Girding for War: The North and the South, 1861–1865

It has long been a grave question whether any government not too strong for the liberties of its people can be strong enough to maintain its existence in great emergencies.

Abraham Lincoln, 1864

Prologue: The seven seceding states formed a provisional government about a month before the firing on Fort Sumter forced the remaining four laggard sisters into their camp. In the ensuing conflict the civilian front, both at home and abroad, was no less important than the fighting front. Northern diplomats strove to keep the European powers out; Southern diplomats strove to drag them in. Britain, the key nation, remained officially neutral because of self-interest. Meanwhile, in America, with dollars pouring into the maw of the war machine, conscienceless grafters and profiteers on each side grew fat. The Washington and Richmond regimes were both forced to override constitutional guarantees and deal harshly with critics.

A. Lincoln and the Secession Crisis

1. A Marylander Rejects Disunion (1861)

By early February 1861, seven Southern states had seceded, taking over most of the federal forts, arsenals, mints, and other public property. Many Northerners were demanding that "in God's name" the "wayward sisters" be allowed to depart in peace. At this juncture a stirring cry of protest arose from Henry Winter Davis, a handsome, eloquent, and ambitious Maryland congressman. He was especially provoked by the action of the South Carolinians in firing on and driving off from Charleston harbor an unarmed merchant ship, Star of the West, sent to reinforce beleaguered Fort Sumter. His speech had a profound effect in slaveholding Maryland, and although it probably cost him his seat in the next election, it helped hold the state in the Union. What arguments did he make against secession?

1Congressional Globe, 36th Congress, 2d session (February 7, 1861), Appendix, p. 182.
Mr. Speaker, we are driven to one of two alternatives. We must recognize what we have been told more than once upon this floor is an accomplished fact—the independence of the rebellious states—or we must refuse to acknowledge it, and accept all the responsibilities that attach to that refusal.

Recognize them! Abandon the Gulf and coast of Mexico; surrender the forts of the United States; yield the privilege of free commerce and free intercourse; strike down the guarantees of the Constitution for our fellow citizens in all that wide region; create a thousand miles of interior frontier to be furnished with internal customhouses, and armed with internal forts, themselves to be a prey to the next caprice of state sovereignty; organize a vast standing army, ready at a moment's warning to resist aggression; create upon our southern boundary a perpetual foothold for foreign powers, whenever caprice, ambition, or hostility may see fit to invite the despot of France [Napoleon III] or the aggressive power of England to attack us upon our undefended frontier; sever that unity of territory which we have spent millions, and labored through three generations, to create and establish; pull down the flag of the United States and take a lower station among the nations of the earth; abandon the high prerogative of leading the march of freedom, the hope of struggling nationalities, the terror of frowning tyrants, the boast of the world, the light of liberty—to become the sport and prey of despots whose thrones we consolidate by our fall—to be greeted by Mexico with the salutation: “Art thou also become weak as we? Art thou become like unto us?” This is recognition.

We must not coerce a state engaged in the peaceful process of secession. We must not coerce a state engaged in the peaceful process of firing into a United States vessel [Star of the West] to prevent the reinforcement of a United States fort. We must not coerce states which, without any declaration of war, or any act of hostility of any kind, have united, as have Mississippi, Florida, and Louisiana, their joint forces to seize a public fortress. We must not coerce a state which has planted cannon upon its shores to prevent the free navigation of the Mississippi. We must not coerce a state which has robbed the United States Treasury. This is peaceful secession!

Mr. Speaker, I do not design to quarrel with gentlemen about words. I do not wish to say one word which will exasperate the already too much inflamed state of the public mind. But I say that the Constitution of the United States and the laws made in pursuance thereof must be enforced; and they who stand across the path of that enforcement must either destroy the power of the United States or it will destroy them.

2. Fort Sumter Inflames the North (1861)

Fort Sumter, in Charleston harbor, still flew the Stars and Stripes when Lincoln took office in March 1861. Unwilling either to goad the South into war or to see the garrison starved out, he compromised by announcing that he would send provisions but

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not reinforcements. The Southerners, who regarded provisioning as aggression, opened fire. The North rose in instant resentment. Especially important was the reaction of New York City, where the merchants and bankers involved in the cotton trade were plotting treacherous courses. What do the following recollections of a contemporary Episcopal clergyman suggest about the patriotism of the financial world and about the importance of retaining New York’s loyalty?

On Sunday, April 14 [1861], the fact became known that Fort Sumter had surrendered. The excitement created by the bombardment of that fortress and its magnificent defense by Anderson* was prodigious. The outrage on the government of the United States thus perpetrated by the authorities of South Carolina sealed the fate of the new-born Confederacy and the institution of slavery.

