

Civilian Life

As you read, look for:

- the effects of the war on civilian life, and
- vocabulary terms **guerrilla**, **Confiscation Act**, and **Emancipation Proclamation**.



Above: Union troops pillaged the countryside while they were in the state. Troops, like these shown near Baton Rouge, left little for the civilian population.

Whatever southerners' reasons were for entering the war, defending their homes became the reason for continuing. The Union policy of total war destroyed parts of Louisiana. The purpose of this "scorched earth policy" was to leave nothing for the Confederates to use to make war. The Union also intended to end the war sooner by making life miserable for the civilians.

Some troops were ordered to pillage (to take goods by force), but others vandalized even against orders. Federal troops were sent to destroy a railroad bridge at Pontchatoula. Instead, they destroyed the town. The

uncontrolled vandalism fueled the civilians' hatred. Mailbags were slit open, and mail scattered in the streets. Private homes were ransacked and treasured possessions were lost.

At Baton Rouge, a Union officer filed a complaint about the looting done by a Massachusetts company. But another officer said he deliberately left "nothing but blackened chimneys as monuments to the folly and villainy of the owners." Baton Rouge was saved from burning only when another officer reminded General Butler about the orphanage there.

Another threat to the citizens came from the *Jayhawkers*. Confederates labeled these men draft dodgers, but they called themselves irregular guerrillas. A **guerrilla** is a member of a small military group that harasses the enemy. Some Jayhawkers helped the Union army, and some just hid out. But others robbed their neighbors. The Catahoula and the Pearl River swamps harbored gangs of these men. These were often the poor whites who felt that this was not their war.

Lagniappe

There was such a shortage of coal during the war that southerners mixed coal dust, sawdust, sand, and wet clay for fuel. These were labeled “fireballs.”

Not all guerrillas were Union sympathizers. Later in the war, the citizens in the Florida Parishes asked for protection from the Union soldiers. Confederate officers gave their approval for guerrilla activity. These irregulars were often hard to control. They took no prisoners and sometimes bushwhacked their enemies by hiding in the bushes and shooting them in the back.

It wasn't only the Union army that brought misery to the people. Confederate troops also foraged (searched) for food, horses, and cattle. The shortages caused by the war forced them to take their supplies from the people. “Hungry Confederate troops took what the Yankees had left,” said one farm woman.

Shortages and Sacrifices

Once the war began, people at home suffered. The federal blockade of New Orleans at the beginning of the war quickly created shortages. Ships could not reach the city with needed goods. For a city based on trade, the blockade was a death grip. Speculators drove up the prices of basic goods. Counterfeiters made Confederate money even more inflated and worthless.

Shortages affected every area of life. People were hungry for war news, but newspapers struggled to survive. A shortage of paper forced *The Weekly News*

Below: The Federal naval blockade of New Orleans was a death threat for the city. This painting by William Challoner shows the Confederate sidewheeler *Webb* attempting to run the blockade.



of Shreveport to become the *Semi-Weekly News*. The editor was finally forced to print his newspaper on the back of wallpaper rolls!

Imported coffee was also not available. Acorns, parched cornmeal, and okra seeds were all tried as substitutes. These “make do” products were soon labeled “Confederate.” For example, a Confederate bridle was a rope halter, and a Confederate bonnet was a simple hat woven of palmetto fronds. Confederate flour was poor quality cornmeal.

The items that were available were often so inflated in price that few could buy them. The price of a dozen eggs reached \$5, as did a pound of butter. An apple cost 50 cents—if one could be found. Often there was no flour, sugar, or meat available at any price. High prices, almost worthless Confederate money, and a shortage of money choked the economy.

As the war dragged on, people reverted to the skills of the past to make what they needed. The oldest women in the communities remembered how to weave cloth on the old looms and the plant dyes used to color the hand-woven cloth. Confederate Governor Allen encouraged this home manufacturing.

