CHAPTER 16

The Civil War

1861–1865
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Mother Bickerdyke Connects Northern Communities to Their Boys at War

In May 1861, the Reverend Edward Beecher interrupted his customary Sunday service at Brick Congregational Church in Galesburg, Illinois, to read a disturbing letter to the congregation. Two months earlier, Galesburg had proudly sent 500 of its young men off to join the Union army. They had not yet been in battle. Yet, the letter reported, an alarming number were dying of diseases caused by inadequate food, medical care, and sanitation at the crowded military camp in Cairo, Illinois. Most army doctors were surgeons trained to operate and amputate on the battlefield. They were not prepared to treat soldiers sick with dysentery, pneumonia, typhoid, measles—all serious, frequently fatal diseases that could often be cured with careful nursing. The letter writer, appalled by the squalor and misery he saw around him, complained of abuses by the army. The Union army, however, was overwhelmed with the task of readying recruits for battle, and had made few provisions for their health when they were not in combat.

The shocked and grieving members of Beecher’s congregation quickly decided to send not only supplies, but one of their number to inspect the conditions at the Cairo camp and to take action. In spite of warnings that army regulations excluded women from encampments, the congregation voted to send their most qualified member, Mary Ann Bickerdyke, a middle-aged widow who made her living as a “botanic physician.” This simple gesture of community concern launched the remarkable Civil War career of “the Cyclone in Calico,” who defied medical officers and generals alike in her unceasing efforts on behalf of ill, wounded, and convalescent Union soldiers.

“Mother” Bickerdyke, as she was called, let nothing stand in the way of helping her “boys.” When she arrived in Cairo, she immediately set to work cleaning the hospital tents and the soldiers themselves, and finding and cooking nourishing food for them. The hospital director, who resented her interference, ordered her to leave, but she blandly continued her work. When he reported her to the commanding officer, General Benjamin Prentiss, she quickly convinced the general to let her stay. “I talked sense to him,” she later said.

From a peacetime point of view, what Mother Bickerdyke was doing was not unusual. Every civilian hospital had a matron, who made sure patients were supplied with clean bed linen and bandages and were fed the proper convalescent diet. But in the context of the war—the sheer number of soldiers, the constant need to set up new field hospitals and commandeer scarce food for an army on the move—it was unusual indeed and required an unusual person. A plain-spoken, hardworking woman, totally unfazed by rank or tender masculine egos, Mother Bickerdyke single-mindedly devoted herself to what she called “the Lord’s work.” The ordinary soldiers loved her; wise generals supported her. Once, when an indignant officer’s wife complained about Bickerdyke’s rudeness, General William Tecumseh Sherman joked, “You’ve picked the one person around here who outranks me. If you want to lodge a complaint against her, you’ll have to take it to President Lincoln.”

Other communities all over the North rallied to make up for the Army’s shortcomings with supplies and assistance. By their actions, Mother Bickerdyke and others like her exposed the War Department’s inability to meet the needs of the nation’s first mass army. The efforts of women on the local level—for example, to make clothing for men from their communities who had gone off to the war—quickly took on national dimensions. The Women’s Central Association of Relief (WCAR), whose organizers were mostly reformers in the abolitionist, temperance, and education movements, eventually had 7,000 chapters throughout the North. Its volunteers raised funds, made and collected food, clothes, medicine, bandages, and more than 250,000 quilts.
and comforters, and sent them to army camps and hospitals. All told, association chapters supplied an estimated $15 million worth of goods to the Union troops.

In June 1861, responding to requests by officials of the WCAR for formal recognition of the organization, President Abraham Lincoln created the United States Sanitary Commission and gave it the power to investigate and advise the Medical Bureau. The commission’s more than 500 “sanitary inspectors” (usually men) instructed soldiers in such matters as water supply, placement of latrines, and safe cooking.

Although at first she worked independently and remained suspicious of all organizations (and even of many other relief workers), in 1862, Mother Bickerdyke was persuaded to become an official agent of “the Sanitary,” as it was known. The advantage to her was access to the commission’s warehouses and the ability to order from them precisely what she needed. The advantage to the Sanitary was that Mother Bickerdyke was an unequaled fundraiser. In speaking tours throughout Illinois, she touched her female listeners with moving stories of wounded boys whom she had cared for as if they were her own sons. Her words to men were more forceful. It was a man’s business to fight, she said. If he was too old or ill to fight with a gun, he should fight with his dollars. With the help of Bickerdyke’s blunt appeals, the Sanitary raised $50 million for the Union war effort.

As the Civil War continued, Mother Bickerdyke became a key figure in the medical support for General Ulysses S. Grant’s campaigns along the Mississippi River. She was with the army at Shiloh, and as Grant slowly fought his way to Vicksburg, she set up convalescent hospitals in Memphis. Grant authorized her to commandeer any army wagons she needed to transport supplies. Between fifty and seventy “contrabands” (escaped former slaves) worked on her laundry crew. On the civilian side, the Sanitary Commission authorized her to draw on its supply depots in Memphis, Cairo, Chicago, and elsewhere. In a practical sense a vital “middlewoman” between the home front and the battlefield, she was also, in a symbolic and emotional sense, a stand-in for all mothers who had sent their sons to war.

The Civil War was a national tragedy, ripping apart the political fabric of the country, and causing more casualties than any other war in the nation’s history. The death toll of approximately 620,000 exceeded the number of dead in all the other wars from the Revolution through the Vietnam War. Yet in another sense, it was a community triumph. Local communities directly supported and sustained their soldiers on a massive scale in unprecedented ways. As national unity failed, the strength of local communities, symbolized by Mother Bickerdyke, endured.

**KEY TOPICS**

- The social and political changes created by the unprecedented nature and scale of the Civil War
- The major military campaigns of the war
- The central importance of the end of slavery to the war efforts of North and South

**COMMUNITIES MOBILIZE FOR WAR**

A neutral observer in March 1861 might have seen ominous similarities. Two nations—the United States of America (shorn of seven states in the Deep South) and the Confederate States of America—each blamed the other for the breakup of the Union. Two new presidents—Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis—each faced the challenging task of building and maintaining national unity. Two regions—North and South—scorned each other and boasted of their own superiority. But the most basic similarity was not yet apparent: both sides were unprepared for the ordeal that lay ahead.

**WHAT ADVANTAGES did the North possess at the outset of the Civil War?**

*AP* Guideline 11.1
Fort Sumter: The War Begins

In their inaugural addresses, both Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis prayed for peace, but positioned themselves for war. Careful listeners to both addresses realized that the two men were on a collision course. Jefferson Davis claimed that the Confederacy would be forced to “appeal to arms . . . if . . . the integrity of our territory and jurisdiction [is] assailed.” Lincoln said, “The power confided to me will be used to hold, occupy, and possess the property and places belonging to the government.” One of those places, Fort Sumter, in South Carolina, was claimed by both sides.

Fort Sumter, a major federal military installation, sat on a granite island at the entrance to Charleston harbor. So long as it remained in Union hands, Charleston, the center of secessionist sentiment, would be immobilized. Thus it was hardly surprising that Fort Sumter would provide President Lincoln with his first crisis.

With the fort dangerously low on supplies, Lincoln had to decide whether to abandon it or risk the fight that might ensue if he ordered it resupplied. On April 6, Lincoln took cautious and careful action, notifying the governor of South Carolina that he was sending a relief force to the fort carrying only food and no military supplies. Now the decision rested with Jefferson Davis, who opted for decisive action. On April 10, he ordered General P. G. T. Beauregard to demand the surrender of Fort Sumter and to attack it if the garrison did not comply. On April 12, as Lincoln’s relief force neared Charleston harbor, Beauregard opened fire. Two days later, the defenders surrendered and the Confederate Stars and Bars rose over Fort Sumter. The people of Charleston celebrated wildly. “I did not know,” wrote Mary Boykin Chesnut in her diary, “that one could live such days of excitement.”

The Call to Arms

Even before the attack on Fort Sumter, the Confederate Congress had authorized a volunteer army of 100,000 men to serve for twelve months. There was no difficulty finding volunteers. Men flocked to enlist, and their communities sent them off in ceremonies featuring bands, bonfires, and belligerent oratory. Most of that oratory, like Jefferson Davis’s inaugural address (see Chapter 15), evoked the Revolutionary War and the right of free people to resist tyranny. Exhilarated by their own rapid mobilization, most southerners believed that Unionists were cowards who would not be able to face up to southern bravery. “Just throw three or four shells among those blue-bellied Yankees,” one North Carolinian boasted, “and they’ll scatter like sheep.” The cry of “On to Washington!” was raised throughout the South, and orators confidently predicted that the city would be captured and the war concluded within sixty days. For these early recruits, war was a patriotic adventure.

The “thunderclap of Sumter” startled the North into an angry response. The apathy and uncertainty that had prevailed since Lincoln’s election disappeared, to be replaced by strong feelings of patriotism. On April 15, Lincoln issued a proclamation calling for 75,000 state militiamen to serve in the federal army for ninety days. Enlistment offices were swamped with so many enthusiastic volunteers that many men were sent home. Free African Americans, among the most eager to serve, were turned away: this was not yet a war for or by black people.
Public outpourings of patriotism were common. New Yorker George Templeton Strong recorded one example on April 18: “Went to the [City] Hall. The [Sixth] Massachusetts Regiment, which arrived here last night, was marching down on its way to Washington. Immense crowd; immense cheering. My eyes filled with tears, and I was half choked in sympathy with the contagious excitement. God be praised for the unity of feeling here! It is beyond, very far beyond, anything I hoped for.”

The mobilization in Chester, Pennsylvania, was typical of the northern response to the outbreak of war. A patriotic rally was held at which a company of volunteers (the first of many from the region) calling themselves the “Union Blues” were mustered into the Ninth Regiment of Pennsylvania Volunteers amid cheers and band music. As they marched off to Washington (the gathering place for the Union army), companies of home guards were organized by the men who remained behind. Within a month, the women of Chester had organized a countywide system of war relief that sent a stream of clothing, blankets, bandages, and other supplies to the local troops and provided assistance to their families at home. Such relief organizations, some formally organized, some informal, emerged in every community, North and South, that sent soldiers off to the Civil War. These organizations not only played a vital role in supplying the troops, but maintained the human, local link on which so many soldiers depended. In this sense, every American community accompanied its young men to war.

The Border States

The first secession, between December 20, 1860, and February 1, 1861, had taken seven Deep South states out of the Union. Now, in April, the firing on Fort Sumter and Lincoln’s call for state militias forced the other southern states to take sides. Courted—and pressured—by both North and South, four states of the Upper South (Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina) joined the original seven in April and May 1861. Virginia’s secession tipped the other three toward the Confederacy. The capital of the Confederacy was now moved to Richmond. This meant that the two capitals—Richmond and Washington—were less than 100 miles apart.

Still undecided was the loyalty of the northernmost tier of slave-owning states: Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland, and Delaware. Each controlled vital strategic assets. Missouri not only bordered the Mississippi River, but controlled the routes to the west. Kentucky controlled the Ohio River. The main railroad link with the West ran through Maryland and the hill region of western Virginia (which split from Virginia to become the free state of West Virginia in 1863). Delaware controlled access to Philadelphia. Finally, were Maryland to secede, the nation’s capital would be completely surrounded by Confederate territory.

