

Chapter I

Yankees

The Civil War began on April 12, 1861, when insurgent forces fired on Fort Sumter. Initially, both sides expected a brief, glorious war, ending in a swift victory for their side. The Northern political leadership did not even remotely grasp the reality of the situation until July 21, 1861, when Confederate generals Pierre G. T. Beauregard, Stonewall Jackson, and others routed their main army in the First Battle of Bull Run (Manassas). The Southern leadership did not wake up until after that.

The Rebel victory at Manassas put New England in a bad position economically. Its main employer was the textile industry and, in 1861, textiles could not be produced without cotton. By the fall of 1861, Northern cotton reserves were nearly exhausted, with no hope of renewal, unless a Southern cotton-growing region could be seized. As a result, as early as November 1861, Massachusetts governor John A. Andrew was calling for the invasion of Texas.¹ He was joined by Maj. Gen. Benjamin Butler, the commander of the Department of New England. From his headquarters in Boston, Butler wrote Gen. George B. McClellan, then the general in chief of the Union Army, and suggested that 15,000 Federal troops—led by Butler himself—land on the Texas coast at Indianola. He would then drive north and seize San Antonio and the Texas cotton-producing region to the northeast. Simultaneously, he would arm supposedly pro-Union German immigrants in the region, who were just waiting for Yankee forces to arrive. They would then rise up, overthrow their Rebel oppressors, and join the Union Army in droves.² (The overconfidence that had led to the disaster at Bull Run had yet to fully dissipate.) On January 19, 1862, Butler met with Edwin M. Stanton, Lincoln's newly appointed secretary of

war, to discuss the project. Butler and Stanton were political allies and intimate personal friends,³ and the secretary gave serious consideration to Butler's idea.

Although not actually abandoned until 1864, the Butler proposal was soon relegated to the back burner by men who actually understood something about military strategy. A Northern military professional, Commodore David D. Porter, presented a detailed operational plan to capture New Orleans to Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles on November 12, 1861.⁴ The Porter plan was not a half-baked scheme to plunder Texas cotton—rather, it was an idea that might actually do military and economic harm to the Confederacy. Welles approved it and delegated the task of executing it to David Farragut, the North's top admiral. When Farragut seized the South's largest city on April 25, 1862, Porter commanded his mortar schooners. Benjamin Butler, now commander of the Department of the Gulf, assumed command of the occupation forces in Louisiana. He headquartered in New Orleans.

The Crescent City was the nation's largest cotton exporting port in 1860, shipping out 2 million bales. Those who thought that its capture would solve New England's economic problems were doomed to disappointment, however, because the city itself grew no cotton, and its hinterland remained mainly in Rebel hands. By the end of 1862, New Orleans had only exported 38,000 bales to the North. Meanwhile, New England lapsed into a severe economic recession.

In 1862, the six New England states had 100,000 looms and 4,745,750 cotton spindles. They needed 700,000 bales of cotton per year to keep them all producing. With Nashville supplying 36,000 bales that summer and New Orleans providing only slightly more, production plummeted. By June 1, 1862, 3,252,000 of the spindles were idle. Another 7 percent ceased operation that month. By July 1862, at least 80 percent of all Northern cotton mills had closed down.⁵ Unemployment was rampant.

New England economic distress had grave political implications for the Lincoln administration. Although many Americans today view Abraham Lincoln as a larger-than-life and almost God-like genius of the highest order, his contemporaries did not hold the

same opinion. He was, in fact, an astute and practical politician who realized that he was a minority president. He was elected in 1860 after having received only 43 percent of the popular vote and would have lost the election had not the Democratic Party split and placed two candidates on the ballot. No one in 1862 could envision a scenario in which Lincoln and his Republican Party could lose New England in the 1864 election and retain the White House. For this reason, Lincoln appointed several prominent New England politicians to high military commands—including Democrats. Benjamin Butler, for example, had fervently supported Jefferson Davis for president of the United States and had voted for him fifty-seven times in the deadlocked Democratic Convention of 1860.⁶ The Great Emancipator was vitally interested in mitigating the economic suffering in Massachusetts and surrounding states. Stanton, Secretary of State William H. Seward, and Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase also had a healthy interest in Louisiana and Texas cotton.