Intelligent Southerners at the North were well aware of the consequences which must follow. In the city of New York a number of prominent gentlemen devoted to the interests of the South, and desirous to obtain a bloodless dissolution of the Union, were seated together in anxious conference, studying with intense solicitude the means of preserving the peace. A messenger entered the room in breathless haste with the news: “General Beauregard has opened fire on Fort Sumter!” The persons whom he thus addressed remained a while in dead silence, looking into each other’s pale faces; then one of them, with uplifted hands, cried, in a voice of anguish, “My God, we are ruined!”

The North rose as one man. The question had been asked by those who were watching events, “How will New York go?” There were sinister hopes in certain quarters of a strong sympathy with the secession movements; dreams that New York might decide on cutting off from the rest of the country and becoming a free city. These hopes and dreams vanished in a day. The reply to the question how New York would go was given with an energy worthy of herself.

3. Fort Sumter Inspires the South (1861)

If the Southern attack on Fort Sumter angered the North, it had an exhilarating effect on the South. Gala crowds in Charleston harbor cheered their cannonading heroes. “The Star-Spangled Banner” was rewritten to read:

The Star-Spangled Banner in disgrace shall wave
Over the land of the tyrant, and the home of the knave.

The Virginia “Submissionists,” who had resisted secession, were overwhelmed by the popular clamor. What does the following account from the Daily Richmond Examiner reveal about the mood of the people? What does it portend for the secession of Virginia and the prolongation of the war?

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The news of the capture of Fort Sumter was greeted with unbounded enthusiasm in this city. Everybody we met seemed to be perfectly happy. Indeed, until the occasion we did not know how happy men could be. Everybody abuses war, and yet it has ever been the favorite and most honored pursuit of men; and the women and children admire and love war ten times as much as the men. The boys pulled down the stars and stripes from the top of the Capitol (some of the boys were sixty years old), and very properly run [sic] up the flag of the Southern Confederacy in its place. What the women did we don’t precisely know, but learned from rumor that they praised South Carolina to the skies, abused Virginia, put it to the Submissionists hot and heavy with their two-edged swords, and wound up the evening’s ceremonies by playing and singing secession songs until fifteen minutes after twelve on Saturday night.—The boys exploded an infinite number of crackers; the price of tar has risen 25 percent, and sky-rockets and Roman candles can be had at no price, the whole stock in trade having been used up Saturday night. We had great firing of cannon, all sorts of processions, an infinite number of grandiloquent, hifaluting speeches, and some drinking of healths, which has not improved healths; for one half the people we have met since are hoarse from long and loud talking, and the other half have a slight headache, it may be, from long and patriotic libations.
1. **Alexander Hamilton Stephens's Cornerstone Speech (1861)**

The same convention that met at Montgomery, Alabama, in February 1861 to frame the Confederate Constitution chose Jefferson Davis as president and Alexander Hamilton Stephens of Georgia, an ex-congressman, as vice president. Stephens was a sallow-complexioned, emaciated figure (seldom weighing more than one hundred pounds) with a piping voice and a fighting spirit. Although opposing secession, he loyally (or disloyally) went along with his state. In this famous speech at Savannah, three weeks before the blowup at Fort Sumter, he spelled out the philosophical basis of the Confederate Constitution. What do his remarks reveal about the white Southern attitude toward the future of slavery?

The new Constitution has put at rest forever all the agitating questions relating to our peculiar institution, African slavery, as it exists amongst us—the proper status of the Negro in our form of civilization. This was the immediate cause of the late rupture and present revolution. Jefferson, in his forecast, had anticipated this as the “rock upon which the old Union would split.” He was right. What was conjecture with him is now a realized fact. But whether he fully comprehended the great truth upon which that rock stood and stands may be doubted. The prevailing ideas entertained by him and most of the leading statesmen at the time of the formation of the old Constitution were that the enslavement of the African was in violation of the laws of nature; that it was wrong in principle, socially, morally, and politically. It was an evil they knew not well how to deal with, but the general opinion of the men of that day was that, somehow or other, in the order of Providence, the institution would be evanescent and pass away. This idea, though not incorporated in the Constitution, was the prevailing idea at the time...

Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea; its foundations are laid, as its cornerstone rests, upon the great truth that the Negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery—subordination to the superior race—is his natural and normal condition. [Applause.]

This, our new government, is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth.


The unabashed prominence that Stephens gave to slavery, though applauded by his audience, was probably a mistaken tactic. Determine why from this direct editorial

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2*New York Times*, March 27, 1861.
response in the New York Times. How had Stephens misled this journal with regard to the general motives for secession?

Mr. Stephens is quite right in saying that this is the first government in the history of the world based upon slavery. This present year is the first time in the history of the world when a great community has overthrown a free Constitution, not because of its oppressions, but in order to perpetuate the abject slavery of four millions of its people.

Mr. Stephens apparently sees nothing in this fact of evil omen to the success of his experiment. Indeed, he makes it the chief glory of the new nation that its cornerstone is slavery. He may rest assured the civilized world will take a very different view of this matter. He will find in that declaration a barrier mountain-high against the sympathies of every nation on earth. There is no power so utterly dead to all the impulses of humanity, and to all the influences of Christian civilization, as to look with anything but horror and detestation upon a nation commencing its career for such a motive and with such an aim.

