

The Civil War

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

In 1861, enthusiasm for the Civil War ran high on both sides. The North fought to restore the Union, which Lincoln declared could never be broken. The Confederacy, which by the summer of 1861 consisted of 11 southern states, fought for the continuation of slavery and state sovereignty.

Although Northerners and Southerners both anticipated that the conflict would be settled quickly, it soon became clear that no resolution was in sight. Moreover, the war highlighted the different paths of economic development that the North and South had traveled since the early 19th century and their relative effectiveness in supporting war efforts.

This tutorial examines the Civil War in four parts:

1. The Balance Sheet

At the onset of the Civil War, many believed that a single battle would decide the contest. For this reason, both sides watched closely on July 21, 1861, when Union and Confederate armies clashed at Bull Run Creek, near the town of Manassas, Virginia, 30 miles from Washington, D.C. Confederate forces carried the day in the **First Battle of Bull Run**, ending Union hopes of a quick, decisive victory.



TERM TO KNOW

First Battle of Bull Run

The first significant engagement of the Civil War, which resulted in a Confederate victory. The First Battle of Bull Run made it clear that the Union would not defeat the Confederacy easily, even though most comparisons favored the Union.

The Union had a larger population than the Confederacy. Bolstered by European immigration, the Union had extensive reserves to draw upon for its army.

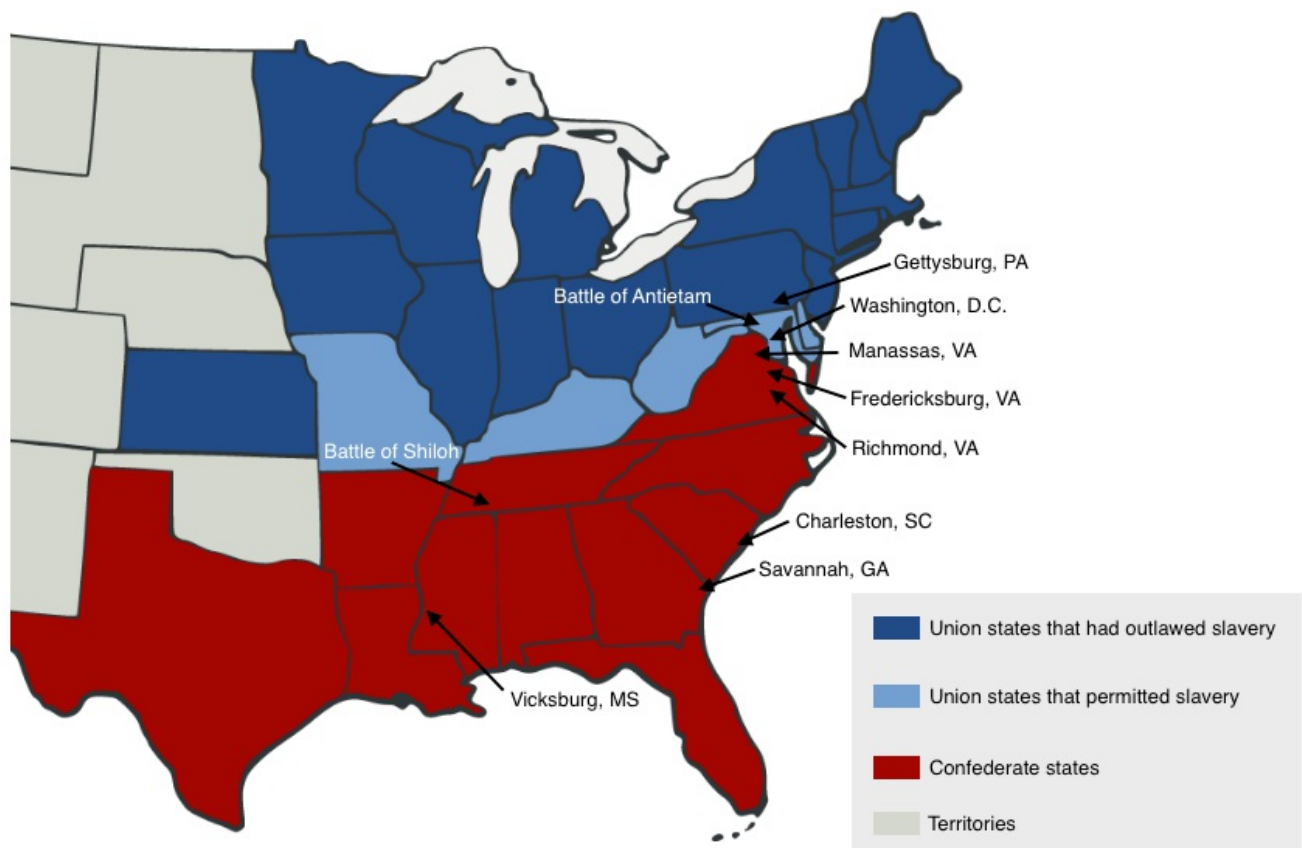
➞ **EXAMPLE** In 1860, the population of the Union, including the border states that remained loyal, was 22 million. The population of the Confederacy was 9 million, 3.5 million of whom were enslaved. The North's manufacturing facilities made it better able to produce war materials. Infrastructure development throughout the region, particularly railroads, enabled the Union to transport goods and people more quickly than the Confederacy.