Meanwhile, back in New Orleans, Benjamin Butler proved to be an ineffective military governor and a mediocre military commander. His corruption and his infantile behavior toward the citizens of Louisiana (and especially toward the ladies) alienated the very people Lincoln wanted to placate, so that they would voluntarily embrace the Grand Republic and bring Louisiana back into the Union. Lincoln wanted to make Louisiana his Reconstruction showcase state, and he realized that willing subjects would produce more cotton than outraged civilians, whose sympathies would naturally lie with the Confederacy. For this reason, “Beast” Butler had to go. Lincoln replaced him with Nathaniel P. Banks.

It is not possible to understand the Civil War, and especially the Union side of the war, without having at least some understanding of the political soldier, who Lincoln felt compelled to appoint to high command. Jefferson Davis appointed political soldiers also but at lower levels than Lincoln, presumably because, as a West Point graduate, a regimental commander and hero in the Mexican War, and former secretary of war, he had a better appreciation of the dangers involved. Lincoln, on the other hand, did not

hesitate to appoint them to army- and corps-level commands. This significantly increased the Union's casualty lists. Certainly it is impossible to understand the Red River disaster without knowing something of Nathaniel P. Banks, the archetypical political soldier.

Nathaniel Prentiss Banks was born on January 30, 1816, in Waltham, Massachusetts, a factory town that grew around the Boston Manufacturing Company, a cotton textile mill. He was the first of eight children of a mill worker. Nathaniel was a healthy, active boy and a born talker. Educated in a one-room schoolhouse, he dropped out against his will at age fourteen, to go to work as a bobbin boy at the Waltham Mill. His job was to remove bobbins from cotton spindles when they were full of thread and replace them with empty spools. He was paid \$2 per week.⁷ As a result of this early job, he was nicknamed the "Bobbin Boy" for the rest of his life.

Dissatisfied with his situation, Banks decided to rise above his working-class origins. He attended the lectures held by the Rumford Institute (which was owned by the Boston Manufacturing Company) and heard Daniel Webster, Caleb Cushing, and Charles Sumner speak, among others. He even tried his hand at acting, but this was not considered a Christian profession in Waltham. He also set up a dancing school but was forced to close it when the Boston Manufacturing Company announced that it would fire any of its female employees who attended the school.

Meanwhile, Banks found his first cause: total abstinence. He became the leading speaker for the temperance movement in Waltham. Banks never drank hard liquor in his life, although he would occasionally have a beer or a glass of wine with a meal. Soon he became a strong speaker for the Democratic Party, and he gained a certain local prominence. He quit the mill and became a newspaper editor but failed in this profession. He also ran for the Massachusetts legislature in 1844 but lost.

About this time, Banks found his mentor, Robert Rantoul, Jr. Smart and enthusiastic, Rantoul backed progressive causes, such as pacifism, reform of prisons and insane asylums, temperance, the end of capital punishment, and the abolition of slavery. Banks joined him in his causes and even copied his oratorical style, which allowed Banks to use his booming voice to maximum

advantage. Rantoul, who became a U.S. senator, would occasionally compromise his principles. Sometimes he would work for interests he professed to hate, including the Illinois Central Railroad. This lesson was not lost on Banks, who would do the same thing.

On April 11, 1847, after an eight-year engagement, the “Bobbin Boy” married Theodosia Palmer. Very much in love, he remained faithful and happily married for forty-seven years. They had four children. During the war, Nathaniel Banks had a special pocket sewn in his shirt, where he kept the pictures of his wife and children. He and his wife did have a common flaw, however, both tended to overspend. Mr. and Mrs. Banks were sharp dressers and loved expensive clothes, fine food, high society, and glittering parties.

By concentrating his campaign on nonfactory workers, Banks was finally elected to the legislature in November 1848. Here he played down his support of workers’ rights so as not to offend the moneyed interests. He even backed a liquor dealer who was running for state senator—an early indication of his willingness to place politics above principles. Meanwhile, as the Massachusetts electorate became more and more antislavery, Banks drifted toward abolitionism. He was reelected in 1850 and became speaker of the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1851. To supplement his income, he worked in Washington, D.C. as lobbyist for the state and as a publicist for the Massachusetts Board of Education.

Meanwhile, Nathaniel Banks educated himself. He had decided early that education was the key to upward mobility and he studied law, history, economics, foreign languages, and political science on his own. Visitors to his home commented that it was full of books. He was a voracious reader and, throughout his life, kept a notebook in his pocket to record data he found interesting or of note.