C. British Involvement

I. The London Times Breathes Easier (1862)

The British government tried to preserve a cold neutrality during the Civil War. The landed aristocracy, however, with a kindred feeling for the plantation aristocracy of the South, generally hoped for a Confederate victory. Some Britons even argued that their Christian duty required them to intervene and stop the senseless bloodshed. The pontifical London Times on the whole supported the official policy of nonintervention, and the North could rejoice that it did. So influential was this journal that when it took snuff, the quipsters said, the rest of England sneezed. What does this Times editorial suggest about why, as between humanitarian intervention and realistic nonintervention, the British government chose nonintervention?

The prevalent expectation is that both North and South will suffer unexampled injury, and finally settle down into two or more states, much the wiser and sadder for their bitter experience. Many politicians are only too content to see things take this course.

Indeed, people are breathing more freely, and talking more lightly of the United States, than they have done any time these thirty years. We don’t now hear once a twelvemonth that England has complied with some ridiculous demand, or endured some high-flying specimen of American impudence, or allowed them to draw their boundary lines [Maine, Oregon?] as they please. We are no longer stunned every quarter of a year with the tremendous totals of American territory, population, and wealth, computed to come due thirty, sixty, a hundred years hence; when, of course, the tallest empire of the Old World will easily walk between the legs of the American colossus.

Nevertheless, the riddance of a nightmare is purchased very dearly at the cost of present suffering. Great as that suffering is, we have assured the Americans over and over again that we have no intention of interfering. If there is any fault to be found with this country, it is that we are too well resigned to the suicidal work of which we are the safe, but not unconcerned, witnesses. It is the old story of the traveller frightened by the tiger and relieved by seeing him immediately afterwards in deadly conflict with some other monster.

2. Britons Hail Democracy’s Collapse (1862)

Many British aristocrats derived satisfaction from recalling 1776. Then thirteen colonies, struggling for freedom against King George III, were trying to secede from the British Empire. Now eleven states, struggling for freedom against King Abraham I, were trying to secede from the American Empire. Why did the London Times believe that the South, in these weeks before Emancipation, had the better moral (if not legal) case? Why could this newspaper maintain that democracy had broken down?

In this respect, as in others, the South has an immense advantage over the North. The Confederates are fighting in a cause which is at once plain and popular, which they have always avowed, and of which they have never despaired. They are fighting for independence—for possession and enjoyment of their own territories under their own laws, apart from any connection with a people from whom they always differed, and whom they now most cordially detest. . . .

But with the Northerners all is different. They are not content with their own. They are fighting to coerce others, and to retain millions of people in political union with them against their will. This, too, they are doing in spite of the principles on which all American institutions have been notoriously based—principles inculcating the most extreme doctrines of freedom, and deriving all governments from the mere will and assent of the governed. . . .

The principles on which the President and the majority, perhaps, of his coadjutors undertook the war are in themselves by no means indefensible. Mr. Lincoln held that the Constitution of the Union, which he was bound to preserve, did not permit the secession of any of its states, and, though the point is not very clear, it may be allowed that this view of the legal merits of the case was shared in England. We were of opinion that South Carolina had no title, under the provisions of the American Constitution, to proclaim her own independence, and it follows, therefore, that the Supreme Government was entitled to restrain her in such a proceeding.

But when South Carolina was followed by other states, when nine millions of people asserted their claims to self-government, and when it became evident that these claims were based, if not upon law, at any rate upon facts, we were unable to see how the Northerners could with any consistency resist the demand. That they did resist it, and even made an appeal to the sword, was simply a proof that democracies, in this respect, are influenced by the same passions as the most despotic monarchies.

—London Times, September 13, 1862.
Here, in fact, it was that republicanism broke down. The real collapse was not in the secession of the South, but in the resistance of the North. If the Northerners, on ascertaining the resolution of the South, had peaceably allowed the seceders to depart, the result might fairly have been quoted as illustrating the advantages of democracy. But when republicans put empire above liberty, and resorted to political oppression and war rather than suffer any abatement of national power, it was clear that nature at Washington was precisely the same as nature at St. Petersburg.

There was not, in fact, a single argument advanced in defense of the war against the South which might not have been advanced with exactly the same force for the subjugation of Hungary or Poland [by Russia].

Democracy broke down, not when the Union ceased to be agreeable to all its constituent states, but when it was upheld, like any other empire, by force of arms.

3. Southern Resentment Against England (1862)

“Cotton is King!” the Southern fire-eaters had exulted before secession. England was so heavily dependent on the Southern fiber for its vast textile industry that in the event of a North-South clash, the British would presumably be forced to intervene on the side of the Confederacy. To the annoyance of Britshers, the Confederates even tried to hasten that day by burning cotton. Late in the second year of the Civil War, England was in the grip of a cotton famine; but much to the disappointment of the South, the London regime refused even to extend recognition to the Confederates. President Davis openly condemned British partiality toward the North. Why, in the view of the Southern journal quoted here, did Britain want the Union to break up but nevertheless refuse to intervene? Which of the arguments seems most farfetched?