Northern agriculture provided another advantage. The best land in the South was devoted to raising cotton and other cash crops, while Northern farms supplied civilians and troops with food throughout the war.

The focus of Southern agriculture on cotton, which secessionists believed would provide an advantage to their economy and war effort, soon proved to be a significant liability. When Lincoln ordered a naval blockade on the Confederacy in 1861, Southerners found it difficult to export cotton and import manufactured goods. Unlike the northeastern states, the Confederacy lacked a substantial manufacturing base, and an extensive railroad infrastructure to move men and supplies.

The Confederacy did have the advantage of fighting a defensive war. It covered an area of over half a million square miles, with borders that extended from Virginia to Texas: a huge amount of territory for the Union to subdue. As a result, the Union required long supply lines to sustain its forces, which could be difficult to maintain. Union soldiers also had to fight on unfamiliar ground and contend with hostile civilians. Most importantly, the Union army would have to defeat the Confederate army and pacify a region that was attempting to leave the United States—a daunting job for any nation, no matter its advantages.

2. Stalemate in the East, Gains in the West



During 1861 and 1862, Confederate and Union forces fought in Virginia, with neither side gaining the upper hand. Losses during the battles of Seven Days, Second Bull Run, and Fredericksburg prevented the Union **Army of the Potomac** from capturing the Confederate capital of Richmond.



TERM TO KNOW

Army of the Potomac

The Union military force that operated outside Washington, D.C.

However, the Army of the Potomac did turn back a Confederate invasion of Maryland at the **Battle of Antietam** on September 17, 1862.



TERM TO KNOW

Battle of Antietam

The deadliest day of the Civil War, in which the Army of the Potomac turned back a Confederate invasion of Maryland.



DID YOU KNOW

More Americans died during the Battle of Antietam than on any other day in American history. Historians estimate that approximately 4,000 men died during the battle, and another 18,000 were wounded.

Many of the Union's early victories were won west of the Appalachian Mountains, in the Mississippi River Valley. Following a Union victory at the Battle of Shiloh in Tennessee (April 1862), General **Ulysses S. Grant's Army of the West** concentrated its efforts on securing control of the Mississippi River. Doing so would split the Confederacy in two and deprive it of a vital water route.



PEOPLE TO KNOW

Ulysses S. Grant

General of the Union's Army of the West in the early years of the Civil War; later the commander of the entire Union war effort who accepted Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House, Virginia in 1865.



TERM TO KNOW

Army of the West

The Union military force that fought in Kentucky, Tennessee, and the Mississippi River Valley. The Union Navy also focused on the Mississippi River. In April 1862, the Navy, under Admiral David Farragut, captured New Orleans, Louisiana. In June of 1862, Union naval forces captured Memphis, Tennessee.

Stalemate in the East kept the Union from capturing Richmond and achieving a speedy victory. However, the fall of New Orleans and Memphis were significant losses for the Confederacy west of the Appalachian Mountains.

3. Mobilization

The longer the Civil War continued, the more the Confederacy and the Union had to draw on their resources.

3a. Confederate Mobilization

After the initial outburst of enthusiasm for the war passed, and the number of volunteers fell, the Confederate government instituted a military draft in April of 1862. All White men between the ages of 18 and 35 were required to serve in the Confederate armed forces for three years. All states were required to participate in the draft.