Delaware was loyal to the Union (less than 2 percent of its population were slaves), but Maryland’s loyalty was divided, as an ugly incident on April 19 showed. When the Sixth Massachusetts Regiment (the one George Templeton Strong had cheered in New York) marched through Baltimore, a hostile crowd of 10,000 southern sympathizers, carrying Confederate flags, pelted the troops with bricks, paving
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stones, and bullets. Finally, in desperation, the troops fired on the crowd, killing twelve people and wounding others. In retaliation, southern sympathizers burned the railroad bridges to the North and destroyed the telegraph line to Washington, cutting off communication between the capital and the rest of the Union for six days.

Lincoln’s response was swift and stern. He stationed Union troops along Maryland’s crucial railroads, declared martial law in Baltimore, and arrested the suspected ringleaders of the pro-Confederate mob and held them without trial. In July, he ordered the detention of thirty-two secessionist legislators and many sympathizers. Thus was Maryland’s loyalty to the Union ensured. The arrests in Maryland were the first of a number of violations of basic civil rights during the war, all of which the president justified on the basis of national security.

As in Maryland, the loyalties of the other border states were also divided. Missouri was plagued by guerrilla battles (reminiscent of the prewar “Bleeding Kansas”) throughout the war. In Kentucky, division took the form of a huge illegal trade with the Confederacy through neighboring Tennessee, to which Lincoln, determined to keep Kentucky in the Union, turned a blind eye. The conflicting loyalties of the border states were often mirrored within families. Kentucky Senator John J. Crittenden had two sons who were major generals, one in the Union army and the other in the Confederate army.

That Delaware, Maryland, Missouri, and Kentucky chose to stay in the Union was a severe blow to the Confederacy. Among them, the four states could have added 45 percent to the white population and military manpower of the Confederacy and 80 percent to its manufacturing capacity. Almost as damaging, the decision of four slave states to stay in the Union punched a huge hole in the Confederate argument that the southern states were forced to secede to protect their right to own slaves.

The Battle of Bull Run

Once sides had been chosen and the initial flush of enthusiasm had passed, the nature of the war, and the mistaken notions about it, soon became clear. The event that shattered the illusions was the First Battle of Bull Run, at Manassas Creek in Virginia in July 1861. Confident of a quick victory, a Union army of 35,000 men marched south, crying “On to Richmond!” So lighthearted and unprepared was the Washington community, that the troops were accompanied not only by journalists, but by a crowd of politicians and sightseers. At first the Union troops held their ground against the 25,000 Confederate troops commanded by General P. G. T. Beauregard (of Fort Sumter fame). But when 2,300 fresh Confederate troops arrived as reinforcements, the untrained northern troops broke ranks in an uncontrolled retreat that swept up the frightened sightseers as well. Soldiers and civilians alike retreated in disarray to Washington. Confederate Mary Boykin Chesnut recorded in her diary, “We might have walked into Washington any day for a week after Manassas, such was the consternation and confusion there.”

Bull Run was sobering—and prophetic. The Civil War was the most lethal military conflict in American history, leaving a legacy of devastation on the battlefield and desolation at home. It claimed the lives of nearly 620,000 soldiers, more than the the First and Second World Wars combined. One out of every four soldiers who fought in the war never returned home.

The Relative Strengths of North and South

Overall, in terms of both population and productive capacity, the Union seemed to have a commanding edge over the Confederacy. The North had two and a half times the South’s population (22 million to 9 million, of whom 3.5 million were slaves) and
enjoyed an even greater advantage in industrial capacity (nine times that of the South). The North produced almost all of the nation’s firearms (97 percent), had 71 percent of its railroad mileage, and produced 94 percent of its cloth and 90 percent of its footwear. The North seemed able to feed, clothe, arm, and transport all the soldiers it chose. The North’s wholehearted commitment to the market revolution, shown in particular in its superior ability to organize its economic advantage, was ultimately to prove decisive: by the end of the war, the Union had managed to field and equip more than 2 million soldiers as compared to the Confederacy’s 800,000. But in the short term, the South had important assets to counter the advantage of the North.

The first was the nature of the struggle. For the South, this was a defensive war, in which the most basic principle of the defense of home and community united almost all white citizens, regardless of their views about slavery. The North would have to invade the South and then control it against guerrilla opposition in order to win. The parallels with the Revolutionary War were unmistakable. Most white southerners were confident that the North, like Great Britain in its attempt to subdue the rebellious colonies, would turn out to be a lumbering giant against whom they could secure their independence.

Second, the military disparity was less extreme than it appeared. Although the North had manpower, its troops were mostly untrained. The professional federal army numbered only 16,000, and most of its experience had been gained in small Indian wars. Moreover, the South, because of its tradition of honor and belligerence (see Chapter 10), appeared to have an advantage in military leadership. More than a quarter of all the regular army officers chose to side with the South. The most notable was Robert E. Lee. Offered command of the Union army by President Lincoln, Lee hesitated, but finally decided to follow his native state, Virginia, into the Confederacy, saying, “I have been unable to make up my mind to raise my hand against my native state, my relatives, my children, and my home.”

Finally, it was widely believed that slavery would work to the South’s advantage, for slaves could continue to do the vital plantation work while their masters went off to war. But above all, the South had the weapon of cotton. “Cotton is King,” James Henry Hammond had announced in 1858, at the height of the cotton boom that made the 1850s the most profitable decade in southern history. Because of the crucial role of cotton in industrialization, southerners were confident that the British and French need for southern cotton would soon bring those countries to recognize the Confederacy as a separate nation.

**Governments Organize for War**

The Civil War forced the federal government to assume powers unimaginable just a few years before. Abraham Lincoln took as his primary task leading and unifying the nation in his role as commander-in-chief. He found the challenge almost insurmountable. Jefferson Davis’s challenge was even greater. He had to create a Confederate nation out of a loose grouping of eleven states, each believing strongly in states’ rights. Yet in the Confederacy, as in the Union, the conduct of the war required central direction.

**Lincoln Takes Charge**

Lincoln’s first task as president was to assert control over his own cabinet. Because he had few national contacts outside the Republican Party, Lincoln chose to staff his cabinet with other Republicans, including, most unusually, several who had been his rivals for the presidential nomination. Secretary of State William Seward, widely

In this excerpt, General Joseph E. Johnston, commander of all Confederate troops in Virginia, assesses the First Battle of Bull Run, 1861.

*After these additions to the forces engaged ... contending with three divisions of the United States army and superior forces of cavalry and artillery; yet the brave southern volunteers lost not a foot of ground, but repelled the repeated attacks of the heavy masses of the enemy, whose numbers enabled them to bring forward fresh troops after each repulse.*

**Lecture Suggestion 16.3, North and South Necessities to Succeed**

**How did the power of the federal government expand as the war progressed?**

**Quick Review**

- Northern Advantages
  - Two and a half times the South’s population.
  - North controlled much of nation’s industrial capacity.
  - Could field a much larger army.
regarded as the leader of the Republican Party, at first expected to “manage” Lincoln as he had Zachary Taylor in 1848, but he soon became the president’s willing partner. On the other hand, Treasury Secretary Salmon P. Chase, a staunch abolitionist, adamantly opposed concessions to the South and considered Lincoln too conciliatory; he remained a vocal and dangerous critic. That the Republican Party was a not-quite-jelled mix of former Whigs, abolitionists, moderate Free-Soilers, and even some prowar Democrats, made Lincoln’s task as party leader much more difficult than it might otherwise have been.

After the fall of Fort Sumter, military necessity prompted Lincoln to call up the state militias, order a naval blockade of the South, and vastly expand the military budget. Breaking with precedent, he took these actions without congressional sanction because Congress was not in session. Military necessity—the need to hold the border states—likewise prompted other early actions, such as the suspension of habeas corpus and the acceptance of Kentucky’s ambiguous neutrality. Over howls of protest from abolitionists, the president also repudiated an unauthorized declaration issued by General John C. Frémont, military commander in Missouri, in August 1861 that would have freed Missouri’s slaves. Lincoln feared that such an action would lead to the secession of Kentucky and Maryland.

Although James K. Polk had assumed responsibility for overall American military strategy during the Mexican-American War (see Chapter 14), Lincoln was the first president to act as commander-in-chief in both a practical and a symbolic way. He actively directed military policy, because he realized that a civil war presented problems different from those of a foreign war of conquest. Lincoln wanted above all to persuade the South to rejoin the Union, and his every military order was dictated by the hope of eventual reconciliation—hence his cautiousness, and his acute sense of the role of public opinion. Today, we recognize Lincoln’s exceptional abilities and eloquent language, but in his own time, some of his most moving statements fell on deaf ears. His first priority had to be to keep the Union unified. He always had to step carefully as he tried to find common ground across a wide spectrum of opinions from militant abolitionist to southern sympathizer. At the same time, he presided over a vast expansion of the powers of the federal government.

**Expanding the Power of the Federal Government**

The greatest expansion in government power during the war was in the War Department, which by early 1862 was faced with the unprecedented challenge of feeding, clothing, and arming 700,000 Union soldiers. Initially, the government relied on the individual states to equip and supply their vastly expanded militias. States often contracted directly with textile mills and shoe factories to clothe their troops. In many northern cities, volunteer groups sprang up to recruit regiments, buy them weapons, and send them to Washington. Other such community groups, like the one in Chester, Pennsylvania, focused on clothing and providing medical care to soldiers. By January 1862, the War Department, under the able direction of Edwin M. Stanton, a former Democrat from Ohio, was able to perform many basic functions of procurement and supply without too much delay or corruption. But the size of the Union army and the complexity of fully supplying it demanded constant efforts at all levels—government, state, and community—throughout the war. Thus, in the matter of procurement and supply, as in mobilization, the battlefront was related to the home front on a scale that Americans had not previously experienced.
The need for money for the vast war effort was pressing. Treasury Secretary Chase worked closely with Congress to develop ways to finance the war. They naturally turned to the nation’s economic experts—private bankers, merchants, and managers of large businesses. With the help of Philadelphia financier Jay Cooke, the Treasury used patriotic appeals to sell war bonds to ordinary people in amounts as small as $50. Cooke sold $400 million in bonds, taking for himself what he considered a “fair commission.” By the war’s end, the United States had borrowed $2.6 billion for the war effort, the first example in American history of the mass financing of war. Additional sources of revenue were sales taxes and the first federal income tax (of 3 percent). Imposed in August 1861, the income tax affected only the affluent: anyone with an annual income under $800 was exempt.

Most radical of all was Chase’s decision—which was authorized only after a bitter congressional fight—to print and distribute Treasury notes (paper money). Until then, the money in circulation had been a mixture of coins and state bank notes issued by 1,500 different state banks. The Legal Tender Act of February 1862 created a national currency. Because of its color, the paper bank notes were popularly known as “greenbacks.” In 1863, Congress passed the National Bank Act, which prohibited state banks from issuing their own notes and forced them to apply for federal charters. Thus was the first uniform national currency created, at the expense of the independence that many state banks had prized. “These are extraordinary times, and extraordinary measures must be resorted to in order to save our Government and preserve our nationality,” pleaded Congressman Elbridge G. Spaulding, sponsor of the legislation. Only through this appeal to wartime necessity were Spaulding and his allies able to overcome the opposition, for the switch to a national currency was widely recognized as a major step toward centralization of economic power in the hands of the federal government. Such a measure would have been unthinkable if southern Democrats had still been part of the national government. The absence of southern Democrats also made possible passage of a number of Republican economic measures not directly related to the war.

