

Confederate forces fought for control of the rivers, since the Mississippi River and its tributaries were key components of the Union's Anaconda Plan. One of the deadliest of these clashes occurred along the Tennessee River at the Battle of Shiloh on April 6–7, 1862. This battle, lasting only two days, was the costliest single battle in American history up to that time. The Union victory shocked both the Union and the Confederacy with approximately twenty-three thousand casualties, a number that exceeded casualties from all of the United States' previous wars combined.¹⁹ The subsequent capture of New Orleans by Union forces proved a heavy blow to the Confederacy and capped an 1862 spring of success in the Western Theater.

The Union and Confederate navies helped or hindered army movements around the many marine environments of the southern United



The creation of black regiments was another kind of innovation during the Civil War. Northern free blacks and newly freed slaves joined together under the leadership of white officers to fight for the Union cause. This novelty was not only beneficial for the Union war effort; it also showed the Confederacy that the Union sought to destroy the foundational institution (slavery) on which their nation was built. William Morris Smith, *[District of Columbia. Company E, 4th U.S. Colored Infantry, at Fort Lincoln]*, between 1863 and 1866. Library of Congress.

States. Each navy employed the latest technology to outmatch the other. The Confederate navy, led by Stephen Russell Mallory, had the unenviable task of constructing a fleet from scratch and trying to fend off a vastly better equipped Union navy. Led by Gideon Welles of Connecticut, the Union navy successfully implemented General-in-Chief Winfield Scott's Anaconda Plan. The future of naval warfare also emerged in the spring of 1862 as two "ironclad" warships fought a duel at Hampton Roads, Virginia. The age of the wooden sail was gone and naval warfare would be fundamentally altered. While advances in naval technology ruled the seas, African Americans on the ground were complicating Union war aims to an even greater degree.

By the summer of 1862, the actions of black Americans were pushing the Union toward a full-blown war of emancipation.²⁰ Following the First Confiscation Act, in April 1862, Congress abolished the institution of slavery in the District of Columbia. In July 1862, Congress passed the Second Confiscation Act, effectively emancipating slaves that came under Union control. Word traveled fast among enslaved people, and this legislation led to even more runaways making their way into Union lines. Abraham Lincoln's thinking began to evolve. By the summer of 1862, Lincoln first floated the idea of an Emancipation Proclamation to members of his cabinet. By August 1862, he proposed the first iteration of the Emancipation Proclamation. While his cabinet supported such an idea, secretary of state William Seward insisted that Lincoln wait for a "decisive" Union victory so the proclamation would not appear too desperate a measure on the part of a failing government.

This decisive moment that prompted the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation occurred in the fall of 1862 along Antietam Creek in Maryland. Emboldened by their success in the previous spring and summer, Lee and Confederate president Jefferson Davis planned to win a decisive victory in Union territory and end the war. On September 17, 1862, McClellan's and Lee's forces collided at the Battle of Antietam near the town of Sharpsburg. This battle was the first major battle of the Civil War to occur on Union soil. It remains the bloodiest single day in American history: over twenty thousand soldiers were killed, wounded, or missing.

Despite the Confederate withdrawal and the high death toll, the Battle of Antietam was not a decisive Union victory. It did, however, result in enough of a victory for Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed slaves in areas under Confederate control. There were





This African American family dressed in their finest clothes (including a USCT uniform) for this photograph, projecting respectability and dignity that was at odds with the southern perception of black Americans. [*Unidentified African American soldier in Union uniform with wife and two daughters*], between 1863 and 1865. Library of Congress.

significant exemptions to the Emancipation Proclamation, including the border states and parts of other states in the Confederacy. A far cry from a universal end to slavery, the Emancipation Proclamation nevertheless proved vital, shifting the war's aims from simple union to emancipation. Framing it as a war measure, Lincoln and his cabinet hoped that stripping the Confederacy of its labor force would not only debilitate the southern economy but also weaken Confederate morale. Furthermore, the Battle of Antietam and the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation all but ensured that the Confederacy would not be recognized by European powers. Nevertheless, Confederates continued fighting. Union and Confederate forces clashed again at Fredericksburg, Virginia, in December 1862. This Confederate victory resulted in staggering Union casualties.