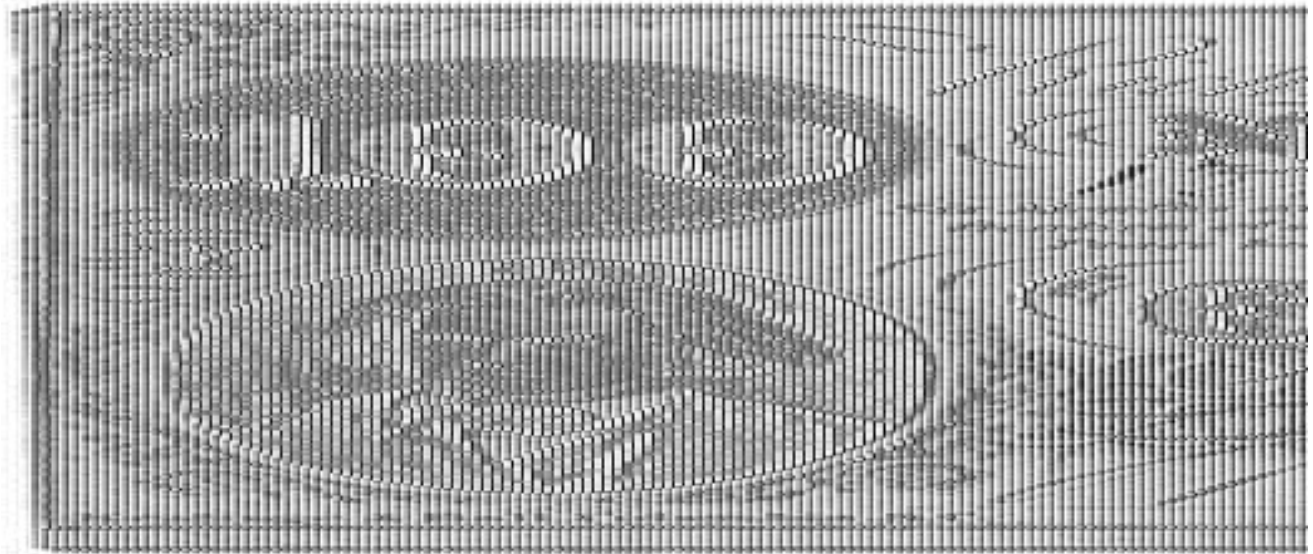


DID YOU KNOW

The Confederate draft included loopholes that favored slaveholders. The "twenty-negro" provision

exempted one White man from military service for every 20 enslaved people on a plantation. Many overseers and plantation owners avoided military service in this way.

The Confederate government struggled to finance its war efforts. Despite its desperate need for revenue, the Confederate Congress refused to levy high taxes on enslaved people or cotton, in an attempt to placate wealthy plantation owners. The government also resorted to printing a large amount of paper money, which led to runaway inflation.



The Confederacy began to print paper money at an accelerated rate, causing runaway inflation and an economy in which many were unable to afford food and other essential goods.



DID YOU KNOW

The Confederate government issued approximately \$1.5 billion in paper money during the Civil War.

By the spring of 1863, food prices soared throughout the Confederacy, and many people, including formerly wealthy Southerners, faced deprivation and starvation. In April of 1863, thousands of hungry people rioted in Richmond, Virginia. Many were mothers who could not feed their children. The riot ended when President Davis threatened to order Confederate forces to fire on the crowds.

One important factor that limited the Confederacy's ability to mobilize was its reliance on cotton. At the onset of the war, the Confederate government believed that Great Britain and France, both of which purchased Southern cotton for their textile mills, would continue to do so. They further hoped that these two countries would loan the Confederacy the money it needed to fight the Union. These hopes did not materialize for a number of reasons:

- The Union blockade made trade with Europe difficult.
- The United States was an important exporter of grain to Europe, as well as a significant purchaser of European manufactured goods. European nations did not want to alienate the Union by openly supporting the Confederacy.



Rampant inflation in the 1860s made food too expensive for many Southerners, leading to widespread starvation and occasional rioting.

- European nations found other sources of cotton. While the Civil War in America was being fought, Great Britain encouraged cotton cultivation in Egypt and India.

Disagreements between Confederate leaders hindered the country's ability to mobilize. Several politicians, who insisted upon the sovereignty of individual Confederate states, resented the Confederate government's attempts to conscript troops, impose taxes, or requisition resources necessary for the war. In addition, class division among White Southerners divided the Confederacy.