In 1852, Banks was narrowly elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. Here he generally avoided controversy and voted with the Pierce administration. (Banks wanted to be all things to all people.) He was reelected in 1854. Shortly thereafter, he switched over to the G.O.P., where there was more opportunity for advancement.

In Congress, the likeable Banks combined “Know Nothing” Americanism with opposition to slavery.⁸ This potent combination

propelled him to the speakership as a compromise candidate in early 1856, when he was elected on the 133rd ballot. This was considered the first national victory for the Republican Party. Personally charming, he did his best to please everyone and was always civil and courteous. He was praised by Alexander Stephens, the future vice president of the Confederacy, and Howell Cobb, the former speaker and future rebel general, even though he was working to reduce the political power of the agrarian South in favor of the industrial and commercial North, by building a transcontinental railroad across the northern states. He did, however, support compromise and moderation on the slavery issue and opposed the radical abolitionists. Even Banks's enemies considered him a success as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives.

In November 1856, James Buchanan was elected president of the United States, and the Democratic Party won a majority of the seats in the House, which cost Banks his speakership. Undeterred, the ambitious Bobbin Boy ran for governor and, in November 1857, defeated the incumbent, Henry J. Gardner. One of his first acts was to remove a judge who enforced the Fugitive Slave Law. He also flip-flopped on his previous prolabor positions and became an advocate of the interests of big business and the large corporations. He was reelected in 1858 and 1859. He ran for the Republican nomination for president in 1860 but was defeated by Abraham Lincoln.

In late 1860, Banks received a lucrative offer from the Illinois Central Railroad. He took the job recently vacated by George B. McClellan and started out making twice as much as he made as governor. He also received a rent-free house. He left office on January 3, 1861, and moved to Chicago. When the Civil War began, however, the president of the railroad (a Republican) gave Banks a full release from his contract.

On May 16, 1861, Banks accepted a commission as a major general of volunteers, despite the fact that he had never served a day in the military in his life. His appointment was purely political. He was outranked only by Winfield Scott, John C. Fremont, and George McClellan. The move, however, did bring a measure of additional popular support to the administration.



Nathaniel P. Banks (1816-94), the twenty-fourth governor of Massachusetts (1858-61) and Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives (1856-57). Abraham Lincoln appointed him major general, U.S. Army, in 1861. An astute politician, he proved to be over his head as commander of the Army of the Gulf.

Banks's first post was commander of the Department of Maryland. He replaced Benjamin Butler, who had, as usual, completely mishandled the situation. Banks initially continued the administration's policy of cooperation and even allowed the citizens of Baltimore to fly the Confederate flag. When he realized that this policy would not work, he gradually clamped down and restricted civilian travel in and out of Baltimore, arrested the chief of police, and placed the police department under the command of a Union colonel. Overall, he dealt with a potentially volatile situation with tact and skill and helped prevent Maryland (which was then a Southern state) from seceding. As a result, he was named commander of the Department of the Shenandoah, headquartered in Harpers Ferry.

In early October 1861, Banks met with Lincoln and Stanton at Harpers Ferry. Banks lobbied for a cabinet position, but Lincoln was pleased with his performance in Maryland, unlike the case with Fremont in Missouri or Butler in Virginia. (Fremont had issued his own emancipation proclamation and Butler had put slaves to work around Fort Monroe.) The president persuaded Banks to stay in the military, to the eventual ruin of the former governor's career.

Banks, who fully realized that military victories would further his presidential aspirations, liked the army and looked impressive in a uniform. He surrounded himself with a bodyguard of Zouaves, who wore red fezzes, white leather leggings, and scarlet trousers. He was not an effective soldier, however, because he could not impose discipline. He lacked a military background or education, and he appointed staff officers who were not only military illiterates but who were also "tactless and arrogant."⁹ He could not command the respect of his officers and men, and his orders against looting and soliciting prostitution were ignored. (About that same time, Confederate brigadier general Richard Taylor, Banks's future opponent in Louisiana, faced a similar problem. Then two enlisted men were disrespectful to one of his officers. Taylor had them court-martialed and shot. He had few problems with discipline after that, but the Massachusetts politician was not the kind of man to take this kind of action.)