IV. War for Emancipation 1863–1865

As Union armies penetrated deeper into the Confederacy, politicians and generals came to understand the necessity and benefit of enlisting black men in the army and navy. Although a few commanders began forming black units in 1862, such as Massachusetts abolitionist Thomas Wentworth Higginson's First South Carolina Volunteers (the first regiment of black soldiers), widespread enlistment did not occur until the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect on January 1, 1863. "And I further declare and make known," Lincoln's proclamation read, "that such persons of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service."²¹

The language describing black enlistment indicated Lincoln's implicit desire to segregate African American troops from the main campaigning armies of white soldiers. "I believe it is a resource which, if vigorously applied now, will soon close the contest. It works doubly, weakening the enemy and strengthening us," Lincoln remarked in August 1863 about black soldiering.²² Although more than 180,000 black men (10 percent of the Union army) served during the war, the majority of United States Colored Troops (USCT) remained stationed behind the lines as garrison forces, often laboring and performing noncombat roles.

Black soldiers in the Union army endured rampant discrimination and earned less pay than white soldiers, while also facing the possibility of being murdered or sold into slavery if captured. James Henry Gooding, a black corporal in the famed 54th Massachusetts Volunteers, wrote to Abraham Lincoln in September 1863, questioning why he and his fellow volunteers were paid less than white men. Gooding argued that because he and his brethren were born in the United States and selflessly left their private lives to enter the army, they should be treated "as American SOLDIERS, not as menial hirelings."²³

African American soldiers defied the inequality of military service and used their positions in the army to reshape society, North and South. The majority of the USCT had once been enslaved, and their presence as armed, blue-clad soldiers sent shock waves throughout the Confederacy. To their friends and families, African American soldiers symbolized the embodiment of liberation and the destruction of slavery. To white southerners, they represented the utter disruption of the Old South's racial and social hierarchy. As members of armies of occupation, black soldiers



wielded martial authority in towns and plantations. At the end of the war, as a black soldier marched by a cluster of Confederate prisoners, he noticed his former master among the group. “Hello, massa,” the soldier exclaimed, “bottom rail on top dis time!”²⁴

Two Brothers in Arms. Library of Congress.

The majority of the USCT occupied the South by performing garrison duty; other black soldiers performed admirably on the battlefield, shattering white myths that docile, cowardly black men would fold in the maelstrom of war. Black troops fought in more than four hundred battles and skirmishes, including Milliken’s Bend and Port Hudson, Louisiana; Fort Wagner, South Carolina; Nashville; and the final campaigns to capture Richmond, Virginia. Fifteen black soldiers received the Medal of Honor, the highest honor bestowed for military heroism. Through their voluntarism, service, battlefield contributions, and even death, black soldiers laid their claims for citizenship. “Once let a black man get upon his person the brass letters U.S.” Frederick Douglass, the great black abolitionist, proclaimed, “and there is no power on earth which can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship.”²⁵

Many slaves accompanied their masters in the Confederate army. They served their masters as “camp servants,” cooking their meals, raising their tents, and carrying their supplies. The Confederacy also impressed slaves to perform manual labor. There are three important points to make about these “Confederate” slaves. First, their labor was almost always coerced. Second, people are complicated and have varying, often contradictory loyalties. A slave could hope in general that the Confederacy would lose but at the same time be concerned for the safety of his master and the Confederate soldiers he saw on a daily basis.

Finally, white Confederates did not see African Americans as their equals, much less as soldiers. There was never any doubt that black laborers and camp servants were property. Though historians disagree on the matter, it is a stretch to claim that not a single African American ever fired a gun for the Confederacy; a camp servant whose master died in battle might well pick up his dead master's gun and continue firing, if for no other reason than to protect himself. But this was always on an informal basis. The Confederate government did, in an act of desperation, pass a law in March 1865 allowing for the enlistment of black soldiers, but only a few dozen African Americans (mostly Richmond hospital workers) had enlisted by the war's end.

As 1863 dawned, Lee's Army of Northern Virginia continued its offensive strategy in the East. One of the war's major battles occurred near the village of Chancellorsville, Virginia, between April 30 and May 6, 1863. While the Battle of Chancellorsville was an outstanding Confederate victory, it also resulted in heavy casualties and the mortal wounding of Confederate major general "Stonewall" Jackson, who was killed by friendly fire.

In spite of Jackson's death, Lee continued his offensive against federal forces and invaded Pennsylvania in the summer of 1863. During the three-day battle (July 1–3) at Gettysburg, heavy casualties crippled both sides. Yet the devastating July 3 infantry assault on the Union center, also known as Pickett's Charge, caused Lee to retreat from Pennsylvania. The Gettysburg Campaign was Lee's final northern incursion and the Battle of Gettysburg remains the bloodiest battle of the war, and in American history, with fifty-one thousand casualties.