Although the outbreak of war overshadowed everything else, the Republican Party in Congress was determined to fulfill its campaign pledge of a comprehensive program of economic development. Republicans quickly passed the Morrill Tariff Act (1861); by 1864, this and subsequent measures had raised tariffs to more than double their prewar rate. In 1862 and 1864, Congress created two federally chartered corporations to build a transcontinental railroad—the Union Pacific Railroad Company, to lay track westward from Omaha, and the Central Pacific, to lay track eastward from California—thus fulfilling the dreams of the many expansionists who believed America’s economic future lay in trade with Asia across the Pacific Ocean. Two other measures, both passed in 1862, had long been sought by westerners. The Homestead Act gave 160 acres of public land to any citizen who agreed to live on the land for five years, improve it by building a house and cultivating some of the land, and pay a small fee. The Morrill Land Grant Act gave states public land that would allow them to finance land-grant colleges offering education to ordinary citizens in practical skills such as agriculture, engineering, and military science. Coupled with this act, the establishment of a federal Department of Agriculture in 1862 gave American farmers a big push toward modern commercial agriculture.

This package revealed the Whig origins of many Republicans, for in essence, the measures amounted to an updated version of Henry Clay’s American System of national economic development, illustrating yet again the unstoppable nature of the market revolution. They were to have a powerful nationalizing effect, connecting ordinary people to the federal government in new ways. As much as the extraordinary war measures,
the enactment of the Republican program increased the role of the federal government in national life. Although many of the executive war powers lapsed when the battles ended, the accumulation of strength by the federal government, which southern Democrats would have opposed had they been in Congress, was never reversed.

**Diplomatic Objectives**

To Secretary of State William Seward fell the job of making sure that Britain and France did not extend diplomatic recognition to the Confederacy. Although southerners had been certain that King Cotton would gain them European support, they were wrong. British public opinion, which had strongly supported the abolition of slavery within the British Empire in the 1830s, would not now countenance the recognition of a new nation based on slavery. British cotton manufacturers found economic alternatives, first using up their backlog of southern cotton and then turning to Egypt and India for new supplies. In spite of Union protests, however, both Britain and France did allow Confederate vessels to use their ports, and British shipyards sold six ships to the Confederacy. But in 1863, when the Confederacy commissioned Britain’s Laird shipyard to build two ironclad ships with pointed pros for ramming Union ships, the Union threatened war, and the British government made sure that the Laird ironclads were never delivered. Seward had wanted to threaten Britain with war earlier, in 1861, when the prospect of diplomatic recognition for the Confederacy seemed most likely, but Lincoln had overruled him, cautioning, “One war at a time.”

Nonbelligerence was also the Union response in 1861, when a bankrupt Mexico suffered the ignominy of a joint invasion by British, Spanish, and French troops determined to collect the substantial debts owed by Mexico to their nations. This was a serious violation of Mexican independence, just the kind of European intervention that the Monroe Doctrine had been formulated to prevent (see Chapter 9). When it became clear that France was bent on conquest, Britain and Spain withdrew, and Mexican forces repelled the French troops on May 5, 1862. Ever since, Mexico has celebrated *El Cinco de Mayo*. France eventually prevailed, and installed the Austrian

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**QUICK REVIEW**

**Jefferson Davis and the Southern Cause**

- Davis had experience as an administrator and former military man.
- Davis not a leader by personality.
- Failed to unify Confederacy.
archduke Maximilian as emperor. In normal times, the French conquest could have led to war, but fearing that France might recognize the Confederacy or invade Texas, Seward had to content himself with refusing to recognize the new Mexican government. In the meantime, he directed Union troops to gain a stronghold in Texas as soon as possible. In November, five months after the French marched into Mexico City, Union troops seized Brownsville, a town on the Texas-Mexico border, sending a clear signal to the French to go no farther. In 1866, after the Civil War, strong diplomatic pressure from Seward convinced the French to withdraw from Mexico. The following year, the hapless Maximilian was captured and shot during a revolt led by a future Mexican president, Benito Juárez. To him fell the task of reviving Mexico after a disastrous decade that included civil war (see Chapter 14), and economic collapse, as well as foreign invasion.

Although the goal of Seward’s diplomacy—preventing recognition of the Confederacy by the European powers—was always clear, its achievement was uncertain for more than two years. Northern fears and southern hopes seesawed with the fortunes of battle. Not until the victories at Vicksburg and Gettysburg in July 1863, could Seward be reasonably confident of success.

**JEFFERSON DAVIS TRIES TO UNIFY THE CONFEDERACY**

Although Jefferson Davis had held national cabinet rank (as secretary of war under President Franklin Pierce), had experience as an administrator, and was a former...
military man (none of which was true of Abraham Lincoln), he was unable to hold
the Confederacy together. Perhaps no one could have.

Davis’s first cabinet of six men, appointed in February 1861, included a repre-
sentative from each of the states of the first secession except Mississippi, which was
represented by Davis himself. This careful attention to the equality of the states
pointed to the fundamental problem that Davis was unable to overcome. For all of
its drama, secession was a conservative strategy for preserving the slavery-based social
and political structure that existed in every southern state. A shared belief in states’
rights—that is, in their own autonomy—was a poor basis on which to build a unified
nation. Davis, who would have preferred to be a general rather than a president,
lacked Lincoln’s persuasive skills and political astuteness. Although he saw the need
for unity, he was unable to impose it. Soon his autonomous style of leadership—he
wanted to decide every detail himself—angered his generals, alienated cabinet mem-
ers, and gave southern governors reason to resist his orders. By the second year of
the war, when rich slave owners were refusing to give up their privileges for the war
effort, Davis no longer had the public confidence and support he needed to coerce
them. After the first flush of patriotism had passed, the Confederacy never lived up
to its hope of becoming a unified nation.

**Confederate Disappointments**

The failure of “cotton diplomacy” was a crushing blow. White southerners were
stunned that Britain and France would not recognize their claim to independence.
Well into 1863, the South hoped that a decisive battlefield victory would change the
minds of cautious Europeans. In the meantime, plantations continued to grow cot-
ton, but were directed to withhold it from market, in the hope that lack of raw mate-
rial for their textile mills would lead the British and French to recognize the
Confederacy. The British reacted indignantly, claiming that the withholding of cot-
ton was economic blackmail and that to yield “would be ignominious beyond mea-
sure,” as Lord Russell put it. Because British textile manufacturers had found new
sources of cotton, when the Confederacy ended the embargo in 1862 and began to
ship its great surplus, the world price of cotton plunged. Then too, the Union naval
blockade, weak at first, began to take effect. Cotton turned out to be not so power-
ful a diplomatic weapon after all.

Perhaps the greatest southern failure was in the area of finances. At first, the
Confederate government tried to raise money from the states, but governors refused
to impose new taxes. By the time uniform taxes were levied in 1863, it was too late.
Heavy borrowing and the printing of great sums of paper money produced run-
away inflation (a ruinous rate of 9,000 percent by 1865, compared with 80 percent
in the North). Inflation, in turn, caused incalculable damage to morale and prospects
for unity.

After the initial surge of volunteers, enlistment in the military fell off, as it did
in the North also. In April 1862, the Confederate Congress passed the first draft law
in American history, and the Union Congress followed suit in March 1863. The southern
law declared that all able-bodied men between eighteen and thirty-five were eligi-
able for three years of military service. Purchase of substitutes was allowed, as in the
North, but in the South the price was uncontrolled, rising eventually to $10,000 in
Confederate money. The most disliked part of the draft law was a provision exempt-
ing one white man on each plantation with twenty or more slaves. This provision not
only seemed to disprove the earlier claim that slavery freed white men to fight, but
it aroused class resentments. A bitter phrase of the time complained, “It’s a rich
man’s war but a poor man’s fight.”
CONTRADICTIONS OF SOUTHERN NATIONALISM

In the early days of the war, Jefferson Davis successfully mobilized feelings of regional identity and patriotism. Many southerners felt part of a beleaguered region that had been forced to resist northern tyranny. But most southerners felt loyalty to their own state and local communities, not to a Confederate nation. The strong belief in states’ rights and aristocratic privilege undermined the Confederate cause. Some southern governors resisted potentially unifying actions such as moving militias outside their home states. Broader measures, such as general taxation, were widely evaded by rich and poor alike. The inequitable draft was only one of many things that convinced the ordinary people of the South that this was a war for privileged slave owners, not for them. With its leaders and citizens fearing (perhaps correctly) that centralization would destroy what was distinctively southern, the Confederacy was unable to mobilize the resources—financial, human, and otherwise—that might have prevented its destruction by northern armies.

THE FIGHTING THROUGH 1862

Just as political decisions were often driven by military necessity, the basic northern and southern military strategies were affected by political considerations as much as by military ones. The initial policy of limited war, thought to be the best route to ultimate reconciliation, ran into difficulties because of the public’s impatience for victories. But victories, as the mounting slaughter made clear, were not easy to achieve.

THE WAR IN NORTHERN VIRGINIA

The initial northern strategy, dubbed by critics the Anaconda Plan (after the constrictor snake), envisaged slowly squeezing the South with a blockade at sea and on the Mississippi River. Proposed by the general-in-chief, Winfield Scott, a native of Virginia, it avoided invasion and conquest in the hope that a strained South would recognize the inevitability of defeat and thus surrender. Lincoln accepted the basics of the plan, but public clamor for a fight pushed him to agree to the disastrous Battle of Bull Run and then to a major buildup of Union troops in northern Virginia under General George B. McClellan (see Map 16-1).

Dashing in appearance, McClellan was extremely cautious in battle. In March 1862, after almost a year spent drilling the raw Union recruits and after repeated exhortations by an impatient Lincoln, McClellan committed 120,000 troops to what became known as the Peninsular campaign. The objective was to capture Richmond, the Confederate capital. McClellan had his troops and their supplies ferried in 400 ships from Washington to Fortress Monroe, near the mouth of the James River, an effort that took three weeks. Inchling up the James Peninsula toward Richmond, he tried to avoid battle, hoping his overwhelming numbers would convince the South to surrender. By June, McClellan’s troops were close enough to Richmond to hear the church bells ringing—but not close enough for victory. In a series of battles known as the Seven Days, Robert E. Lee (who had just assumed command of the Confederacy’s Army of northern Virginia) boldly counterattacked, repeatedly catching McClellan off guard. Taking heavy losses as well as inflicting them, Lee drove McClellan back. In August, Lee routed another Union army, commanded by General John Pope, at the Second Battle of Bull Run (Second Manassas). Lincoln, alarmed at the threat to Washington and disappointed by McClellan’s inaction, ordered him to abandon the Peninsular campaign and return to the capital.

WHAT SUCCESSES did the South enjoy in the early years of the war and how were they achieved?

Peninsular campaign Union offensive led by McClellan with the objective of capturing Richmond.
Jefferson Davis, like Abraham Lincoln, was an active commander-in-chief. And like Lincoln, he responded to a public that clamored for more action than a strictly defensive war entailed. After the Seven Days victories, Davis supported a Confederate attack on Maryland. At the same time, he issued a proclamation urging the people of Maryland to make a separate peace. But in the brutal battle of Antietam on September 17, 1862, which claimed more than 5,000 dead and 19,000 wounded, McClellan’s army checked Lee’s advance. Lee retreated to Virginia, inflicting terrible losses on northern troops at Fredericksburg when they again made a thrust toward...
Richmond in December 1862. The war in northern Virginia was stalemated; neither side was strong enough to win, but each was too strong to be defeated (see Map 16-2).

**Shiloh and the War for the Mississippi**

Although most public attention was focused on the fighting in Virginia, battles in Tennessee and along the Mississippi River proved to be the key to eventual Union victory. The rising military figure in the West was Ulysses S. Grant, who had once resigned from the service because of a drinking problem. Reenlisting as a colonel after the fall of Fort Sumter, Grant was promoted to brigadier general within two months. In February 1862, Grant captured Fort Henry and Fort Donelson, on the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers, establishing Union control of much of Tennessee and forcing Confederate troops to retreat into northern Mississippi.