General Banks's first experience in combat was commanding an army in the Shenandoah Valley against Stonewall Jackson, who

tore him limb from limb. The Rebels captured so many supplies and provisions that they called him “Commissary Banks,” a nickname that crossed the lines. Banks’s staff officers urged him to blame the War Department and to criticize the administration for his defeat, but Banks refused to do so. He took his beating like a man, earning him a measure of respect in Washington. Secretary Stanton wrote, “On this occasion as at other times General Banks has obeyed the orders from the War Department without one selfish complaint and was the only General of his rank of whom it could be said.”¹⁰ On the negative side, Banks felt he had done well to escape with his army and his trains. More seriously, he was not a man to learn from his mistakes.

On the morning of August 9, 1862, near Cedar Mountain, Virginia, Dr. Hunter McGuire, Jackson’s surgeon, asked the general if he expected a battle that day. Stonewall smiled and said, “Banks is in our front and he is generally willing to fight. And he generally gets whipped.”¹¹ Sure enough, Banks fought. He committed his units piecemeal, instead of all at once, and was again chewed up by the Rebels. Banks lost 2,400 men (500 of them killed)—a third of his command. Jackson lost about half as many. That night, Banks and his chief, Gen. John Pope, were nearly captured by Southern cavalry. Banks himself was painfully injured when a Southerner shot and killed his aide. The lieutenant was on his horse, which reared, and caught the dismounted general in the chin with his hoof.

That evening, Jackson commented to Jeb Stuart, the commander of Lee’s cavalry, that Banks had fought well. Stuart replied that Jackson would be ungrateful if he complained about Banks, “for he has been the best commissary and quartermaster you have ever had.”¹²

Despite his defeats, Banks was still popular in the North because he was popular with the Northern newspapers. (Media “spin” was certainly prevalent in the nineteenth century, even though the term would not be invented for another century.) On November 9, 1862, Lincoln ordered him to replace Butler as commander of the Department of the Gulf. Banks left New York for New Orleans on December 4, traveling with a fleet of fifty transports. He was not prepared for what he found there; the corruption was incredible.

“Everybody connected with the government has been employed in stealing other people’s property,” he wrote to his wife.¹³

Historians consider the 1870s one of the most corrupt eras in the history of American politics. This phenomenon did not develop overnight. There was plenty of corruption in the 1860s as well, and much of it occurred in wartime New Orleans, which has never been known for its pristine politics. War brings out the best in some people and the worst in others, and the war had driven the price of cotton from \$0.06 per pound to \$1.09 per pound. Quick and large fortunes could be made buying and selling “White Gold,” and as the port nearest the cotton fields, New Orleans naturally attracted the worst kind of speculator. The fact that these speculators would have to deal with Confederates or slave owners (whom many of them professed to despise) did not bother them particularly. One of these speculators was Andrew Butler, the brother of the general, who offered General Banks a \$100,000 bribe. Banks, who was not personally corrupt at this stage of his career, turned down the money, but there were others who were more than willing to accept. Andrew Butler would die a rich man.

Southerners, of course, took bribes also, but there seems to have been fewer of them. Banks tried to bribe Rebel officers into not burning cotton and/or handing it over to Union speculators for a handsome profit. Naturally, exact figures are lacking, but this effort did not produce as much in the way of results as Banks had hoped. It was not that Southerners were more morally upright or were averse to making a dollar on the sly, as long as it was in gold or greenbacks and not worthless Confederate script. It was just that the new Rebel commander in Louisiana was General Taylor, and he had ordered his officers to burn the cotton, rather than to sell it for personal profit or let it fall into Yankee hands. Unlike Banks, Richard Taylor was respected. More to the point, Taylor was feared. Nathaniel Banks spoke coldly to people who disobeyed his orders. Dick Taylor had them hanged or shot, which was a much more effective deterrent. Even so, there were those who were willing to risk it.

Meanwhile, the Confederate military government was doing exactly what it had ordered its citizens not to do: it was trading with the enemy.

J. H. McKee and Banks had an understanding. McKee's cousin, Maj. A. W. McKee, held an important position in the Cotton Bureau of the Confederates' Trans-Mississippi Department, of which Taylor's Army of Western Louisiana was a part. (Since he was on the staff of Gen. Edmund Kirby Smith, Taylor's superior, McKee was beyond Taylor's reach.) McKee undertook to see that Confederate cotton was not burned as the Federals approached. For this service, he received \$0.18 per pound. The money was deposited in a New Orleans bank, in a joint account with McKee and Col. Samuel B. Holabird, chief quartermaster of Banks' Department of the Gulf.¹⁴

Another speculator was Gardner Banks, the Bobbin Boy's brother. He had resigned his commission in the Sixteenth Massachusetts due to a bad knee and showed up in New Orleans, seeking favors. He ended up making huge profits, mainly in sutlers' goods. General Taylor's brother-in-law, Martin Gordon, Jr., was also a cotton speculator.¹⁵ He did not, however, receive any support or encouragement from Taylor.