Freeing the Slaves

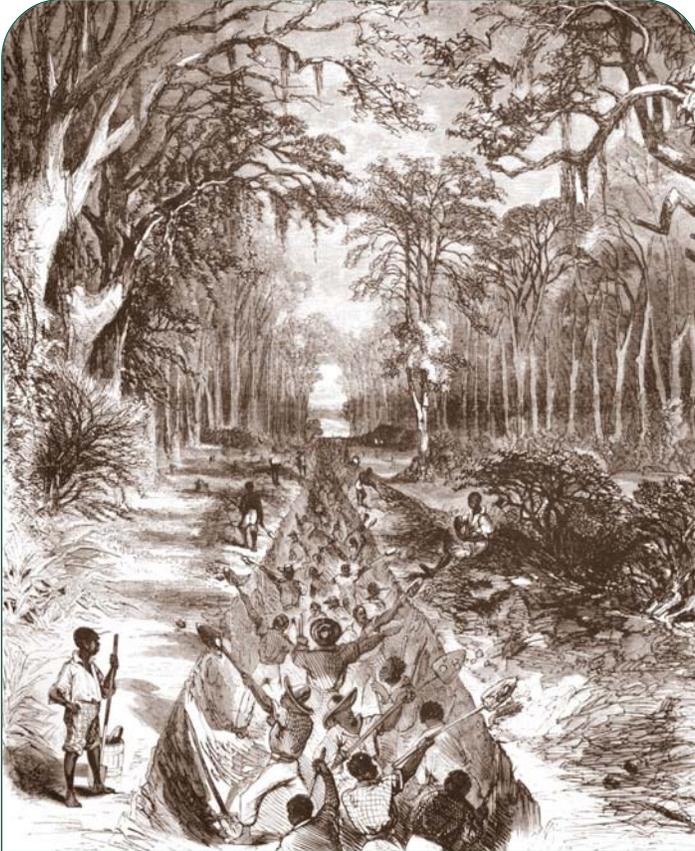
Life for the slaves during the war years was filled with hope, fear, confusion, and disappointment. When the Union army arrived, slaves came to them seeking freedom. At first they were told to return to the plantations.

Later, General Butler followed his contraband policy. That is, he gave his soldiers the right to take any Confederate-owned property, including slaves. This was his interpretation of the **Confiscation Act**. This law, passed by the U.S. Congress in July 1862, said that the property of rebels could be taken by the government.

Thousands of slaves flocked to the Union camps. As the Union army moved through the Teche region, a huge group of slaves followed. Union soldiers wrote about lines of slaves that were longer than the columns of marching troops. Sometimes they came with a few possessions in a bundle; sometimes they had nothing. Young and old, sick or strong, the slaves looked for freedom.

Providing for these people became the responsibility of Union authorities. The first solution was to set up camps for the slaves. Like all refugee camps, they were crowded and filled with disease. Some former slave owners even complained about the poor care the slaves received in these camps.

The huge numbers of slaves presented management problems for the Union. Some of the slaves were put to work as laborers in New Orleans. Then they



Above: Some former slaves worked for the Union Army. These helped dig General Grant's canals at Vicksburg, Mississippi.

were assigned to work with the military. They built forts on the Red River and dug Grant's canals at Vicksburg. Some of the slaves were paid low wages to work on the plantations seized by the Union.

On January 1, 1863, President Lincoln acted boldly to increase pressure on the Confederacy. With his **Emancipation Proclamation**, he made slavery the issue of the war. He stated that all slaves "within any state . . . under rebellion against the United States" were now free. Lincoln's proclamation kept Great Britain from entering the war on the side of the Confederates. The British economy needed southern cotton, but the British people would not support slavery.

As the war continued, both the former slaves and the free men of color were allowed to join the Union army. At the beginning of the war, Louisiana's Native Guards (the militia composed of free men of color) helped the Confederacy protect New Orleans. The grandfathers of these men had formed the Native Guards to defend the city at the Battle of New Orleans in 1815. But in 1862, after New Orleans fell to Union forces, the free people of color aligned themselves with the Union army. They approached General Butler and volunteered to fight with his army.

Below: The Louisiana Native Guard, composed of free men of color, served first the Confederacy and later the Union.



The Art of Politics



This caricature of “Beast Butler” reflects the outrage generated by Butler’s Order No. 28.

Lagniappe

After hearing of Butler’s Order No. 28, Confederate President Jefferson Davis branded Butler an “outlaw.”

Like many other Union officers, Butler feared black troops. He appreciated the education of the free men of color but hesitated to arm any former slaves. However, the need for more troops and the need to provide for the many former slaves after the Emancipation Proclamation led the Union army to allow black troops. The Louisiana Native Guard organized three regiments for the “Corps d’Afrique,” and the members of the Native Guard served as the officers. Although they met prejudice from Union officers and soldiers, these Louisiana regiments made history at Port Hudson, their first combat action.

Life in Occupied New Orleans

During most of the war years, New Orleans was an occupied city, isolated from the rest of the state. After April 1862, the city was under the control of the United States Army. General Benjamin Butler and his troops were responsible for maintaining order and running the city.