Moving south with 28,000 men, Grant met a 40,000-man Confederate force commanded by General Albert Sidney Johnston at Shiloh Church in April 1862. Seriously outnumbered on the first day, Grant’s forces were reinforced by the arrival of 35,000 troops under the command of General Don Carlos Buell. After two days of bitter and bloody fighting in the rain, the Confederates withdrew. The losses on both sides were enormous: the North lost 13,000 men, the South 11,000, including General Johnston, who bled to death. McClellan’s Peninsular campaign was already under way when Grant won at Shiloh, and Jefferson Davis, concerned about the defense of Richmond, refused to reinforce the generals who were trying to stop Grant. Consequently, Union forces kept moving, capturing Memphis in June and beginning a campaign to eventually capture Vicksburg, “the Gibraltar of the Mississippi.” Grant and other Union generals faced strong Confederate resistance, and progress was slow. Earlier that year, naval forces under Admiral David Farragut had captured New Orleans and then continued up the Mississippi River. By the end of 1862, it was clearly only a matter of time before the entire river would be in Union hands. Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas would then be cut off from the rest of the Confederacy (see Map 16-3).

**The War in the Trans-Mississippi West**

Although only one western state, Texas, seceded from the Union, the Civil War was fought in small ways in many parts of the West. Southern hopes for the extension of slavery into the Southwest were re-ignited by the war, and the just-announced discovery of gold in Colorado impelled the Confederacy to attempt to capture it. Texans mounted an attack on New Mexico, which they had long coveted, and kept their eyes on the larger prizes of Arizona and California. A Confederate force led by General Henry H. Sibley occupied Santa Fe and Albuquerque early in 1862 without resistance, thus posing a serious Confederate threat to the entire Southwest. Confederate hopes were dashed, however, by a ragtag group of 950 miners and adventurers organized into the first Colorado Volunteer Infantry Regiment. After an epic march of 400 miles from Denver, which was completed in thirteen days despite snow and high winds, the Colorado militia stopped the unsuspecting Confederate troops in the Battle of Glorieta Pass on March 26–28, 1862. This dashing action, coupled with the efforts of California militias to safeguard Arizona and Utah from seizure by Confederate sympathizers, secured the Far West for the Union.
Other military action in the West was less decisive. The chronic fighting along the Kansas-Missouri border set a record for brutality when Confederate William Quantrill’s Raiders made a predawn attack on Lawrence, Kansas, in August 1863, massacring 150 inhabitants and burning the town. Another civil war took place in Indian Territory, south of Kansas. The southern Indian tribes who had been removed there from the Old Southwest in the 1830s included many who were still bitter over the horrors of their removal by federal troops, and they sympathized with the Confederacy. John Ross, leader of the majority pro-Union Cherokee fullbloods, at first tried to assure the safety of his people by proclaiming their neutrality, but later in 1861, bordered by Confederate states and lacking support from Washington, he signed a treaty of alliance with the Confederates. The Confederacy actively sought Indian support by offering Indian people representation in the Confederate Congress. Consequently, many Indians fought for the South, among them Stand Watie, who became a Confederate military officer. Union victories at Pea Ridge (in northwestern Arkansas) in 1862 and near Fort Gibson (in Indian Territory) in 1863 secured the area for the Union, but did little to stop dissension among the Indian groups themselves. Ross, captured in 1862 and held at Fort Leavenworth in Kansas, never returned to his tribe, which factionalized badly after his departure. After the Civil War, the victorious federal government used the tribes’ wartime support for the Confederacy as a justification for demanding further land cessions.

Elsewhere in the West, other groups of Indians found themselves caught up in the wider war. An uprising by the Santee Sioux in Minnesota occurred in August 1862, just as McClellan conceded defeat in the Peninsular campaign in Virginia. Alarmed whites, certain that the uprising was a Confederate plot, ignored legitimate Sioux grievances and responded in kind to Sioux ferocity. In little more than a month, 500 to 800 white settlers and an even greater number of Sioux were killed. Thirty-eight Indians were hanged in a mass execution in Mankato on December 26, 1862, and subsequently all Sioux were expelled from Minnesota. In 1863, U.S. Army Colonel Kit Carson invaded Navajo country in Arizona in retaliation for Indian raids on U.S. troops. Eight thousand Navajos were forced on the brutal “Long Walk” to Bosque Redondo on the Pecos River in New Mexico, where they were held prisoner until a treaty between the United States and the Navajos was signed in 1868. The hostilities in the West showed that no part of the country, and none of its inhabitants, could remain untouched by the Civil War.

The Naval War

The Union’s naval blockade of the South, intended to cut off commerce between the Confederacy and the rest of the world, was initially unsuccessful. The U.S. Navy had only thirty-three ships with which to blockade 189 ports along 3,500 miles of coastline. Southern blockade runners evaded Union ships with ease: only an estimated one-eighth of all Confederate shipping was stopped in 1862. Moreover, the Confederacy licensed British-made privateers to strike at northern shipping. In a two-year period, one such Confederate raider, the Alabama, destroyed sixty-nine Union ships with cargoes valued at $6 million. Beginning in 1863, however, as the Union navy became larger, the blockade began to take effect. In 1864, a third of...
the blockade runners were captured, and in 1865, half of them. As a result, fewer and fewer supplies reached the South.

North and South also engaged in a brief duel featuring the revolutionary new technology of ironcladding. The Confederacy refitted a scuttled Union vessel, the _Merrimac_, with iron plating and renamed it the _Virginia_. On March 8, 1862, as McClellan began his Peninsular campaign, the _Virginia_ steamed out of Norfolk harbor to challenge the Union blockade. The iron plating protected the _Virginia_ from the fire of the Union ships, which found themselves defenseless against its ram and its powerful guns. Two Union ships went down, and the blockade seemed about to be broken. But the North had an experimental ironclad of its own, the _Monitor_, which was waiting for the _Virginia_ when it emerged from port on March 9. The _Monitor_, which looked like "an immense shingle floating on the water, with a gigantic cheese box rising from its center," was the ship of the future, for the "cheese box" was a revolving turret, a basic component of battleships to come. The historic duel between these first two ironclads was inconclusive, and primitive technology together with limited resources made them of little consequence for the rest of the war. But this brief duel prefigured the naval and land battles of the world wars of the twentieth century as much as did the massing of huge armies on the battlefield.

For the Union, the most successful naval operation in the first two years of the war was not the blockade, but the seizing of exposed coastal areas. The Sea Islands of South Carolina were taken, as were some of the North Carolina islands and Fort Pulaski, which commanded the harbor of Savannah, Georgia. Most damaging to the South, was the capture of New Orleans.

**THE BLACK RESPONSE**

The capture of Port Royal in the South Carolina Sea Islands in 1861 was important for another reason. Whites fled at the Union advance, but 10,000 slaves greeted the troops with jubilation and shouts of gratitude. Union troops had unwittingly freed these slaves in advance of any official Union policy on the status of slaves in captured territory.

Early in the war, an irate southerner who saw three of his slaves disappear behind Union lines at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, demanded the return of his property, citing the Fugitive Slave Law. The Union commander, Benjamin Butler, replied that the Fugitive Slave Law no longer applied and that the escaped slaves were "contraband of war." News of Butler’s decision spread rapidly among the slaves in the region of Fortress Monroe. Two days later, eight runaway slaves appeared; the next day, fifty-nine black men and women arrived at the fort. Union commanders had found an effective way to rob the South of its basic workforce. The "contrabands," as they were known, were put to work building fortifications and doing other useful work in northern camps. Washington, DC, became a refuge for contraband blacks, who crowded into the capital to join the free black people who lived there (at 9,000 people, they were one of the largest urban black populations outside the Confederacy). Many destitute contrabands received help from the Contraband Relief Association. Modeled on the Sanitary Commission, the association was founded by former slave Elizabeth Keckley, seamstress to Mary Todd Lincoln, the president’s wife.

As Union troops drove deeper into the South, the black response grew. When Union General William Tecumseh Sherman marched his army through Georgia in 1864, 18,000 slaves—entire families, people of all ages—flocked to the Union lines. By the war’s end, nearly a million black people, fully a quarter of all the slaves in the South, had "voted with their feet" for the Union.
Chapter 16: The Civil War, 1861–1865

The Death of Slavery

The overwhelming response of black slaves to the Union advance changed the nature of the war. As increasing numbers of slaves flocked to Union lines, the conclusion that the South refused to face was unmistakable: the southern war to defend the slave system did not have the support of slaves themselves. Any northern policy that ignored the issue of slavery and the wishes of the slaves was unrealistic.

The Politics of Emancipation

In 1862, as the issue of slavery loomed ever larger, Abraham Lincoln, acutely aware of divided northern opinion, inched his way toward a declaration of emancipation. Lincoln was correct to be worried about the unity of opinion in the North. Before the war, within the Republican Party, only a small group of abolitionists had favored freeing the slaves. Most Republicans were more concerned about the expansion of slavery than they were about the lives of slaves themselves. For their part, most northern Democrats were openly antiblack. Irish workers in northern cities had rioted against free African Americans, with whom they often competed for jobs. There was also the question of what would become of slaves who were freed. Northern Democrats effectively played on racial fears in the 1862 congressional elections, warning that freed slaves would pour into northern cities and take jobs from white laborers.

Nevertheless, the necessities of war demanded that Lincoln adopt a policy to end slavery. In March 1862, he proposed that every state undertake gradual, compensated emancipation, after which former slaves would be resettled in Haiti and Panama (neither of which was under U.S. control). This unrealistic colonization scheme doomed the proposal.

Even as Radical Republicans chafed at Lincoln’s slow pace, he was edging toward a new position. Following the Union victory at Antietam in September 1862, Lincoln issued a preliminary decree: unless the rebellious states returned to the Union by January 1, 1863, he would declare their slaves “forever free.” The decree increased the pressure on the South by directly linking the slave system to the war effort. Thus the freedom of black people became part of the struggle. Frederick Douglass, the voice of black America, wrote, “We shout for joy that we live to record this righteous decree.”

On January 1, 1863, Lincoln duly issued the final Emancipation Proclamation, which turned out to be less than sweeping. The proclamation freed the slaves in the areas of rebellion—the areas the Union did not control—but specifically exempted slaves in the border states and in former Confederate areas conquered by the Union. Lincoln’s purpose was to meet the abolitionist demand for a war against slavery while not losing the support of conservatives, especially in the border states. But the proclamation was so equivocal that Lincoln’s own secretary of state, William Seward, remarked sarcastically, “We show our sympathy with slavery by emancipating slaves where we cannot reach them and holding them in bondage where we can set them free.”

One group greeted the Emancipation Proclamation with open celebration. On New Year’s Day, hundreds of African Americans gathered outside the White House and cheered the president. They called to him, as pastor Henry M. Turner recalled, that “if he would come out of that palace, they would hug him to death.” Free African Americans predicted that the news would encourage southern slaves either to flee to Union lines or refuse to work for their masters. Both of these things were already happening as African Americans seized on wartime changes to reshape white–black relations in the South. In one sense, then, the Emancipation Proclamation simply gave a name to a process already in motion.

**Quick Review**

African American Soldiers
- Lincoln supported recruitment of black soldiers as part of the Emancipation Proclamation.
- Nearly 200,000 African Americans served in the Union army.
- Thirty-seven thousand African Americans died defending their freedom and the Union.

Emancipation Proclamation
- Decree announced by President Abraham Lincoln in September 1862 and formally issued on January 1, 1863, freeing slaves in all Confederate states still in rebellion.