The Confederate States are the only new power she [England] has refused to recognize, and yet they have manifested a degree of strength greater than all those we have enumerated [e.g., Belgium] put together. We have, under these circumstances, we think, some right to be indignant. We have not the smallest right to be astonished.

Great Britain has been trying to bring about the very state of things now existing here ever since the United States became a recognized power of the earth. She never could find it in her heart to forgive the successful revolt of the colonies. . . . In latter days England has been jealous of the growing power of the United States to an inordinate degree. She has clearly foreseen that, if they continue united, they must become, before the close of this century, the first nation of the world, with an invincible army, a navy that must assume the empire of the seas, and a commerce that must swallow up all the commerce of the Old World.

Thus, in addition to the old grudge, she has been stimulated by the fear of losing her position among the powers of the earth. Cost what it might, she has felt that for her the greatest of all objects has been to destroy the Union. She has succeeded at last, and it is not wonderful that she should desire to see the war carried on as long as both parties may have the strength to maintain themselves. She feels that in-

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4Southern Illustrated News, October 4, 1862.
C. British Involvement

tervention would follow recognition, and this she is by no means disposed to undertake, because it might have the effect of shortening the war.

The war in question, besides removing a powerful rival from her path, is useful to her in another respect. If it should last long enough, it may be the means of getting her cotton from India into demand, and it may stimulate the production in Australia. When we consider that cotton constitutes the very basis upon which her enormous power is built, we shall see at once the importance of having it all under her own control. This she hopes to accomplish by destroying the culture in this country, which can only be done by destroying the labor which produces it. The abolition of slavery in her West India possessions was but the preliminary step to the abolition of slavery in this country. . . .

In addition to these causes, it may be that the British Government feels itself in no condition to intervene, because of the present condition in Europe. Affairs are far from satisfactory in Italy, and any moment may witness the outbreak of a general war. As we have already observed, recognition might bring on intervention as a necessary consequence, and intervention would be sure to bring on war. This the British Government will avoid if it can. It already has a most exaggerated opinion of the strength of the Yankee Government, and is evidently very unwilling—we might almost say afraid—to come into collision with it. A late debate in Parliament plainly revealed an extraordinary degree of alarm on the subject of Canada. . . .

These, we think, are the reasons why Great Britain—meaning the British Government—is averse to recognize us. That the majority of the people sympathize with us, while they detest the Yankees, we do not doubt.

4. A Northerner Lambastes Britain (1863)

The South was disillusioned because England did not seem sympathetic enough; the North was angered because England seemed too sympathetic to the South. Several diplomatic crises between London and Washington were narrowly surmounted—the Trent affair, the building of the cruiser Alabama, the Laird rams threat—but the construction of destructive Confederate commerce raiders in England rankled most deeply. Despite the serious shortage of cotton, the British prospered from an enormously expanded two-way trade with the North. George T. Strong, a prominent New York lawyer, here expresses a common view. Was his assessment of England's alleged unneutrality fair? Why was he more bitter toward England than his Southern counterpart in the preceding article?

April 14 [1863]. We drift fast toward war with England, but I think we shall not reach that point. The shopkeepers who own England want to do us all the harm they can and to give all possible aid and comfort to our slave-breeding and woman-flogging adversary, for England has degenerated into a trader, manufacturer, and banker, and has lost all the instincts and sympathies that her name still suggests. She would declare war against us fast enough if she dared follow her sordid impulses, but there are dirty, selfish considerations on the other side.

She cannot ally herself with slavery, as she inclines to do, without closing a profitable market, exposing her commerce to [Yankee] privateers, and diminishing the supply of [Northern] breadstuffs on which her operatives depend for life. On the other side, however, is the consideration that by allowing piratical Alabamas to be built, armed, and manned in her ports to prey on our commerce, she is making a great deal of money.

It's fearful to think that the sympathies of England—the England of Shakespeare and Hooker, Cowper, Milton, Somers, Erskine, and others—with North or South, freedom or slavery, in this great continental battle of her children, are guided by mere considerations of profit and loss. Anglo-maniac [pro-English] Americans, like myself, are thoroughly “disillusioned.”

D. Graft and Shortages North and South

I. Shoddy Wool in Yankeeland (1861–1865)

Great wars invariably inspire devotion and self-sacrifice; they also spawn grafters and chislers. The Civil War, with all its noble ideals, was no exception. The orgy of greed, which begot the “shoddy millionaires,” is here described by General Régis de Trobriand, a French émigré and New York newspaper editor who served as a volunteer officer in the U.S. Army for four years. What gave rise to the conditions he describes?