➔ **EXAMPLE** Poor White people resented the loopholes written into the draft that enabled wealthy slaveholders and overseers to avoid military service.

Racial tensions also plagued the Confederacy. Confederate armies conscripted thousands of African Americans as laborers, but slaveholders resisted the enlistment of enslaved people as soldiers and worried about enslaved insurrections.



DID YOU KNOW

The Confederacy would not authorize the arming of African Americans until March of 1865, one month before significant fighting ended.

Failure to effectively mobilize and maintain their armed forces and economy, combined with the persistence of traditional class and racial divisions, exposed the inability of a government founded upon state sovereignty and racial slavery to wage war successfully.

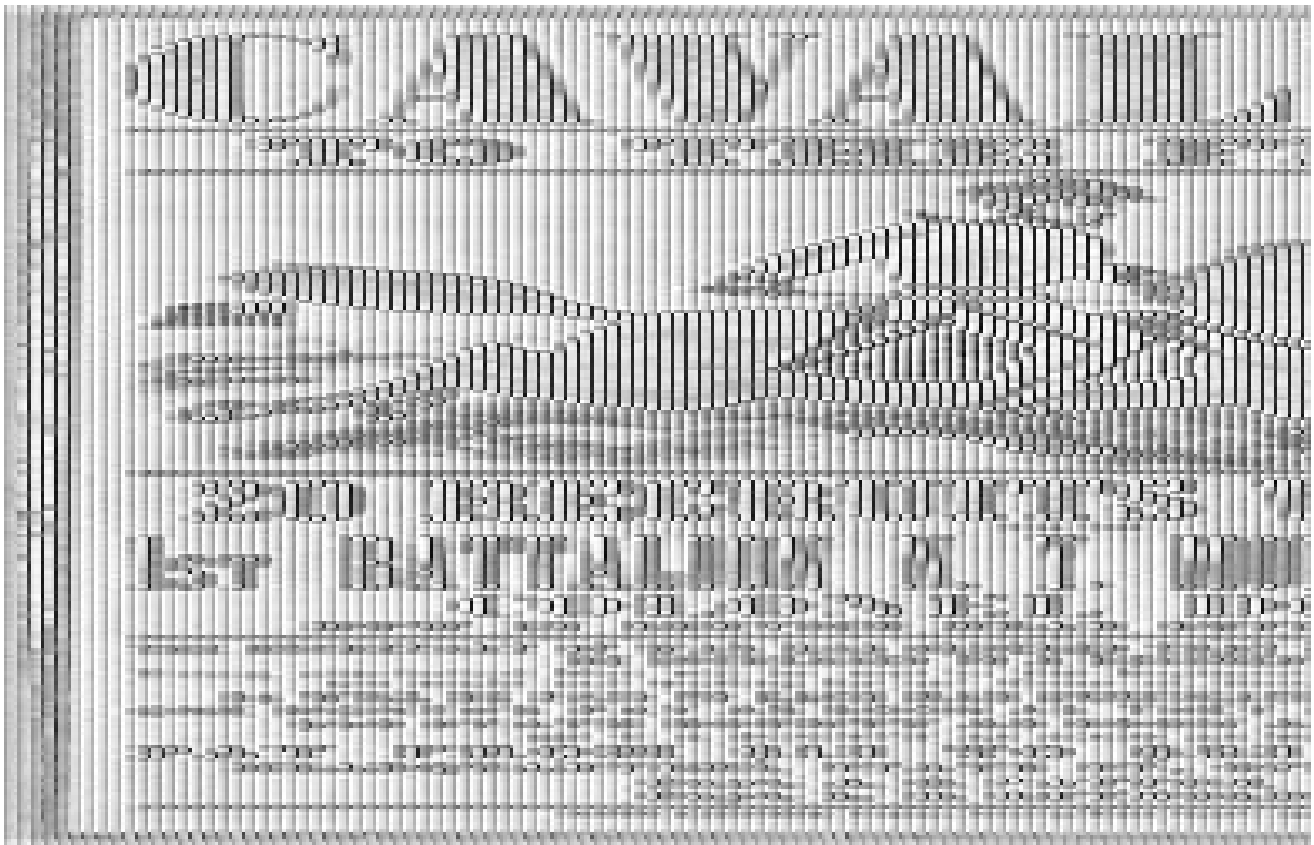
3b. Union Mobilization

Like the Confederacy, the Union turned to a military draft when enthusiasm for the war and, consequently, the number of volunteers, waned. In March of 1863, Congress passed the Enrollment Act, which required all unmarried men between the ages of 20 and 25, and all married men between the ages of 35 and 45—including immigrants who had applied for citizenship—to register for service. All who registered were considered available for military service, and draftees were selected by a lottery.