**Class Discussion Question 16.4**

How did the end of slavery affect the war efforts of the North and South?
Abolitionists set about moving Lincoln beyond his careful stance in the Emancipation Proclamation. Reformers such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony lobbied and petitioned for a constitutional amendment outlawing slavery. Congress, at Lincoln’s urging, approved and sent to the states a statement banning slavery throughout the United States. Quickly ratified by the Union states in 1865, the statement became the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution. (The southern states, being in a state of rebellion, could not vote.) Lincoln’s firm support for this amendment is a good indicator of his true feelings about slavery when he was freed of the kinds of military and political considerations necessarily taken into account in the Emancipation Proclamation.

**Black Fighting Men**

As part of the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln gave his support for the first time to the recruitment of black soldiers. Early in the war, eager black volunteers had been bitterly disappointed at being turned away. Many, like Robert Fitzgerald, a free African American from Pennsylvania, found other ways to serve the Union cause. Fitzgerald first drove a wagon and mule for the Quartermaster Corps, and later, in spite of persistent seasickness, he served in the Union navy. After the Emancipation Proclamation, however, Fitzgerald was able to do what he had wanted to do all along: be a soldier. He enlisted in the Fifth Massachusetts Cavalry, a regiment that, like all the units in which black soldiers served, was 100 percent African American, but commanded by white officers.

In Fitzgerald’s company of eighty-three men, half came from slave states and had run away to enlist; the other half came mostly from the North but also from Canada, the West Indies, and France. Other regiments had volunteers from Africa. The proportion of volunteers from the loyal border states (where slavery was still legal) was upwards of 25 percent—a lethal blow to the slave system in those states.
After a scant two months of training, Fitzgerald’s company was sent on to Washington and thence to battle in northern Virginia. Uncertain of the reception they would receive in northern cities with their history of antiblack riots, Fitzgerald and his comrades were pleasantly surprised. “We are cheered in every town we pass through,” he wrote in his diary. “I was surprised to see a great many white people weeping as the train moved South.” White people had reason to cheer: black volunteers, eager and willing to fight, made up 10 percent of the Union army. Nearly 200,000 African Americans (one out of every five black males in the nation) served in the Union army or navy. A fifth of them—37,000—died defending their own freedom and the Union.

Military service was something no black man could take lightly. African American soldiers faced prejudice within the army and had to prove themselves in battle. The performance of black soldiers under fire helped to change the minds of the Union army command. “The bravery of the blacks . . . completely revolutionized the sentiment of the army with regard to the employment of negro troops,” wrote Charles Dana, assistant secretary of war. “I heard prominent officers who formerly in private had sneered at the idea of negroes fighting express themselves after that as heartily in favor of it.”

However, the Confederates hated and feared African American troops and threatened to treat any captured black soldier as an escaped slave subject to execution. On at least one occasion, the threats were carried out. In 1864, Confederate soldiers massacred 262 black soldiers at Fort Pillow, Tennessee, after they had surrendered. Although large-scale episodes such as this were rare (especially after President Lincoln threatened retaliation), smaller ones were not. On duty near Petersburg, Virginia, Robert Fitzgerald’s company lost a picket to Confederate hatred: wounded in the leg, he was unable to escape from Confederate soldiers, who smashed his skull with their musket butts.

Another extraordinary part of the story of the African American soldiers was their reception by black people in the South, who were overjoyed at the sight of armed black men, many of them former slaves themselves, wearing the uniform of the Union army. As his regiment entered Wilmington, North Carolina, one soldier wrote, “Men and women, old and young, were running throughout the streets, shouting and praising God. We could then truly see what we have been fighting for.”

Robert Fitzgerald’s own army career was brief. Just five months after he enlisted, he caught typhoid fever. Hearing of his illness, Fitzgerald’s mother traveled from Pennsylvania and nursed him, probably saving his life. Eventually, 117 members of his regiment died of disease—and only 7 in battle. Eight months after he had enlisted, Fitzgerald was discharged for poor eyesight. His short military career nevertheless gave him, in the words of a granddaughter, the distinguished lawyer Pauli Murray, “a pride which would be felt throughout his family for the next century.”

African American soldiers were not treated equally by the Union army. They were segregated in camp, given the worst jobs, and paid less than white soldiers ($10 a month rather than $13). Although they might not be able to do much about the other kinds of discrimination, the men of the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts found an unusual way to protest their unequal pay: they refused to accept it, preferring to serve the army for free until it decided to treat them as free men. The protest was effective; in June 1864, the War Department equalized the wages of black and white soldiers.

In other ways the army service of black men made a dent in northern white racism. Massachusetts, the state where abolitionist feeling was the strongest, went the farthest by enacting the first law forbidding discrimination against African Americans in public facilities. Some major cities, among them San Francisco, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and New York, desegregated their streetcars. Some states—Ohio, California, Illinois—repealed
statutes that had barred black people from testifying in court or serving on juries. But above all, as Frederick Douglass acutely saw, military service permanently changed the status of African Americans. “Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters, U.S., let him get an eagle on his button and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket,” Douglass said, and “there is no power on earth that can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship.”

**The Front Lines and the Home Front**

Civil War soldiers wrote millions of letters home, more proportionately than in any American war. Their letters and the ones they received in return were links between the front lines and the home front, between the soldiers and their home communities. They are a testament to the patriotism of both Union and Confederate troops, for the story they tell is frequently one of slaughter and horror.

**The Toll of War**

In spite of early hopes for what one might call a “brotherly” war, one that avoided excessive brutality, Civil War battles were appallingly deadly (see Figure 16-1). One reason was technology: improved weapons, particularly modern rifles, had much greater range and accuracy than the muskets they replaced. The Mexican-American War

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**What Impact**

Did the war have on northern political, economic, and social life? And on the same aspects of southern life?

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**Figure 16-1**

**The Casualties Mount Up** This chart of the ten costliest battles of the Civil War shows the relentless toll of casualties (killed, wounded, missing, captured) on both the Union and Confederate sides.
had been fought with smooth-bore muskets, which were slow to reload and accurate only at short distances. As Ulysses Grant said, “At a distance of a few hundred yards, a man could fire at you all day [with a musket] without your finding out.” The new Springfield and Enfield rifles were accurate for a quarter of a mile or more.

Civil War generals, however, were slow to adjust to this new reality. Almost all Union and Confederate generals remained committed to the conventional military doctrine of massed infantry offensives—the “Jomini doctrine”—that they had learned in their military classes at West Point. Part of this strategy had been to “soften up” a defensive line with artillery before an infantry assault, but now the range of the new rifles made artillery itself vulnerable to attack. As a result, generals relied less on “softening up” than on immense numbers of infantrymen, hoping that enough of them would survive the withering rifle fire to overwhelm the enemy line. Enormous casualties were a consequence of this basic strategy.

Medical ignorance was another factor in the casualty rate. Because the use of antiseptic procedures was in its infancy, men often died because minor wounds became infected. Gangrene was a common cause of death. Disease was an even more frequent killer, taking twice as many men as were lost in battle. The overcrowded and unsanitary conditions of many camps were breeding grounds for smallpox, dysentery, typhoid, pneumonia, and, in the summer, malaria.

Both North and South were completely unprepared to handle the supply and health needs of their large armies. Twenty-four hours after the battle of Shiloh, most of the wounded still lay on the field in the rain. Many died of exposure; some, unable to help themselves, drowned. Nor were the combatants prepared to deal with masses of war prisoners, as the shocking example of the Confederate prison camp at Andersonville in northern Georgia demonstrated. Andersonville was an open stockade with no shade or shelter, erected early in 1864 to hold 10,000 northern prisoners. But by midsummer, it held 33,000. During the worst weeks of that summer, 100 prisoners died of disease, exposure, or malnutrition each day.

**Army Nurses**

Many medical supplies that the armies were unable to provide were donated by the United States Sanitary Commission in the North, as described in the opening of this chapter, and by women’s volunteer groups in the South. But in addition to supplies, there was also an urgent need for skilled nurses to care for wounded and convalescent soldiers. Nursing within a family context was widely considered to be women’s work. Caring for sick family members was a key domestic responsibility for women, and most had considerable experience with it. But taking care of strange men in hospitals was another thing. There were strong objections that such work was “unseemly” for respectable women.

Under the pressure of wartime necessity, and over the objections of most army doctors—who resented the challenge to their authority from people no different than their daughters or wives—women became army nurses. Hospital nursing, previously considered a job only disreputable women would undertake, now became a suitable vocation for middle-class women. Under the leadership of veteran reformer Dorothea Dix of the asylum movement (see Chapter 13), and in cooperation with the Sanitary Commission (and with the vocal support of Mother Bickerdyke), by the war’s end more than 3,000 northern women had worked as paid army nurses and many more as volunteers. Other women organized volunteer efforts outside the Sanitary Commission umbrella. Perhaps the best known was Clara Barton, who had been a government clerk before the war and consequently knew a number of influential members of Congress. Barton organized nursing and the distribution of medical
supplies; she also used her congressional contacts to force reforms in army medical practice, of which she was very critical.

Southern women were also active in nursing and otherwise aiding soldiers, though the South never boasted a single large-scale organization like the Sanitary Commission. The women of Richmond volunteered when they found the war on their doorstep in the summer of 1862. During the Seven Days Battles, thousands of wounded poured into Richmond; many died in the streets, because there was no room for them in hospitals. Richmond women first established informal “roadside hospitals” to meet the need, and their activities expanded from there. As in the North, middle-class women at first faced strong resistance from army doctors and even their own families, who believed that a field hospital was “no place for a refined lady.” Kate Cumming of Mobile, who nursed in Corinth, Mississippi, after the Battle of Shiloh, faced down such reproofs, though she confided to her diary that nursing wounded men was very difficult: “Nothing that I had ever heard or read had given me the faintest idea of the horrors witnessed here.” She and her companion nurses persisted and became an important part of the Confederate medical services. For southern women, who had been much less active in the public life of their communities than their northern reforming sisters, this Civil War activity marked an important break with prewar tradition.

Although women had made important advances, most army nurses and medical support staff were men. One volunteer nurse was the poet Walt Whitman, who visited wounded soldiers in the hospital in Washington, DC. Horrified at the suffering he saw, Whitman also formed a deep admiration for the “incredible dauntlessness” of the common soldier in the face of slaughter and privation. While never denying the senselessness of the slaughter, Whitman nevertheless found hope in the determined spirit of the common man and woman.

The Life of the Common Soldier
The conditions experienced by the eager young volunteers of the Union and Confederate armies included massive, terrifying, and bloody battles, apparently unending, with no sign of victory in sight. Soldiers suffered from the uncertainty of supply, which left troops, especially in the South, without uniforms, tents, and sometimes even food. They endured long marches over muddy, rutted roads while carrying packs weighing fifty or sixty pounds. Disease was rampant in their dirty, verminous, and unsanitary camps, and hospitals were so dreadful that more men left them dead than alive. As a result, desertion was common: an estimated one of every nine Confederate soldiers and one of every seven Union soldiers deserted. Unauthorized absence was another problem. At Antietam, Robert E. Lee estimated that unauthorized absence reduced his strength by a third to a half. In October 1861, a Louisiana man wrote to his brother-in-law: “You spoke as if you had some notion of volunteering. I advise you to stay at home.” Once the initial patriotic fervor had waned, attitudes such as his were increasingly common, both on the battlefield and at home.

Guideline 11.1
Nurse Ann Bell shown preparing medicine for a wounded soldier. Prompted by the medical crisis of the war, women such as Bell and “Mother” Bickerdyke actively participated in the war effort as nurses.
Center of Military History, U.S. Army.