But besides the army formed to act against the enemy, there was another army—of lobbyists, contractors, speculators—which was continually renewed and never exhausted. These hurried to the assault on the Treasury, like a cloud of locusts alighting down upon the capital to devour the substance of the country. They were everywhere; in the streets, in the hotels, in the offices, at the Capitol, and in the White House. They continually besieged the bureaus of administration, the doors of the Senate and House of Representatives, wherever there was a chance to gain something.

Government, obliged to ask the aid of private industry for every kind of supply that the army and navy must have without delay, was really at the mercy of these hungry spoilers, who combined with one another to make the law for the government. From this arose contracts exceedingly burdensome, which impoverished the Treasury to enrich a few individuals.

As a matter of course, these latter classes, strangers to every patriotic impulse, saw in the war only an extraordinary opportunity of making a fortune. Every means of obtaining it was a good one to them; so that corruption played a great part in the business of contracting. Political protection was purchased by giving an interest in the contracts obtained. . . .

The government . . . was, then, fleeced by the more moderate and robbed by the more covetous. The army suffered from it directly, as the supplies, which were

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furnished at a price which was much above their value if they had been of a good quality, were nearly all of a fraudulent inferiority. For example, instead of heavy woolen blankets, the recruits received, at this time, light, open fabrics, made I do not know of what different substances, which protected them against neither the cold nor the rain. A very short wear changed a large part of the uniform to rags, and during the winter spent at Tenallytown [in the District of Columbia] the ordinary duration of a pair of shoes was not longer than twenty or thirty days.

This last fact, well attested in my regiment, was followed by energetic remonstrances, on account of which the general commanding the brigade appointed, according to regulations, a special Board of Inspection, with the object of obtaining the condemnation of the defective articles. Amongst the members of the board was an officer expert in these matters, having been employed, before the war, in one of the great shoe factories of Massachusetts. The report was very precise. It showed that the shoes were made of poor leather, not having been properly tanned; that the inside of the soles was filled with gray paper; and that the heels were so poorly fastened that it needed only a little dry weather following a few days of rain to have them drop from the shoes. In fine, the fraud was flagrant in every way.

The report was duly forwarded to the superior authorities. Did it have any consideration? I never knew. However, it was necessary to exhaust the stock in hand before obtaining a new supply, and the price charged the soldier was not altered.

2. Chislers in the South (1862–1863)

The myth that the Southern “Cavaliers” gave their all with selfless dedication must be discarded. There was magnificent devotion to the lost cause, but human nature did not change at the Mason-Dixon line. In proportion to numbers, desertion was about as rampant in the South as in the North, especially after Yankee invaders burned the homes of absent soldiers. And in proportion to the amount of graft obtainable, the number of grafters was probably about the same. John B. Jones, a prolific and popular Maryland novelist, worked as a clerk for the Confederate government in Richmond and recorded some bitter observations. What does he reveal about the South's capacity to resist?

[December 1, 1862] God speed the day of peace! Our patriotism is mainly in the army and among the ladies of the South. The avarice and cupidity of the men at home could only be excelled by ravenous wolves; and most of our sufferings are fully deserved. Where a people will not have mercy on one another, how can they expect mercy? They depreciate the Confederate notes [currency] by charging from $20 to $40 per bbl. for flour; $3.50 per bushel for meal; $2 per lb. for butter; $20 per cord for wood, etc. When we shall have peace, let the extortionists be remembered! Let an indelible stigma be branded upon them.

A portion of the people look like vagabonds. We see men and women and children in the streets in dingy and dilapidated clothes; and some seem gaunt and pale with hunger—the speculators, and thieving quartermasters and commissaries only, looking sleek and comfortable. If this state of things continue a year or so longer,

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they will have their reward. There will be governmental bankruptcy, and all their gains will turn to dust and ashes, dust and ashes! . . .

[February 11, 1863] Some idea may be formed of the scarcity of food in this city from the fact that, while my youngest daughter was in the kitchen today, a young rat came out of its hole and seemed to beg for something to eat; she held out some bread, which it ate from her hand, and seemed grateful. Several others soon appeared, and were as tame as kittens. Perhaps we shall have to eat them! . . .

[October 22, 1863] A poor woman yesterday applied to a merchant in Carey Street to purchase a barrel of flour. The price he demanded was $70.

“My God!” exclaimed she, “how can I pay such prices? I have seven children; what shall I do?”

“I don’t know, madam,” said he, coolly, “unless you eat your children.”

3. The Pinch of the Blockade (1861–1865)

The Yankee blockade, which created acute shortages, played into the hands of Southern profiteers. Not all the blockade runners carried munitions of war exclusively. Dr. Paul Barringer, then a small boy in North Carolina, later recalled that an ornately bound copy of Samuel Johnson’s Rasselas came through to his family early in 1865. What do these recollections, edited after his death in 1941, suggest about the effect of the blockade on Southern armies and civilian morale?