DID YOU KNOW

Like the Confederate system, the Union draft had loopholes. For example, one could avoid enlistment by paying \$300 to the federal government. The federal government also provided financial incentives to encourage individuals to enlist without having to wait for the draft.



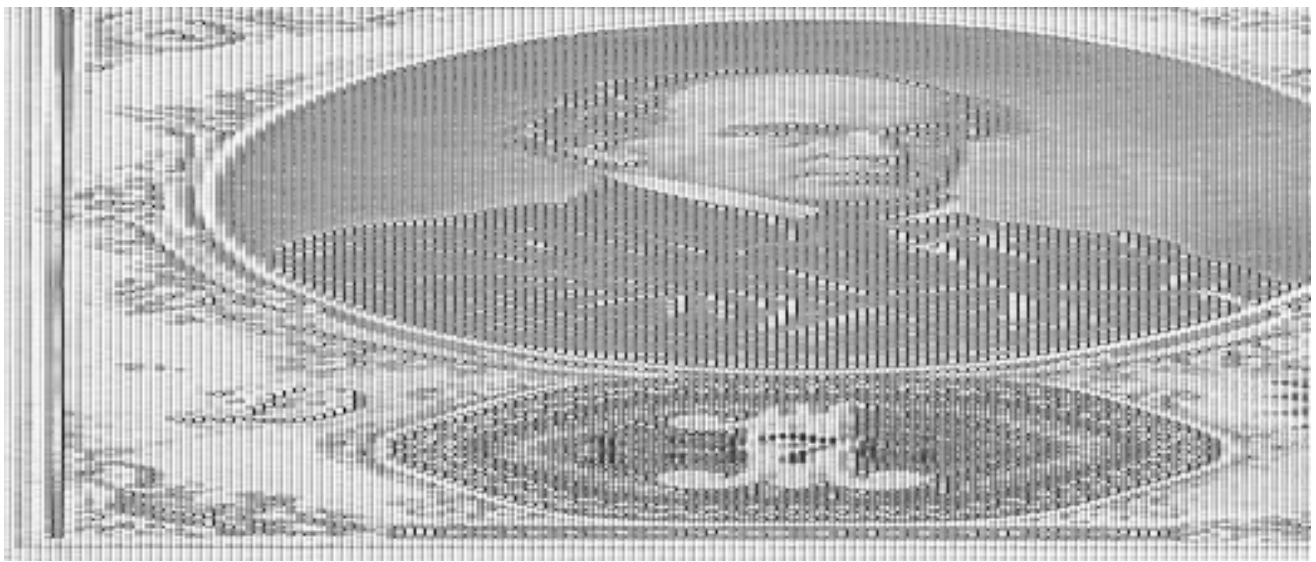
The Union provided incentives, in the form of bounties, for draft-age men to enlist without waiting for the draft, as shown in recruitment posters (a) and (b).

Unlike the Confederacy, the Union was able to finance its war efforts in several ways.

- Federal taxes, including an income tax (the first in American history) and a tax on all inheritances
- High tariffs, which protected Northern manufacturing from cheap imports and encouraged economic development
- Government contracts with major producers of food, weapons, and other necessary materials, stimulated production and guaranteed supplies for Union military forces.

The Union also enacted a series of laws that stabilized the money supply and formed the foundation of a modern banking system.

- In 1862, Congress passed the Legal Tender Act, which authorized the federal government to print paper money (also known as **greenbacks**) that citizens could use in almost all private and public monetary transactions.
- Between 1863 and 1864, Congress passed a series of National Bank Acts, which allowed the U.S. Treasury to issue war bonds to help finance the war effort, and which created a national system of chartered banks.



The Union began printing these paper “greenbacks” to use as legal tender as one of its strategies for funding the war effort.



TERM TO KNOW

Greenbacks

Paper money the Union issued during the Civil War.