One of the most prominent speculators was George S. Denison, a young relative of Secretary of the Treasury Chase. He was a high-ranking treasury official in New Orleans and took bribes and sold permits for other speculators to deal with the Rebels.

Banks himself did not take monetary bribes, as far as we know. "His thirst is not for money, but for power," Major Pellet wrote.¹⁶ Even so, he was certainly willing to associate with dubious characters. When he arrived to assume command in New Orleans, several cotton speculators were on the ship with him. He allowed A. S. Mansfield, a representative of the Boston financial power brokers, and Jacob Barker of the New Orleans Bank of Commerce, to carry \$45,000 in gold beyond Union lines, to deal with Confederate officials. In his isolated department, Confederate general Kirby Smith was perfectly willing to let his agents sell cotton to the Yankees for gold. He then sent other agents to Europe via Mexico, where they bought all manners of military equipment, hardware, ammunition, shoes, food, medicine, liquor, and other supplies and had them shipped back home—all under the protection of the Mexican flag.

The United States War Department issued General Order 88 on March 31, 1863, instructing military commanders to turn over all

captured and abandoned Confederate property (including cotton) to treasury agents, except that required by the army. Banks ignored the order. He had been selling the property to help defray the expenses of his department—and continued to do so.¹⁷

Although Banks may not have pocketed tainted money, he did live large while in New Orleans. He brought his wife to town and held many lavish parties. One costume ball alone cost more than a \$1,000. Her confectioner's bill for three months was \$637. The general's pay at this time was less than \$600 a month.

A thriving trade certainly existed between the cotton speculators, the Confederates, and the quartermaster of the Department of the Gulf. The chief quartermaster, Colonel Holabird, was found intoxicated and partially dressed in the residence of one of his staff officers, who kept six to eight mulatto girls. These officers could not have afforded such luxuries on their salaries. They (and others) were bribed into certifying cotton speculators and allowing them to operate freely, both inside and beyond Union lines. Exactly how much General Banks knew about this trade is subject to conjecture, but he certainly had to be aware of it. He even sent Federal officers in civilian clothes behind Rebel lines to buy cotton. Several Texans later captured in the Battle of Pleasant Hill recognized some of these "cotton buyers" as they were being sent to the Union rear. They were officers on Banks's staff.¹⁸

Even President Lincoln, who was under tremendous pressure, sometimes granted special trading permits to certain people. On other occasions, he steadfastly refused to do so. He certified William Butler, an old friend from his Springfield days, and several others with the authority to buy cotton. He ordered Banks and Admiral Porter, the senior naval officer in the department, to assist them in any way necessary. Lincoln was also duped at least once. John A. Stevenson, a director of the Louisiana State Bank, bought 19,000 bales of cotton and shipped them to Europe via New Orleans. His permit to do this was personally signed by Abraham Lincoln. Stevenson, however, was a loyal Confederate and was apparently a captain in the Confederate Secret Service. Little documentation concerning this shady deal is extant, so some of the details are missing, but we do know that Stevenson's operation had the full approval of Gen. Kirby Smith, who was aware of everything. The

cotton was provided by Col. W. A. Broadwell, the chief of the Cotton Bureau of the Trans-Mississippi Department (i.e., by the Confederate government), and Jefferson Davis was fully briefed on what was transpiring. Davis, in fact, knew more about the deal than did Lincoln. The funds from the sale were reportedly transferred from the bank to Stevenson's personal account in Europe, and he transferred them to a Confederate treasury account. Apparently, Stevenson did not keep any money for himself and did not make a dime off the transaction.¹⁹

Whatever else he may have bungled, Benjamin Butler realized that the Union was failing to utilize a major potential source of manpower: the African American. He created a stir within Federal ranks when he allowed them to enlist in already existing units, so he began forming all black units on a large scale.²⁰ As soon as he arrived, Banks canceled this policy, on the grounds that many Union soldiers felt it degraded the uniform to have black troops in the army. Apparently, this was the general's view as well.²¹ Shortly thereafter, however, Lincoln announced that he was in favor of recruiting Negroes. Banks, ever the political chameleon, promptly reserved himself and resumed recruiting former slaves. He did, however, discontinue Butler's policy of commissioning black officers. He wrote Lincoln and asserted that they were simply "unsuited" to be officers. He set up a Board of Examiners to investigate the blacks that Butler had commissioned, to determine if they were qualified and could keep their commissions. The board seems to have been stacked; very few black officers were allowed to keep their ranks.