Concurrently in the West, Union forces continued their movement along the Mississippi River and its tributaries. Grant launched his campaign against Vicksburg, Mississippi, in the winter of 1862. Known as the "Gibraltar of the West," Vicksburg was the last holdout in the West, and its seizure would enable uninhibited travel for Union forces along the Mississippi River. Grant's Vicksburg Campaign, which lasted until July 4, 1863, ended with the city's surrender. The fall of Vicksburg split the Confederacy in two.

Despite Union success in the summer of 1863, discontent over the war simmered across the North. This was particularly true in the wake of the Enrollment Act—the first effort at a draft among the northern populace during the Civil War. Working-class northerners were especially angry that the wealthy could pay \$300 for substitutes, sparing themselves from the carnage of war. "A rich man's war, but a poor man's fight," was a popular



refrain.²⁶ The Emancipation Proclamation convinced many immigrants in northern cities that freed people would soon take their jobs. These economic and racial anxieties culminated in the New York City Draft Riots in July 1863. Over the span of four days, white rioters killed some 120 citizens, including the lynching of at least eleven black New Yorkers. Property damage was in the millions, including the complete destruction of more than fifty properties—most notably that of the Colored Orphan Asylum. It was the largest civil disturbance to date in the United States (aside from the war itself) and was only stopped by the deployment of Union soldiers, some of whom came directly from the battlefield at Gettysburg.

Elsewhere, the North produced widespread displays of unity. Sanitary fairs originated in the Old Northwest and raised millions of dollars for Union soldiers. Indeed, many women rose to take pivotal leadership roles in the sanitary fairs—a clear contribution to the northern war effort. The fairs also encouraged national unity within the North—something that became more important as the war dragged on and casualties continued to mount. The northern homefront was complicated: overt displays of loyalty contrasted with violent dissent.

A similar situation played out in the Confederacy. The Confederate Congress passed its first conscription act in the spring of 1862, a full year

Thomas Nast, “Our Heroines, United States Sanitary Commission,” in *Harper’s Weekly*, April 9, 1864. Cushing/Whitney Medical Library at Yale University.



before its northern counterpart. Military service was required from all able-bodied males between ages eighteen and thirty-five (eventually extended to forty-five). Notable class exemptions likewise existed in the Confederacy: those who owned twenty or more slaves could escape the draft. Popular discontent reached a boiling point in 1863. Through the spring of 1863 consistent food shortages led to “bread riots” in several Confederate cities, most notably Richmond, Virginia, and the Georgia cities of Augusta, Macon, and Columbus. Confederate women led these mobs to protest food shortages and rampant inflation within the Confederate South. Exerting their own political control, women dramatically impacted the war through violent actions in these cases, as well as constant petitions to governors for aid and the release of husbands from military service. One of these women wrote a letter to North Carolina governor Zebulon Vance, saying, “Especially for the sake of suffering women and children, do try and stop this cruel war.”²⁷ Confederates waged a multi-front struggle against Union incursion and internal dissent.

For some women, the best way to support their cause was spying on the enemy. When the war broke out, Rose O’Neal Greenhow was living in Washington, D.C., where she traveled in high social circles, gathering information for her Confederate contact. Suspecting Greenhow of espionage, Allan Pinkerton placed her under surveillance, instigated a raid on her house to gather evidence, and then placed her under house arrest, after which she was incarcerated in Old Capitol Prison. Upon her release, she was sent, under guard, to Baltimore, Maryland. From there Greenhow went to Europe to attempt to bring support to the Confederacy. Failing in her efforts, Greenhow decided to return to America, boarding the blockade runner *Condor*, which ran aground near Wilmington, North Carolina. Subsequently, she drowned after her lifeboat capsized in a storm. Greenhow gave her life for the Confederate cause, while Elizabeth “Crazy Bet” Van Lew sacrificed her social standing for the Union. Van Lew was from a prominent Richmond, Virginia, family and spied on the Confederacy, leading to her being “held in contempt & scorn by the narrow minded men and women of my city for my loyalty.”²⁸ Indeed, when General Ulysses Grant took control of Richmond, he placed a special guard on Van Lew. In addition to her espionage activities, Van Lew also acted as a nurse to Union prisoners in Libby Prison. For pro-Confederate southern women, there were more opportunities to show their scorn for the enemy. Some women in New Orleans took these demonstrations to the level of dumping their chamber pots onto the heads of unsuspecting federal soldiers who stood underneath their balconies,