Clara Barton, Medical Life at the Battlefield (1862)
In the earliest days of the war, northerners had joined together in support of the war effort. Democrat Stephen A. Douglas, Lincoln’s defeated rival, paid a visit to the White House to offer Lincoln his support, then traveled home to Illinois, where he addressed a huge rally of Democrats in Chicago: “There can be no neutrals in this war, only patriots—or traitors!” Within a month, Douglas was dead at age forty-eight. The Democrats had lost the leadership of a broad-minded man who might have done much on behalf of northern unity. By 1862, Democrats had split into two factions: the War Democrats and the Peace Democrats, derogatorily called “Copperheads” (from the poisonous snake).

Despite the split in the party in 1860 and the secession of the South, the Democratic Party remained a powerful force in northern politics. It had received 44 percent of the popular vote in the North in the 1860 election and its united opposition to the emancipation of slaves explains much of Lincoln’s equivocal action on this issue. But the Peace Democrats went far beyond opposition to emancipation, denouncing the draft, martial law, and the high-handed actions of “King Abraham.”

The leader of the Copperheads, Clement Vallandigham, a former Ohio congressman, advocated an armistice and a negotiated peace that would “look only to the welfare, peace and safety of the white race, without reference to the effect that settlement may have on the African.” Western Democrats, he threatened, might form their own union with the South, excluding New England with its radical abolitionists and high-tariff industrialists. Lincoln could not afford to take Vallandigham’s threats lightly. Besides, he was convinced that some Peace Democrats were members of secret societies—the Knights of the Golden Circle and the Sons of Liberty—that had been conspiring with the Confederacy. In 1862, Lincoln proclaimed that all people who discouraged enlistments in the army or otherwise engaged in disloyal practices would be subject to martial law. In all, 13,000 people were arrested and imprisoned, including Vallandigham, who was exiled to the Confederacy. Lincoln rejected all protests, claiming that his arbitrary actions were necessary for national security.

Lincoln also faced challenges from the radical faction of his own party. As the war continued, the Radicals gained strength: it was they who pushed for emancipation in the early days of the war and for harsh treatment of the defeated South after it ended. The most troublesome Radical was Salmon P. Chase, who in December 1862, caused a cabinet crisis when he encouraged Senate Republicans to complain that Secretary of State William Seward was “lukewarm” in his support for emancipation. This Radical challenge was a portent of the party’s difficulties after the war, which Lincoln did not live to see—or prevent.

**Economic and Social Strains on the North**

Wartime needs caused a surge in northern economic growth, but the gains were unequally distributed. Early in the war, some industries suffered: textile manufacturers could not get cotton, and shoe factories that had made cheap shoes for slaves were without a market. But other industries boomed—boot making, shipbuilding, and the manufacture of woolen goods such as blankets and uniforms, to give just three examples. Coal mining expanded, as did ironmaking, especially the manufacture of iron rails for railroads. Agricultural goods were in great demand, promoting further mechanization of farming. The McCormick brothers grew rich from sales of their reapers. Once scorned as a “metal grasshopper,” the ungainly-looking McCormick reaper made hand harvesting of grain a thing of the past and led to great savings in manpower. Women, left to tend the family farm while the men went to war,
found that with mechanized equipment, they could manage the demanding task of harvesting.

Meeting wartime needs enriched some people honestly, but speculators and profiteers also flourished, as they have in every war. By the end of the war, government contracts had exceeded $1 billion. Not all of this business was free from corruption. New wealth was evident in every northern city. Many people were appalled at the spectacle of wealth in the midst of wartime suffering. Still, some of the new wealth went to good causes. Of the more than $3 million raised by the female volunteers of the United States Sanitary Commission, some came from gala Sanitary Fairs designed to attract those with money to spend.

For most people, however, the war brought the day-to-day hardship of inflation. During the four years of the war, the North suffered an inflation rate of 80 percent, or nearly 15 percent a year. This annual rate, three times what is generally considered tolerable, did much to inflame social tensions. Wages rose only half as much as prices, and workers responded by joining unions and striking. Thirteen occupational groups, among them tailors, coal miners, and railroad engineers, formed unions during the Civil War. Manufacturers, bitterly opposed to unions, freely hired strikebreakers (many of whom were African Americans, women, or immigrants) and formed organizations of their own to prevent further unionization and to blacklist union organizers. Thus both capital and labor moved far beyond the small, localized confrontations of the early industrial period. The formation of large-scale organizations, fostered by wartime demand, laid the groundwork for the national battle between workers and manufacturers that would dominate the last part of the nineteenth century.

Another major source of social tension was conscription. The Union introduced a draft in March 1863. Especially unpopular was a provision in the draft law that allowed the hiring of substitutes or the payment of a commutation fee of $300. Substitutes were mostly recent immigrants who had not yet filed for citizenship and were thus not yet eligible to be drafted. It is estimated that immigrants (some of whom were citizens) made up 20 percent of the Union army. Substitution had been accepted in all previous European and American wars. It was so common that President Lincoln, though overage, tried to set an example by paying for a substitute himself. The Democratic Party, however, made substitution an inflammatory issue. Pointing out that $300 was almost a year’s wages for an unskilled laborer, they denounced the draft law (88 percent of Democratic congressmen had voted against it). They appealed to popular resentment by calling it “aristocratic legislation” and to fear, by running headlines such as “Three Hundred Dollars or Your Life.”

As practiced in the local communities, conscription was indeed often marred by favoritism and prejudice. Local officials called up many more poor than rich men and selected a higher proportion of immigrants than nonimmigrants. In reality, however, only 7 percent of all men called to serve actually did so. About 25 percent hired a substitute, another 45 percent were exempted for “cause” (usually health reasons), and another 20–25 percent simply failed to report to the community draft office. Nevertheless, by 1863, many northern urban workers believed that the slogan “a rich man’s war but a poor man’s fight,” though coined in the South, applied to them as well.

**The New York City Draft Riots**

In the spring of 1863, there were protests against the draft throughout the North. Riots and disturbances broke out in many cities, and several federal enrollment officers were killed. The greatest trouble occurred in New York City between July 13 and
July 16, 1863, where a wave of working-class looting, fighting, and lynching claimed the lives of 105 people, many of them African American. The rioting, the worst up to that time in American history, was quelled only when five units of the U.S. Army were rushed from the battlefield at Gettysburg, where they had been fighting Confederates the week before.

The riots had several causes. Anger at the draft and racial prejudice were what most contemporaries saw. From a historical perspective, however, the riots were at least as much about the urban growth and tensions described in Chapter 13. The Civil War made urban problems worse and heightened the visible contrast between the lives of the rich and those of the poor. These tensions exploded, but were not solved, during those hot days in the summer of 1863.

Ironically, African American men, a favorite target of the rioters’ anger, were a major force in easing the national crisis over the draft. Though they had been barred from service until 1863, in the later stages of the war, African American volunteers filled much of the manpower gap that the controversial draft was meant to address.

The Failure of Southern Nationalism

The war brought even greater changes to the South. As in the North, war needs led to expansion and centralization of government control over the economy. In many cases, Jefferson Davis himself initiated government control (over railroads, shipping, and war production, for example), often in the face of protest or inaction by governors who favored states’ rights. The expansion of government brought sudden urbanization, a new experience for the predominantly rural South. The population of Richmond, the Confederate capital, almost tripled, in large part because the Confederate bureaucracy grew to 70,000 people. Because of the need for military manpower, a good part of the Confederate bureaucracy consisted of women, who were referred to as “government girls.” All of this—government control, urban growth, women in the paid workforce—was new to southerners, and not all of it was welcomed.

Even more than in the North, the voracious need for soldiers fostered class antagonisms. When small yeoman farmers went off to war, their wives and families struggled to farm on their own, without the help of mechanization, which they could not afford, and without the help of slaves, which they had never owned. But wealthy men could be exempted from the draft if they had more than twenty slaves. Furthermore, many upper-class southerners—at least 50,000—avoided military service by paying liberally ($5,000 and more) for substitutes. In the face of these inequities, desertions from the Confederate army soared.

Worst of all was the starvation. The North’s blockade and the breakdown of the South’s transportation system restricted the availability of food in the South, and these problems were vastly magnified by runaway inflation. Prices in the South rose by an unbelievable 9,000 percent from 1861 to 1865. Speculation and hoarding by the rich made matters even worse. In the spring of 1863, food riots broke out in four...
Georgia cities (Atlanta among them) and in North Carolina. In Richmond, more than a thousand people, mostly women, broke into bakeries and snatched loaves of bread, crying "Bread! Bread! Our children are starving while the rich roll in wealth!"

When the bread riot threatened to turn into general looting, Jefferson Davis himself appealed to the crowd to disperse—but found he had to threaten the rioters with gunfire before they would leave. A year later, Richmond stores sold eggs for $6 a dozen and butter for $25 a pound. One woman wept, "My God! How can I pay such prices? I have seven children; what shall I do?"

Increasingly, the ordinary people of the South, preoccupied with staying alive, refused to pay taxes, to provide food, or to serve in the army. Soldiers were drawn home by the desperation of their families as well as by the discouraging course of the war. By January 1865, the desertion rate had climbed to 8 percent a month.

At the same time, the life of the southern ruling class was irrevocably altered by the changing nature of slavery. By the end of the war, one-quarter of all slaves had fled to the Union lines, and those who remained often stood in a different relationship to their owners. As white masters and overseers left to join the army, white women were left behind on the plantation to cope with shortages, grow crops, and manage the labor of slaves. Lacking the patriarchal authority of their husbands, white women found that white–black relationships shifted, sometimes drastically (as when slaves fled) and sometimes more subtly. Slaves increasingly made their own decisions about when and how they would work, and they refused to accept the punishments that would have accompanied this insubordination in prewar years. One black woman, implored by her mistress not to reveal the location of a trunk of money and silver plate when the invading Yankees arrived, looked her in the eye and said, "Mistress, I can’t lie over that; you bought that silver plate when you sold my three children."

Peace movements in the South were motivated by a confused mixture of realism, war weariness, and the animosity of those who supported states’ rights and opposed Jefferson Davis. The anti-Davis faction was led by his own vice president, Alexander Stephens, who early in 1864, suggested a negotiated peace. Peace sentiment was especially strong in North Carolina, where more than a hundred public meetings in support of negotiations were held in the summer of 1863. Davis would have none of it, and he commanded enough votes in the Confederate Congress to enforce his will and to suggest that peace sentiment was traitorous.

**The Tide Turns**

As Lincoln’s timing of the Emancipation Proclamation showed, by 1863 the nature of the war was changing. The proclamation freeing the slaves struck directly at the southern home front and the civilian workforce. That same year, the nature of the battlefield war changed as well. The Civil War became the first total war.

**The Turning Point of 1863**

In the summer of 1863, the moment finally arrived when the North could begin to hope for victory. But for the Union army, the year opened with stalemate in the East and slow and costly progress in the West. For the South, 1863 represented its highest hopes for military success and for diplomatic recognition by Britain or France.

Attempting to break the stalemate in northern Virginia, General Joseph "Fighting Joe" Hooker and a Union army of 130,000 men attacked a Confederate army half that size at Chancellorsville in May. In response, Robert E. Lee daringly
The war’s turning point? 

What was Lee hoping to achieve with his campaign northward and why was his defeat at Gettysburg the war’s turning point?