Due to the activism of the federal government during the Civil War, virtually every sector of the Northern economy was linked to the war effort. The everyday lives of citizens were impacted through measures such as the draft or taxation. Government contracts with major suppliers ensured that the Union's armed forces were well-supplied.

Additional Resources

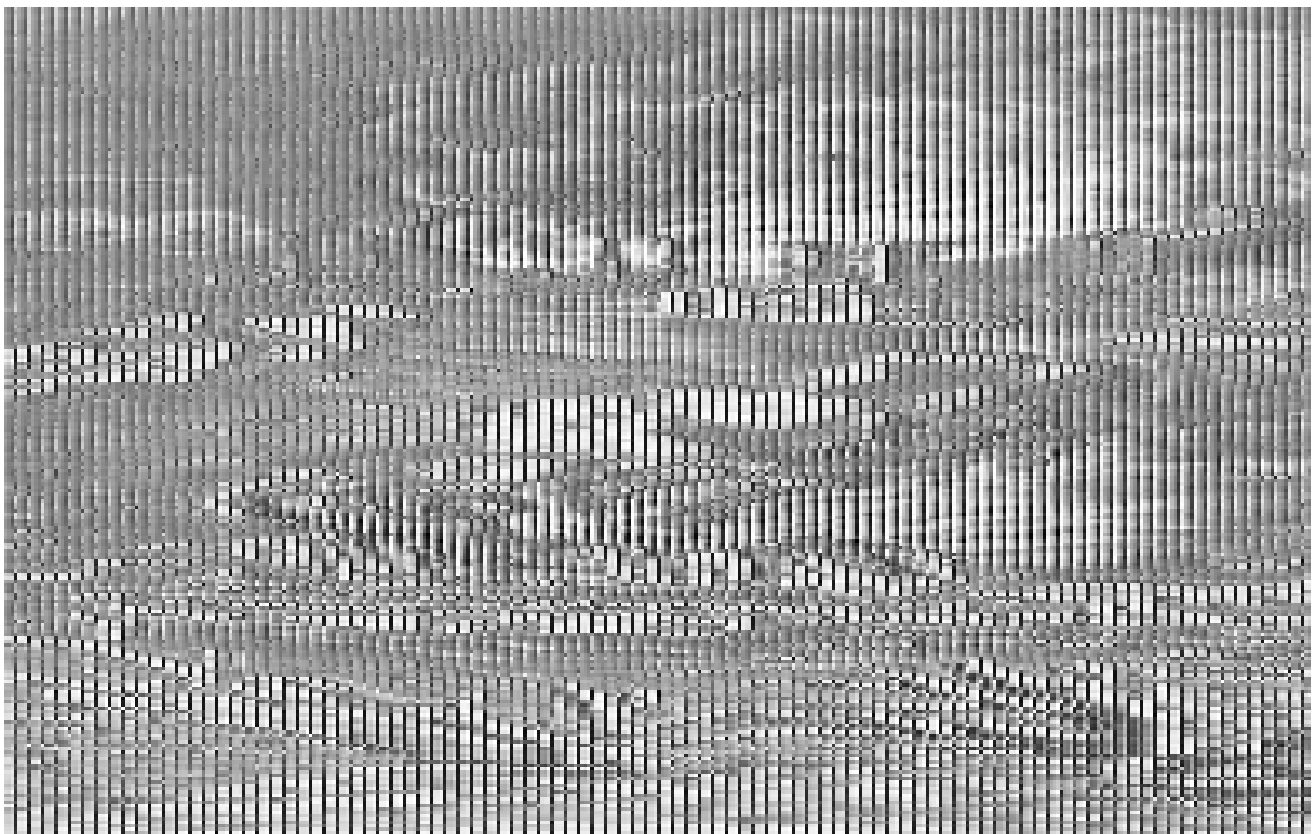
Explore the experiences of people in two different communities—one northern and one southern—during the American Civil War, at the [Valley of the Shadow Project](#).

4. Turning Points

Two key battles in the summer of 1863 turned the tide of the war in favor of the Union.

In the spring of 1863, after taking New Orleans and Memphis, the Union Army of the West attempted to secure the Mississippi River by capturing Vicksburg, Mississippi, a commercial center located on bluffs above the Mississippi River.

