff challenge. To achieve its goal of forcing the rebel states back into the Union, it had to conquer large pieces of southern territory, cripple the South's resources, and destroy its armies. The Union's challenge was the Confederacy's asset. To sustain Confederate independence, the South had to fight a defensive war, far less costly in men and materiel. It had to prevent Union conquest of its territory, preserve its armies from annihilation, and hold out long enough to convince the North that further effort would be pointless. Moreover, southerners expected to fight on home ground and

to enjoy an advantage in morale. Thus, though its resources were fewer, the Confederacy's task was less daunting.

The start of war challenged governments, North and South, in similar ways: both sides had to raise armies and funds. Within two years, both Union and Confederacy had drafted troops, imposed taxes, and printed paper money. As war dragged on, both regions faced political and economic problems. Leaders on each side confronted disunity and dissent. Northern Democrats assailed President Lincoln; in the South, states' rights supporters defied the authority of the Confederate government. The North's two-party system and the skills of its political leaders proved to be assets that the Confederacy lacked. Economically, too, the North held an edge. Both regions endured labor shortages and inflation. But the Union with its far greater resources more handily met the demands of war. In the North,

Republicans in Congress enacted innovative laws that enhanced federal might, such as the National Banking Act, Pacific Railroad Act, and Homestead Act. The beleaguered South, in contrast, coped with food shortages and economic dislocation. Loss of southern manpower to the army also took a toll; slavery began to disintegrate as a labor system during the war. By 1864, even the Confederate Congress considered measures to free at least some slaves.

Significantly, war itself pressed the North to bring slavery to an end. To deprive the South of resources, the Union began to seize rebel property, including slaves, in 1861. Step by step, Union policy shifted toward emancipation. The second Confiscation Act in 1862 freed slaves who fled behind Union lines. Finally, seizing the initiative from Radical Republicans, Lincoln announced a crucial policy change. A war measure, the Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863, served many purposes. The edict freed only slaves behind Confederate lines, those beyond the reach of the Union army. But it won foreign support, outflanked the Radicals, and confounded the Confederates. It also empowered Union soldiers to liberate slaves, enabled former slaves to serve in the Union army, and vastly strengthened the Union's hand. "Crippling the institution of slavery," as a Union officer declared, meant "striking a blow at the heart of the rebellion." Most important, the proclamation changed the nature of the war. After January 1, 1863, the war to save the Union was also a war to end slavery. Emancipation took effect mainly at the war's end and became permanent with the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865. The proclamation of 1863 was a pivotal turning point in the war.

Historians have long debated the causes of Union victory. They have weighed many factors,

including the North's imposing strengths, or what Robert E. Lee called its "overwhelming numbers and resources." Recently, two competing interpretations have held sway. One focuses on southern shortcomings. Did the South, in the end, lose the will to win? Did the economic dislocations of war undercut southern morale? Were there defects of Confederate nationalism that could not be overcome? Some historians point to internal weaknesses in the Confederacy as a major cause of Union triumph. Other historians stress the utterly unpredictable nature of the conflict. In their view, the two sides were fairly equally matched, and the war was a cliffhanger; that is, the North might have crushed the South much earlier or, alternatively, not at all. The North won the war, these historians contend, because it won a series of crucial contests on the battlefield, including the battles of Antietam, Vicksburg, Gettysburg, and Atlanta, any one of which could have gone the other way. The factors that determined the military outcome of the war continue to be a source of contention.

The impact of the Civil War is more clear-cut than the precise cause of Union triumph. The war gave a massive boost to the northern economy. It left in its wake a stronger national government, with a national banking system, a national currency, and an enfeebled version of states' rights. It confirmed the triumph of the Republican Party, with its commitment to competition, free labor, and industry. Finally, it left a nation of free people, including the millions of African-Americans who had once been slaves. Emancipation and a new sense of nationalism were the war's major legacies. The nation now turned its attention to the restoration of the conquered South to the Union and to deciding the future of the former slaves.

## KEY TERMS

conscription (p. 429)

Legal Tender Act (p. 430)

National Bank Act (p. 431)

Jefferson Davis (p. 431)

Radical Republicans (p. 431)

Anaconda plan (p. 435)

First Battle of Bull Run (p. 435)

Robert E. Lee (p. 436)

Battle of Antietam (p. 437)

Ulysses S. Grant (p. 437)

William T. Sherman (p. 438)

Battle of Shiloh (p. 438)

"cotton diplomacy" (p. 441)

Emancipation

Proclamation (p. 442)

Freedmen's Bureau (p. 443)

Battle of Gettysburg (p. 447)

Battle of Vicksburg (p. 448)

Homestead Act (p. 450)

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New York City Draft Riots (p. 452)

United States Sanitary

Commission (p. 453)

Woman's National Loyal

League (p. 456)

Thirteenth Amendment (p. 459)

Appomattox Court House (p. 461)

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