MAP 16-4

The Turning Point: 1863 In June, Lee boldly struck north into Maryland and Pennsylvania, hoping for a victory that would cause Britain and France to demand a negotiated peace on Confederate terms. Instead, he lost the hard-fought battle of Gettysburg, July 1–3. The very next day, Grant’s long siege of Vicksburg succeeded. These two great Fourth of July victories turned the tide in favor of the Union. The Confederates never again mounted a major offensive. Total Union control of the Mississippi now exposed the Lower South to attack.

WHAT WAS Lee hoping to achieve with his campaign northward and why was his defeat at Gettysburg the war’s turning point?

Class Discussion Question 16.7

Grant and Sherman

In March 1864, President Lincoln called Grant east and appointed him general-in-chief of all the Union forces. Lincoln’s critics were appalled. Grant was an uncouth westerner (like the president) and (unlike the president) was rumored to have a drinking problem. Lincoln replied that if he knew the general’s brand of whiskey, he would send a barrel of it to every commander in the Union army.

Grant devised a plan of strangulation and annihilation. While he took on Lee in northern Virginia, he sent General William Tecumseh Sherman to defeat Confederate general Joe Johnston’s Army of Tennessee, which was defending the approach to Atlanta. Both Grant and Sherman exemplified the new kind of warfare. They aimed to inflict maximum damage on the fabric of southern life, hoping that the South would choose to surrender rather than face total destruction. This decision to broaden the war so that it directly affected civilians was new in American military history, and prefigured the total wars of the twentieth century.

In northern Virginia, Grant pursued a policy of destroying civilian supplies. He said he “regarded it as humane to both sides to protect the persons of those found at their homes, but to consume...
everything that could be used to support or supply armies.” One of those supports was slaves. Grant welcomed fleeing slaves to Union lines and encouraged army efforts to put them to work or enlist them as soldiers. He also cooperated with the efforts of groups like the New England Freedmen’s Aid Society, which sent northern volunteers (many of them women) into Union-occupied parts of the South to educate former slaves. The Freedmen’s Bureau, authorized by Congress in March 1865, continued this work into Reconstruction. One of the northern teachers who went south in 1866 to work for the bureau was Robert Fitzgerald, the former soldier.

The most famous example of the new strategy of total war was General Sherman’s 1864 march through Georgia. Sherman captured Atlanta on September 2, 1864, and the rest of Georgia now lay open to him. Gloom enveloped the South. “Since Atlanta I have felt as if all were dead within me, forever,” Mary Boykin Chesnut wrote in her diary. “We are going to be wiped off the earth” (see Map 16-5).

In November, Sherman set out to march the 285 miles to the coastal city of Savannah, living off the land and destroying everything in his path. His military purpose was to tighten the noose around Robert E. Lee’s army in northern Virginia by cutting off Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia from the rest of the Confederacy. But his second purpose, openly stated, was to “make war so terrible” to the people of the South, to “make them so sick of war that generations would pass away before they would again appeal to it.” Accordingly, he told his men to seize, burn, or destroy everything in their path (but, significantly, not to harm civilians).

It was estimated that Sherman’s army did $100 million worth of damage. “They say no living thing is found in Sherman’s track,” Mary Boykin Chesnut wrote, “only chimneys, like telegraph poles, to carry the news of [his] attack backwards.”

Terrifying to white southern civilians, Sherman was initially hostile to black southerners as well. In the interests of speed and efficiency, his army turned away many of the 18,000 slaves who flocked to it in Georgia, causing a number to be recaptured and reenslaved. This callous action caused such a scandal in Washington that Secretary of War Edwin Stanton arranged a special meeting in Georgia with Sherman and twenty African American ministers who spoke for the freed slaves. This meeting in itself was extraordinary: no one had ever before asked slaves what they wanted. Equally extraordinary was Sherman’s response in Special Field Order 15, issued in January 1865: he set aside more than 400,000 acres of Confederate land to be given to the freed slaves in forty-acre parcels. This was war of a kind that white southerners had never imagined.

Far to the North, a much smaller unimaginable event occurred in October, when twenty-six Confederate sympathizers invaded St. Albans, Vermont, robbing three banks, setting fires, killing a man—and then escaping over the border into Canada. When a Montreal magistrate released the men on a technicality, American military authorities threatened retaliation if Canadian authorities ever again allowed such an event. The St. Albans incident, minor in itself, caused both the British government and Canadian officials to think seriously about how to defend against the possibility of future American invasions. The answer was obvious: the Canadian provinces, which by 1860 stretched from one coast to the other, would need to be united. In 1867, all of the Canadian provinces joined in confederation and henceforth were known as the Dominion of Canada. In this way, a small Confederate pinprick helped to foster the unity of America’s large northern neighbor.

**The 1864 Election**

The war complicated the 1864 presidential election. Lincoln was renominated during a period when the war was going badly. Opposed by the Radicals, who thought he was
too conciliatory toward the South, and by Republican conservatives, who disapproved of the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln had little support within his own party.

In contrast, the Democrats had an appealing candidate: General George McClellan, a war hero (always a favorite with American voters) who was known to be sympathetic to the South. Democrats played shamelessly on the racist fears of the urban working class, accusing Republicans of being “negro-lovers” and warning that racial mixing lay ahead.

A deeply depressed Lincoln fully expected to lose the election. “I am going to be beaten,” he told an army officer in August 1864, “and unless some great change takes place badly beaten.” A great change did take place: Sherman captured Atlanta on September 2. Jubilation swept the North: some cities celebrated with 100-gun salutes. Lincoln won the election with 55 percent of the popular vote. Seventy-eight percent of the soldiers voted for him rather than for their former commander. The vote probably saved the Republican Party from extinction. Ordinary people and war-weary soldiers had voted to continue a difficult and divisive conflict. The election was important evidence of northern support for Lincoln’s policy of unconditional surrender for the South. There would be no negotiated peace; the war would continue.

**Nearing the End**

As Sherman devastated the lower South, Grant was locked in struggle with Lee in northern Virginia. Grant did not favor subtle strategies. He bluntly said, “The art of war is simple enough. Find out where your enemy is. Get at him as soon as you can. Strike at him as hard as you can, and keep moving on.” Following this plan, Grant eventually hammered Lee into submission, but at enormous cost. Lee had learned the art of defensive warfare (his troops called him “the King of Spades” because he made them dig trenches so often), and he inflicted heavy losses on
the Union army in a succession of bloody encounters in the spring and summer of 1864: almost 18,000 at the battle of the Wilderness, more than 8,000 at Spotsylvania, and 12,000 at Cold Harbor. At Cold Harbor, Union troops wrote their names and addresses on scraps of paper and pinned them to their backs, so certain were they of being killed or wounded in battle. Grim and terrible as Grant’s strategy was, it proved effective. Rather than pulling back after his failed assaults, he kept moving South, finally settling in for a prolonged siege of Lee’s forces at Petersburg. The North’s great advantage in population finally began to tell. There were more Union soldiers to replace those lost in battle, but there were no more white Confederates (see Map 16-6).

In desperation, the South turned to what had hitherto been unthinkable: arming slaves to serve as soldiers in the Confederate army. As Jefferson Davis said in February 1865, “We are reduced to choosing whether the negroes shall fight for or against us.” But—and this was the bitter irony—the African American soldiers and their families would have to be promised freedom or they would desert to the Union at the first chance they had. Even though Davis’s proposal had the support of General Robert E. Lee, the Confederate Congress balked at first. As one member said, the idea was “revolting to southern sentiment, southern pride, and southern honor.” Another candidly admitted, “If slaves make good soldiers our whole theory of slavery is wrong.” Finally, on March 13, the Confederate Congress authorized a draft of black soldiers—without mentioning freedom. Although two regiments of African American soldiers were immediately organized in Richmond, it was too late. The South never had to publicly acknowledge the paradox of having to offer slaves freedom so that they would fight to defend slavery.

By the spring of 1865, public support for the war simply disintegrated in the South. Starvation, inflation, dissension, and the prospect of military defeat were too much. In February, Jefferson Davis sent his vice president, Alexander Stephens, to negotiate terms at a peace conference at Hampton Roads. Lincoln would not countenance anything less than full surrender, although he did offer gradual emancipation with compensation for slave owners. Davis, however, insisted on southern independence at all costs. Consequently, the Hampton Roads conference failed and southern resistance faded away. In March 1865, Mary Boykin Chesnut recorded in her diary: “I am sure our army is silently dispersing. Men are going the wrong way all the time. They slip by now with no songs nor shouts. They have given the thing up.”

**APPOMATTOX**

Grant’s hammering tactics worked—slowly. In the spring of 1865, Lee and his remaining troops, outnumbered two to one, still held Petersburg and Richmond. Starving, short of ammunition, and losing men in battle or to desertion every day, Lee retreated from Petersburg on April 2. The Confederate government fled Richmond, stripping and burning the city. Seven days later, Lee and his 25,000 troops surrendered to Grant at Appomattox Court House. Grant treated Lee with great respect and set a historic precedent by giving the Confederate troops parole. This meant they could not subsequently be prosecuted for treason. Grant then sent the starving army on its way with three days’ rations for every man. Jefferson Davis, who had hoped to set up a new government in Texas, was captured in Georgia on May 10. The war was finally over.

**Map 16-4**

Lee’s troops entered Maryland and Pennsylvania in June 1863 in an effort to bring about a victory for the Confederates that would help it politically by persuading England and France to enter the war for the South and demand a Confederate-friendly settlement to the war. At the Battle of Gettysburg, the Confederates suffered huge casualties and were forced to retreat. The following day, Grant took Vicksburg, Mississippi. Together the two northern victories turned the tide of the war in favor of the North, by dash- ing hopes of support for the South from England and France, and by tempering a mounting movement in the North calling for peace. The North also tightened its grip on the South, with total control of the entire Mississippi River.

**MAP 16-6**

The Final Battles in Virginia 1864–65 In the war’s final phase early in 1865, Sherman closed one arm of a pincers by marching north from Savannah, while Grant attacked Lee’s last defensive positions in Petersburg and Richmond. Lee retreated from them on April 2 and surrendered at Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865.
Come and Join Us Brothers

This is a recruitment poster for the Massachusetts 54th Infantry regiment, one of the first official black regiments in the U.S. Army. Organized in March 1863, the 600-man unit led the charge against Fort Wagner, South Carolina, in July, resulting in 116 deaths, including that of the white commanding officer, Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, and many casualties. The bravery of the recruits at Fort Wagner and in other battles changed the minds of many Union officers, who had previously disparaged the fighting abilities of African Americans.

A general belief in African American inferiority was rampant in the North, but the army service of black men made a dent in white racism. Massachusetts enacted the first law forbidding discrimination against African Americans in public facilities. Some major cities, among them San Francisco, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and New York, desegregated their streetcars. Some states—Ohio, California, Illinois—repealed statutes that had barred black people from testifying in court or serving on juries.

COMPARE THE portraits of the men in this recruiting poster with the caricatures of African Americans shown in Chapter 13. What has changed? Frederick Douglass said, “Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters, U.S., let him get an eagle on his button and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket,” Douglass continued, and “there is no power on earth that can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship.” Was Douglass right?