General Butler was determined to control the city. In his words, “New Orleans is a conquered city. And, by the law of nations, lies subject to the will of the conqueror.” Butler clearly informed the citizens of New Orleans that he would tolerate no disrespect for the United States. He ordered that William Mumford be hanged for pulling down the American flag. This was the first of many acts that enraged the citizens.

Butler was furious at the attitude displayed toward his troops. He retaliated when he heard reports

of the rude comments made to his soldiers by Confederate women, whom he privately called “she-rebels.” Saying that no lady would make such remarks, Butler issued Order No. 28. The order said that any woman who insulted any officer of the United States would be treated like a “woman of the town plying her avocation.”

Butler’s action was criticized around the world. One northern newspaper even joined in the name calling, labeling him “Beast Butler.” The British Parliament and the London *Times* also condemned his order. Generations have repeated the story of the ladies’ revenge against Butler. They placed his picture at the bottom of their chamber pots!

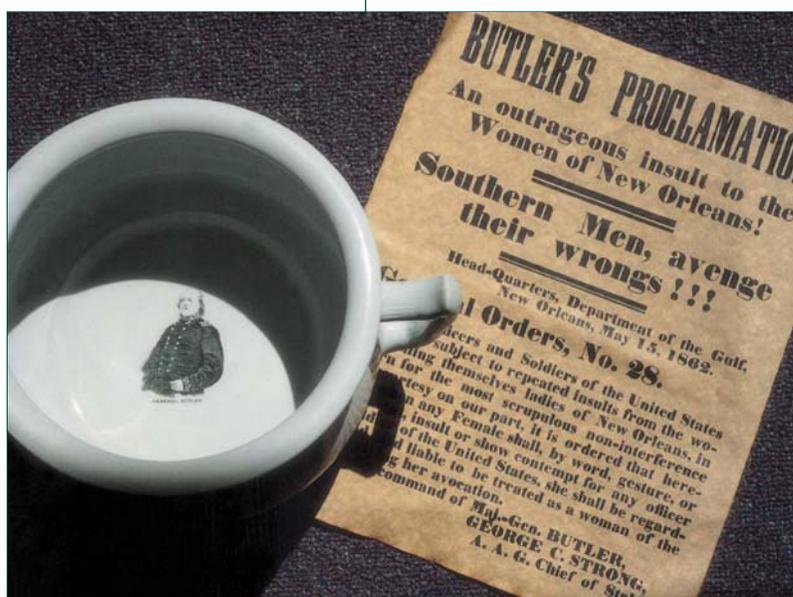
In other actions, General Butler re-opened the port to international trade. He knew that a prosperous New Orleans would help the Union war effort. The citizens of New Orleans benefited when goods became available and the economy improved.

He ordered his soldiers to respect private property and not to enter homes or businesses without authority. However, when the U.S. Congress passed the Confiscation Act, Butler interpreted it strictly. By September 1862, Butler began seizing the property of anyone who had not signed an oath of allegiance to the United States. Many accused Butler of using this law for his own benefit. The confiscated property was sold at auction, with General Butler's brother in charge. The secretary of the U.S. Treasury even warned Butler to "avoid the appearance of evil."

While some felt Butler's actions were unjust and harsh, others believed he did what he had to do to control the city. Many of his programs helped the city and its people. He kept the city clean and its citizens fed. The poor were paid to clean the city, and this "broom battalion" kept the city so clean that disease was greatly reduced. There were no outbreaks of cholera or yellow fever during the occupied years.

Butler continued to be criticized. The foreign diplomats in New Orleans complained to the U.S. government about his actions. For example, when he took weapons from the Confederates, he also seized the weapons of people who lived in New Orleans but were citizens of other countries. At the end of 1862, Butler was replaced by General Nathaniel Banks.

General Banks was more moderate in his treatment of the city. One of the first things he did was reopen the Episcopal churches, earning the gratitude and approval of the city. Butler had closed the churches because the pastors prayed for Jefferson Davis instead of President Lincoln.



Check for Understanding ✓

1. What happened in an area when the Union army came through?
2. How did the people also suffer when the Confederate army was in the area?
3. What happened to the prices of available goods? Why?
4. Why did the people have to find substitutes for many items?
5. How did the Union army provide for the freed slaves?
6. Why did the people of New Orleans hate General Butler?

Top: General Butler imprisoned "she-rebel" Eugenia Levy Phillips on Ship Island for several months for "laughing and mocking at the remains of a Federal officer." **Above:** A poster protesting General Butler's Order No. 28, next to a "Butler chamber pot."