After several failed attempts to capture the city (including an attempt to divert the Mississippi River by way of a canal), Grant's army initiated a siege of **Vicksburg** in April of 1863. The siege continued through June. Some Vicksburg residents hid in caves to protect themselves from constant Union bombardment; some were forced to eat their pets to stay alive. On July 3rd, after more than a month of siege, Confederate forces in the city (30,000 in all) surrendered. Grant's victory inflicted a serious blow on the Southern war effort and, by securing control of the Mississippi River, the Union had split the Confederacy in two.



In this illustration, Union gun boats fire on Vicksburg in the campaign that helped the Union win control of the Mississippi River.



TERM TO KNOW

Vicksburg

A city on the Mississippi River captured by the Union on July 3, 1863, securing control of the Mississippi River.

As Grant and his forces pounded Vicksburg, Confederate strategists, at the urging of General **Robert E. Lee**, commander of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia (who had recently defeated the Union Army of the Potomac at Chancellorsville, Virginia in May of 1863) formed a bold plan to invade the North. Confederate leaders hoped the invasion would force the Union to send troops east from Vicksburg, reducing its chances of capturing and controlling the river. They also hoped that the campaign would weaken the Union's resolve and encourage it to negotiate for peace.



PEOPLE TO KNOW

Robert E. Lee

General of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia during the Civil War.

In June of 1863, Lee's army moved north into Maryland. The Army of the Potomac marched northward as well, in search of Lee's army. They met at a small town in southern Pennsylvania. The subsequent **Battle of Gettysburg** of July 1–3, 1863, involving approximately 165,000 soldiers, was the biggest and costliest battle ever fought in North America.



TERM TO KNOW

Battle of Gettysburg

The biggest and costliest battle ever fought in North America, resulting in a Union victory that turned back a Confederate invasion of the North.

The climax of the battle occurred on July 3rd when Lee ordered a frontal assault (led by General George Pickett) against the Union lines, which were entrenched on Cemetery Ridge. Approximately 15,000 Confederate soldiers took part in what became known as “Pickett’s Charge”; more than half lost their lives as they advanced across an open field to attack the Union forces, only to be turned back.

Casualties during the battle were immense: approximately 23,000 for the Union and 28,000 for the Confederacy. Lee’s army escaped southward, but the simultaneous defeats at Vicksburg and Gettysburg dealt a heavy blow to the Confederacy and gave the Union hope that the tide had turned in its favor.



SUMMARY

When the Civil War began, many in the Union and the Confederacy believed that a short, decisive confrontation in 1861 would end the conflict. After the First Battle of Bull Run, however, it became clear that those expectations would not be met. As the war continued, both sides realized that they had to mobilize for total war. Mobilization proved to be a challenge for the Confederacy, a nation founded on state sovereignty and slavery. The Union mobilized effectively and kept its armies well-supplied. Mobilization efforts would prove decisive by the summer of 1863 when success at Vicksburg gave the Union control of the Mississippi River and victory at Gettysburg ended an attempted Confederate invasion of the North.

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TERMS TO KNOW

Army of the Potomac

The Union fighting force that operated outside of Washington, D.C.

Army of the West

The Union fighting force that operated in Kentucky, Tennessee, and the Mississippi River Valley.

Battle of Antietam

The deadliest day of the Civil War, in which the Army of the Potomac turned back a Confederate invasion of Maryland.

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The biggest and costliest battle ever fought in North America, resulting in a Union victory that turned back a Confederate invasion of the North.

First Battle of Bull Run

The first significant engagement of the Civil War, which resulted in a Confederate victory.

Greenbacks

Paper money the Union issued during the Civil War.

Vicksburg

A city situated along the Mississippi River captured by the Union on July 3, 1863, securing control of the Mississippi River.



PEOPLE TO KNOW

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General of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia during the Civil War.

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General of the Union's Army of the West in the early years of the Civil War; later the commander of the entire Union war effort who accepted Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House, Virginia in 1865.



DATES TO KNOW

1861

Confederate forces fire on Fort Sumter; Abraham Lincoln issues call for military volunteers; The First Battle of Bull Run results in a Confederate victory.

1862

The Confederacy introduces a draft; The Battle of Shiloh, Second Bull Run, Antietam, and Fredericksburg occur; The Union captures New Orleans and Memphis.

1863

Thousands of hungry people riot in Richmond; The Union issues a draft; The Union achieves key victories at Vicksburg and Gettysburg.