Lithograph; ICHi-22051; “Come and join us brothers.” Civil War; Philadelphia, PA; ca. 1863. Creator P. S. Duval & Son. Chicago Historical Society.
Death of a President

Sensing that the war was near its end, Abraham Lincoln visited Grant’s troops when Lee withdrew from Petersburg on April 2. Thus it was that Lincoln came to visit Richmond, and to sit briefly in Jefferson Davis’s presidential office, soon after Davis had left it. As Lincoln walked the streets of the burned and pillaged city, black people poured out to see him and surround him, shouting “Glory to God! Glory! Glory! Glory!” Lincoln in turn, said to Admiral David Porter: “Thank God I have lived to see this. It seems to me that I have been dreaming a horrid dream for four years, and now the nightmare is gone.” Lincoln had only the briefest time to savor the victory. On the night of April 14, President and Mrs. Lincoln went to Ford’s Theater in Washington. There, Lincoln was shot at point-blank range by John Wilkes Booth, a Confederate sympathizer. He died.
the next day. For the people of the Union, the joy of victory was muted by mourning for their great leader. After a week of observances in Washington, Lincoln’s coffin was loaded on a funeral train that slowly carried him back to Springfield. All along the railroad route, day and night, in small towns and large, people gathered to see the train pass and to pay their last respects. At that moment, the Washington community and the larger Union community were one and the same.

The nation as a whole was left with Lincoln’s vision for the coming peace, expressed in the unforgettable words of his Second Inaugural Address:

> With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation’s wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

**CONCLUSION**

In 1865, a divided people had been forcibly reunited by battle. Their nation, the United States of America, had been permanently changed by civil war. Devastating losses among the young men of the country—the greatest such losses the nation was ever to suffer—would affect not only their families but all of postwar society. Politically, the deepest irony of the Civil War was that only by fighting it had America become completely a nation. For it was the war that broke down local isolation. Ordinary citizens in local communities, North and South, developed a national perspective as they sent their sons and brothers to be soldiers, their daughters to be nurses and teachers. Then, too, the federal government, vastly strengthened by wartime necessity, reached the lives of ordinary citizens more than ever before. The question now was whether this strengthened but divided national community, forged in battle, could create a just peace.

**AP* DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTION**

Directions: This exercise requires you to construct a valid essay that directly addresses the central issues of the following question. You will have to use facts from the documents provided and from the chapter to prove the position you take in your thesis statement.

Southerners believed that “King Cotton” and their own rich military tradition would lead the Confederacy to victory in a defensive war against the Union. What northern advantages and strategies upset this formula and led to a Confederate defeat?

**DOCUMENT A**

Examine the painting, “Departure of the Seventh Regiment, N.Y.S.M.” by George Hayward on page 533. This military unit left for Washington, D.C. on April 19, 1861, and would arrive in time to participate in the First Battle of Bull
Run. Compare it to the written account of by George Templeton Strong of the April 18, 1861 parade of the Sixth Massachusetts Regiment, also on page 533.

• Southern politicians claimed that the people of the North had no stomach for war. Do the painting and statement cited here back up that claim?

• At least here in the beginning, how did the northern public react to the attack on Fort Sumter and the attempted secession of the South?

**Document B**

Examine the maps on pages 542, 543, 544, 556, 558 and 559 of overall military strategy in the war. Look at the photo on page 561 of Richmond following its surrender in 1865.

• Why was the North far better prepared to wage war than the better trained officers and soldiers of the South?

Northern military strategy changed during the course of the war.

• How did it change and what did that mean for the South?

• How did superior Union naval power deprive the South of important advantages?

• When the Mississippi was finally brought entirely under Union control, how did that hurt the southern cause?

**Document C**

Without firing a gun, without drawing a sword, should [anyone] make war on us we could bring the whole world to our feet.... What would happen if no cotton was furnished for three years? I will not stop to depict what every one can imagine, but this is certain: England would topple headlong and carry the whole civilized world with her, save the South. No, you dare not make war on cotton. No power on earth dares to make war upon it. Cotton is king.

—Sen. James Henry Hammond (South Carolina), Speech Before the U.S. Senate, March 4, 1858.

Note: Southern leaders were convinced that if the North attacked the South and threatened the cotton flow to Europe, Britain and France would be forced to break any Union naval blockade, grant diplomatic recognition to the Confederacy, and perhaps form an alliance with the Confederacy.

• Why were the Confederate leaders so very wrong?

**Document D**

Seemingly very ordinary resources such as a multitude of wagons could be a vital advantage in wartime, as both the North and the South discovered. Wagons were vital to transportation of military supplies and the North had an unlimited capability to produce them, but the South could not. Even when the South had supplies of food and munitions to supply its armies, it frequently could not transport them. Railway carriages, iron rails, even wooden rail ties were vital resources that the South lacked. This would be an important advantage in the war for the North. The photo on the left is of the Union wagon park near Brady Station, Virginia, 1864.

• How could this serve as an advantage to the North that upset the southern belief that “King Cotton” would win the war?

• The advantages of the northern economy, including such resources as factories and industry (for weapons, textiles, shoes, and railroad supplies), shipbuilding, stronger and more diversified economy, larger population, and an established government to quickly make decisions during time of war

• The North’s decision to wage a more aggressive and offensive war, especially with the appointment of General Grant and his concept of “total war”

• The North’s plan for victory under Winfield Scott’s Anaconda Plan and what the plan called for

• How the North’s naval blockade prevented the Confederacy from exporting southern cotton (Document B)

• How Union control of the entire Mississippi River injured the southern war cause (Document B)

• The implications the Emancipation Proclamation on the both the North and South war goals (Document C)

• The dashed hopes of the South after the denial of European allies against the North (Document C)

• The seemingly infinite supply of northern raw materials and manufacturing capabilities compared to the lack of both in the Confederacy (Document D)

• How, despite the fact that it was pioneered by the South, ironclad naval vessels were an advantage for the North with their superior supply of raw materials, workers, factories, and manufacturing capabilities. Additionally, recapturing the Mississippi River and other waterways was easier with ironclad vessels. (Document E)
The USS *Saint Louis*, was a 512-ton Cairo class ironclad river gunboat used by the Union forces to recapture the Mississippi in 1862 and 1863. It was later renamed the USS *Baron de Kalb*. Although the Confederacy pioneered the introduction of the ironclad with the USS *Virginia*, the Union had the resources to produce such naval monsters in quantities and would use the concept to blockade Confederate harbors and recapture inland waterways like the Mississippi River.

**Why was this an advantage to the North?**

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**AP* PREP TEST**

Select the response that best answers each question or best completes each sentence.

1. An important federal agency that helped the Union soldiers during the Civil War was the:
   a. American Red Cross.
   b. Department of Health and Hospitals.
   c. Food and Drug Administration.
   d. Center for Disease Control.
   e. United States Sanitary Commission.

2. When President Lincoln called for volunteers following the surrender of Fort Sumter:
   a. very few men came forward to join in what they viewed as an unnecessary war.
   b. the Union army enlisted virtually every free African American who volunteered.
   c. New Englanders responded enthusiastically but other northerners did not.
   d. four additional slave states declared secession and joined the Confederacy.
   e. the Confederate army began enlisting every free African American who volunteered.

3. During the Civil War, President Lincoln:
   a. worked to ensure that all Americans enjoyed the constitutional protections of due process of law.
   b. occasionally violated Americans’ civil rights based on what he considered national security requirements.
   c. ordered that everybody who expressed any sympathy for the South should be drafted or imprisoned.
   d. totally disregarded the Constitution’s guarantee of due process of law and made the nation a dictatorship.
   e. structured that all slave holders in the border states be imprisoned without trial for the remainder of the war.

4. One of the guiding principles for Abraham Lincoln during the war was:
   a. complete and total destruction of the South as punishment for the conflict.
   b. to pursue the war vigorously despite what any northerners thought about him.
   c. obtaining reconciliation with the South to ensure the survival of the nation.
   d. to keep the federal government relatively small as it conducted the war.
   e. to conquer the South slowly so as to further punish them for their rebellious actions.

5. One result of national war-time policies was the:
   a. issuance of a national currency known as “Greenbacks.”
   b. incorporation of dozens of state banks to issue bank notes.
   c. determination by the government that all money had to be specie.
   d. decentralization of the banking industry to keep state banks solvent.
   e. collapse of national banks so as to require British financial assistance.

6. King Cotton Diplomacy:
   a. was the Union’s all-out war effort to destroy all of the South’s cotton-producing capability.
   b. allowed the Confederacy to earn millions of dollars to finance its conduct of the Civil War.
   c. was successful until 1864 when the Union blockade finally cut off southern commerce.
   d. allowed the Confederacy to export cotton in exchange for the release of southern slaves.
   e. was the basis for the South’s mistaken belief that England would recognize the Confederacy.

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**Answer Key**

1-E 4-C 7-B 10-A 13-C
2-D 5-A 8-D 11-B 14-D
3-B 6-E 9-E 12-A

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Naval Historical Foundation, Courtesy of Dr. Oscar Parkes, London, England, 1936
7. Crucial to the Union’s ultimate victory was:
   a. the rapid defeat and occupation of Texas.
   b. its campaigns along the Mississippi River.
   c. recapturing the Ohio River Valley.
   d. the early defeat of Stand Watie.
   e. preventing Confederate forces on the Erie Canal.

8. President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation:
   a. shortly after the war began in order to be able to
      enlist former slaves into the federal army.
   b. because he had always planned to end slavery in the
      South as soon as he had the opportunity.
   c. once federal forces under William Tecumseh
      Sherman had begun to occupy the Deep South.
   d. because war-time necessities required that the
      conflict become an effort to end slavery.
   e. to encourage Union border states to emancipate
      their slaves, as stated in the Proclamation.

9. During the Civil War:
   a. African Americans served as combat troops for the first
      time in U.S. history.
   b. northern racism prevented any African Americans
      from serving as combat troops.
   c. on both sides African Americans were only allowed to
      perform tedious manual labor.
   d. southern prejudice meant that slaves could not work
      on the Confederate war effort.
   e. African Americans and women served in a variety of
      capacities for the Union forces.

10. One result of the Civil War for most Americans was:
    a. economic difficulties because of inflation.
    b. they got rich quick selling war supplies.
    c. rapidly increasing wages for civilian workers.
    d. the total loss of all of their life savings.
    e. the economic difficulties cause by deflation.

11. During the Civil War:
    a. most northerners protested against conscription laws
       because they believed the war was immoral and
       should end quickly.
    b. resistance to conscription revealed that there were
       deep class resentments and sharp racial differences
       in the United States.
    c. southern patriotism was so strong that folks in the
       Confederacy never questioned the government’s policies
       on conscription.
    d. the New York Draft Riots were so successful that they
       led to a sharp drop in the number of people who
       supported the war.
    e. the support of universal conscription demonstrated
       that the northern patriotism never questioned the
       fairness of the government’s policies on conscription.

12. Two significant events that made 1863 a turning point
    in the war were:
    a. the federal victory at Gettysburg and the Union’s capture
       of Vicksburg.
    b. the occupation of Atlanta and William T. Sherman’s March to the Sea.
    c. the Union’s control of New Orleans and the fall of Nashville, Tennessee.
    d. Ulysses S. Grant’s victory at Antietam and Robert E. Lee’s
       retreat to Virginia.
    e. the Union victory at Fredericksburg and the Battle of the Wilderness.

13. General Ulysses S. Grant’s approach to conducting the war was:
    a. to inflict casualties on the enemy but to suffer few
       losses in his own army.
    b. to surround enemy positions and then choke them
       off without a major battle.
    c. to pursue unconditional victory aggressively despite
       the cost to his own forces.
    d. to command the overall effort from Washington, D.C., while other generals led armies.
    e. to cut off the enemies supply line and lay siege on the army, starving them out.

14. A fundamental question facing the United States in
    1865 was:
    a. what to do about the localism still present in much
       of America.
    b. to make sure that the national government wasn’t
       too powerful.
    c. whether the United States would ever be a true nation.
    d. the nature of the peace that would follow the deadly war.
    e. to make certain that the federal government was not
       too weak.