Almost at once we began to feel the pinch of war. White sugar disappeared immediately; not only were there no more lumps for gun-shy horses, but there was no sugar for the table. There was, however, an unlimited quantity of sorghum syrup, and around the barrels of sorghum a thick crust of brown sugar often formed. This was carefully scraped off to be served with coffee and berries, the fluid product going to the servants [slaves]. . . .

In a very short time I noticed that matches had disappeared, and I have learned that at the outbreak of the war there was not one match factory in the South. However, flint and steel had passed out of use so recently that many of these old relics, which were sticking around in closets and hidden recesses in attics, were taken out and returned to use. . . .

Other shortages threatened of which I, as a child, saw only the signs and could not realize the seriousness. Paper was getting so scarce that my elders feared that even the dreaded death lists might cease to come. Then it was discovered that wallpaper could be used, and if properly removed from the walls and bleached, it could be printed on both sides. At the last, they used wallpaper that could not be bleached, printing on one side only. I still have one of these old journals. Framed under glass, it shows pink flowers on one side, while the bloody harvest of war is recorded on the other. . . .

The Federal Government declared all drugs contraband of war, and almost no morphine or quinine came through the blockade. As a substitute for the latter, as I

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have already stated, we used boneset tea, which helped but did not cure malaria. To supply opiate we grew our own poppies, making incisions into the sides of the ovaries of these plants and with the flat of a case knife scraping up the exuded gum. The knife was then scraped off on the edge of a glass jar, and thus we found that we could raise gum opium that was 10 or 12 percent morphine.

There was a poppy bed in every garden planted for this purpose, and when I was seven years old I worked daily for the soldiers, scraping the inspissated juice of the poppy from the bulbar ovaries which had been punctured a few days before, and, like everyone else, I worked under the eternal mandate, "Don't taste it!" On some fifty poppy heads it was a morning's work to get a mass about as big as a small peanut.

The time came when no more Chilean nitre could run the blockade, and the South must depend on its own resources for this essential element of explosives. It was then that the urine cart began to make its rounds, collecting the night's urine and hauling it to the boiling vats, where the urea and other nitrogenous constituents were extracted and shipped to Augusta, Georgia, for the manufacture of gunpowder. That plant was never more than a few days ahead of the needs of the firing line.

Later on the need became so great that many old cabins which stood up on four corner posts were raised by levers, so that men could crawl under them to scrape the ground for the thin layer of nitrogen-charged clay at the top. As wondering children, we saw men crawling under old barns to scrape up the dry dust, and we saw old plaster taken from the walls and leached in the ash hopper. We heard that in Virginia and Kentucky searching parties invaded the caves where bats roosted, to scrape the bat manure from the floor. All such gleanings were likewise sent to the plant in Augusta.

Looking back at it now, I can see the reason for that persistent and unceasing call to save and extend every natural resource in every section of the South. The need was desperate, and the toil in the homes, the fields, and the improvised factories was unceasing.

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I. Clement Vallandigham Flays Despotism (1863)

To preserve the Constitution, Lincoln was forced to take liberties with it. His arbitrary acts included a suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, and a consequent imprisonment without trial of scores of Southern sympathizers. Many Democrats in the North—dubbed Copperheads—condemned such high-handed action. The most notorious of these was Clement L. Vallandigham, an eloquent and outspoken critic of this "wicked and cruel" war. He regarded it as a diabolical attempt to end slavery and inaugurate a Republican despotism. Convicted by a military tribunal in Cincinnati of treasonable utterances, he was banished by Lincoln to the Confederacy. After a

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short stay, he made his way by ship to Canada. From there he ran for the governorship of Ohio in 1863 and, though defeated, polled a heavy vote. Some two months before his arrest in 1863, he delivered this flaming speech in New York to a Democratic group, assailing the recent act of Congress that authorized the president to suspend habeas corpus during the war. Is this speech treasonable? Should habeas corpus have been suspended?

... [The Habeas Corpus Act] authorizes the President whom the people made, whom the people had chosen by the ballot box under the Constitution and laws, to suspend the writ of habeas corpus all over the United States; to say that because there is a rebellion in South Carolina, a man shall not have freedom of speech, freedom of the press, or any of his rights untrammeled in the state of New York, or a thousand miles distant. That was the very question upon which the people passed judgment in the recent [congressional] elections, more, perhaps, than any other question. . . .

The Constitution gives the power to Congress, and to Congress alone, to suspend the writ of habeas corpus, but it can only be done in case of invasion or rebellion, and then only when the public safety requires it. And in the opinion of the best jurists of the land, and indeed of every one previous to these times, Congress could only suspend this writ in places actually in rebellion or actually invaded. That is the Constitution. [Cheers.] And whenever this question shall be tried before a court in the state of New York, or Ohio, or Wisconsin, or anywhere else, before honest and fearless judges worthy of the place they occupy, the decision will be that it is unconstitutional.* [Loud applause.] . . .

Was it this which you were promised in 1860, in that grand [Lincoln] “Wide Awake” campaign, when banners were borne through your streets inscribed “Free speech, free press, and free men”? And all this has been accomplished, so far as the forms of the law go, by the Congress which has just expired. Now, I repeat again that if there is anything wanting to make up a complete and absolute despotism, as iron and inexorable in its character as the worst despotisms of the old world, or the most detestable of modern times, . . . I am unable to comprehend what it is.

All this, gentlemen, infamous and execrable as it is, is enough to make the blood of the coldest man who has one single appreciation in his heart of freedom, to boil with indignation. [Loud applause.] Still, so long as they leave to us free assemblages, free discussion, and a free ballot, I do not want to see, and will not encourage or countenance, any other mode of ridding ourselves of it. [“That’s it,” and cheers.] We are ready to try these questions in that way. But . . . when the attempt is made to take away those other rights, and the only instrumentalties peaceably of reforming and correcting abuses—free assemblages, free speech, free ballot, and free elections—THEN THE HOUR WILL HAVE ARRIVED WHEN IT WILL BE THE DUTY OF FREE MEN TO FIND SOME OTHER AND EFFICIENT MODE OF DEFENDING THEIR LIBERTIES. [Loud and protracted cheering, the whole audience rising to their feet.]

Our fathers did not inaugurate the Revolution of 1776, they did not endure the sufferings and privations of a seven years’ war to escape from the mild and moderate control of a constitutional monarchy like that of England, to be at last, in the

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*The Supreme Court did not hold the Habeas Corpus Act unconstitutional.
third generation, subjected to a tyranny equal to that of any upon the face of the globe. [Loud applause.]

2. William Brownlow Scolds the Secessionists (1861)

If President Lincoln had his pro-Confederate Copperheads, President Davis had his pro-Union "Tories," chiefly among the mountain whites. If Lincoln had his Val­landigham, Davis had his William G. ("Parson") Brownlow, the fiery and fearless Methodist preacher with a foghorn voice who had become editor of the Knoxville Whig. This journal was the most influential paper in East Tennessee, and the last Union paper in the South. Though not antislavery, Brownlow was antisecession. His newspaper was suppressed late in 1861, its press was destroyed, and he was imprisoned for treason. The Confederates banished him to the Federal lines—a Val­landigham case in reverse—but he returned to be elected Reconstruction governor of Tennessee in 1865. His defiant flying of a United States flag over his home led him to publish the following statement in his paper on May 25, 1861, two weeks before Tennessee seceded by a popular vote of 104,913 to 47,238. Considering the time of the incident, who acted treasonably: Brownlow or those who displayed the Confed­erate flag? What does this episode reveal of the strength of Unionism in Tennessee during those anxious weeks?

It is known to this community and to the people of this county that I have had the Stars and Stripes, in the character of a small flag, floating over my dwelling, in East Knoxville, since February. This flag has become very offensive to certain leaders of the Secession party in this town, and to certain would-be leaders, and the more so as it is about the only one of the kind floating in the city. Squads of troops, from three to twenty, have come over to my house within the last several days, cursing the flag in front of my house, and threatening to take it down, greatly to the annoyance of my wife and children. No attack has been made upon it, and consequently we have had no difficulty.

It is due to the Tennessee troops to say that they have never made any such demonstrations. Other troops from the Southern states, passing on to Virginia, have been induced to do so by certain cowardly, sneaking, white-livered scoundrels residing here, who have not the melt [guts] to undertake what they urge strangers to do. One of the Louisiana squads proclaimed in front of my house, on Thursday, that they were told to take it down by citizens of Knoxville.

Now, I wish to say a few things to the public in connection with this subject. This flag is private property, upon a private dwelling, in a state that has never voted herself out of the Union or into the Southern Confederacy, and it is therefore law­fully and constitutionally under these same Stars and Stripes I have floating over my house. Until the state, by her citizens, through the ballot box, changes her federal rel­lations, her citizens have a right to fling this banner to the breeze. Those who are in rebellion against the government represented by the Stars and Stripes have up the

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Rebel flag, and it is a high piece of work to deny loyal citizens of the Union the privilege of displaying their colors!...

If these God-forsaken scoundrels and hell-deserving assassins want satisfaction [a duel] out of me for what I have said about them—and it has been no little—they can find me on these streets every day of my life but Sunday. I am at all times prepared to give them satisfaction. I take back nothing I have ever said against the corrupt and unprincipled villains, but reiterate all, cast it in their dastardly faces, and hurl down their lying throats their own infamous calumnies.

Finally, the destroying of my small flag or of my town property is a small matter. The carving out of the state upon the mad wave of secession is also a small matter, compared with the great principle involved. Sink or swim, live or die, survive or perish, I am a Union man, and owe my allegiance to the Stars and Stripes of my country. Nor can I, in any possible contingency, have any respect for the government of the Confederate States, originating as it did with, and being controlled by, the worst men in the South. And any man saying—whether of high or low degree—that I am an abolitionist or a Black Republican, is a liar and scoundrel.

3. A North Carolinian Is Defiant (1863)

States’ rights proved about as harmful to the South as Yankee bayonets. Many Southerners, with their strong tradition of localism, resented or resisted the arbitrary central government in Richmond. William W. Holden, who attacked conscription and other harsh measures, was the recklessly outspoken editor of the Raleigh North Carolina Standard. Probably the most influential paper in the state, it allegedly inspired wholesale desertions. In 1863, when a Georgia regiment destroyed Holden’s office, he and his associates retaliated by wrecking the headquarters of a rival secessionist organ. (Scores of similar mob demonstrations occurred in the North against Copperhead journals.) What is ironic and fantastic about the extreme remedy that Holden here proposes, and what extraordinary conditions was he overlooking?

We were told, when the government was broken up by the states south of us, that the contest was to be for liberty; that the civil power was to prevail over the military; that the common government was to be the agent of the states, and not their master; and that free institutions, not an imperial despotism, were to constitute the great object of our toils and sufferings. But the official paper [the Richmond Enquirer] has declared otherwise. That paper is opposed to a nobility to be established by law, but it favors a military despotism like that of France. . . .

We know that a military despotism is making rapid strides in these [Confederate] states. We know that no people ever lost their liberties at once, but step by step, as some deadly disease steals upon the system and gradually but surely saps the fountain of life. . . . The argument now is, we hate Lincoln so bitterly that in order to resist him successfully we must make slaves of ourselves. The answer of our people is, we will be slaves neither to Lincoln, nor Davis, nor France, nor England.

North Carolina is a state, not a province, and she has eighty thousand of as brave troops as ever trod the earth. When she calls them they will come. If the worst

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1North Carolina Standard (Raleigh), May 6, 1863.
should happen that can happen, she will be able to take care of herself as an inde­
pendent power. She will not submit, in any event, to a law of [the Confederate] Con­
gress, passed in deliberate violation of the Constitution, investing Mr. Davis with
dictatorial powers; but will resist such a law by withdrawing, if necessary, from the
Confederation, and she will fight her way out against all comers. . . . For one, we are
determined not to exchange one despotism for another.

F. Abraham Lincoln Defines the Purposes of the War

I. The War to Preserve the Union (1863)

In his 1863 Gettysburg Address, President Lincoln defined the war’s purpose with
unmatched eloquence. What were his principal arguments?

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a
new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are
created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any na­
tion so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle­
field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting
place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether
fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not
hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have
consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note,
nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.
It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who
fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated
to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take in­
creased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—
that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this
nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the
people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

2. The War to End Slavery (1865)

Near the war’s end, in his second inaugural address, Lincoln again returned to the
theme of the war’s purpose, but on this occasion he offered a different explanation of
the war’s goals and meaning than he had two years earlier at Gettysburg. What are

2James D. Richardson, A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents (Washington, D.C.: Bu­
reau of National Literature, 1911), vol. 5, pp. 3477–3478.
the major differences? Which considerations do you think weighed most heavily in Lincoln’s mind as the war progressed? Did his war aims change over time?

Fellow-Countrymen: At this second appearing to take the oath of the Presidential office there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first. Then a statement somewhat in detail of a course to be pursued seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the expiration of four years, during which public declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the attention and engrosses the energies of the nation, little that is new could be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known to the public as to myself, and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all. With high hope for the future, no prediction in regard to it is ventured.

On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil war. All dreaded it, all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to saving the Union without war, insurgent agents were in the city seeking to destroy it without war—seeking to dissolve the Union and divide effects by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war, but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would accept war rather than let it perish, and the war came.

One-eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the southern part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was somehow the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union even by war, while the Government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it. Neither party expected for the war the magnitude or the duration which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with or even before the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and results less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God’s assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men’s faces, but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. “Woe unto the world because of offenses; for it must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh.” If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said “the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.”
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.

Thought Provokers

1. Why did the South secede? Would the North have acquiesced in peaceful coexistence if the South had not fired on Fort Sumter? Which side was the aggressor in starting the war?
2. What were the most distinctive principles of the new Confederate government? Could a government founded on such principles long endure?
3. Why did both North and South regard Britain as unduly partial to the other side? What would probably have happened if the British fleet had intervened to break the blockade? To what extent was democracy an issue in the Civil War?
4. Why were the governments on both sides unable to stop profiteering, graft, and corruption? What special circumstances during the Civil War encouraged such practices?
5. Explain why, in all of the United States' major wars, constitutional guarantees of freedom have suffered infringement. What conditions during the Civil War caused them to be more endangered than during other wars?
6. Lincoln's two speeches—the Gettysburg Address and his second inaugural address—are inscribed on facing walls of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. In what ways do they constitute a fitting summation of Lincoln's views on the war?