Before he departed, Butler had begun organizing three black regiments. Banks allowed the process to continue and indeed organized a fourth, but he did nothing to improve the quality of officers, which was very poor. Mediocre Union officers who found their way to promotion in white units blocked by their own poor performance often volunteered for duty in "Colored" regiments, because this was the only avenue of advancement left to them. Also, some were transferred to black units against their will. Commanders of white regiments found it convenient to off-load their troublemakers and other problem officers on black regiments.

The excellent black sergeants and corporals partially compensated for this huge deficiency, but it was usually not enough. Although there were some exceptions, black formations were generally worse led than any other units in the entire Civil War.

A good example of the incompetent white officer was Lt. Col. Augustus W. Benedict. He was “a tactless and unstable man,” noted for his foul language. He was transferred to the Fourth Regiment, Corps d’Afrique, in Baton Rouge, where his sadistic tendencies came to the fore, and he vented his spleen on what he thought were helpless soldiers. In August 1863, two blacks were caught stealing corn. Benedict had them staked to the ground and covered with molasses, in order to attract ants. When other Union soldiers objected to his torture, Benedict refused to release them, stating that he did not care if they died. They were not released for two days. A brutal tyrant, Benedict frequently struck black soldiers in the face with his fists and kicked them for minor infractions, such as not having their brass polished properly or failing to shine their boots.²²

Benedict continued to abuse and humiliate black soldiers until December 9, 1863. (By this time, the Fourth had been transferred from Baton Rouge to Fort Jackson, on the Mississippi River, south of New Orleans.) That day, two black soldiers appeared for a formation without their coats. Colonel Benedict assembled the unit and had the men beaten fifteen to twenty times with a teamster’s bullwhip. Then he had them thrown in the guardhouse. The result was a riot and a mutiny. The blacks maintained a silent fury until they were dismissed. Shortly thereafter, all hell broke loose. More than 250 blacks (i.e., more than half of the understrength regiment) joined the mutiny. Col. James R. Drew, the regimental commander, tried to restore order but without success. The mutineers stormed the stockade and released all of the prisoners. They also seized the regimental armory, issued themselves weapons, fired guns into the air, and started looking for Benedict. The colonel fled to a nearby steamboat and barely escaped with his life. Fortunately for him, the mutineers stormed the wrong steamer, yelling “Kill the son of a bitch!” Gradually, it dawned on the leaders that Benedict had escaped. With the cause of the riot gone, the company-grade white officers restored order by persuading the blacks to return to their barracks.²³

Banks, embarrassed by the riot, ordered an investigation and summoned Benedict to New Orleans. The lieutenant colonel offered to resign, but Banks court-martialed him instead. He was dishonorably discharged from the service. Thirteen of the blacks were also court-martialed. Four were acquitted, two were sentenced to death by firing squad, six were sentenced to hard labor, and one received thirty days in the guardhouse. Banks refused to confirm the death sentences and ordered the release of the man in the guardhouse.²⁴

In the spring of 1863, Lincoln ordered Brig. Gen. Daniel Ullmann to recruit a black brigade in the Department of the Gulf. Another political general, Ullmann had been the Know-Nothing candidate for governor of New York in 1854. Later, he joined the Republican Party and supported Abraham Lincoln for president. When the war broke out, he helped recruit the Seventy-Eighth New York (Highlander) Regiment and, as its colonel, led it in Virginia in 1862, where it formed part of Nathaniel Banks's ill-fated army. The two men quickly formed a mutual dislike for each other, at least in part because Banks was a teetotaler and Ullmann was a drunkard. Partially due to Banks's mismanagement, Ullmann was wounded and captured at Cedar Mountain. This did nothing to improve the relationship between the two men. The fact that Lincoln required Banks to provide Ullmann with two hundred officers from his department further exacerbated the bad situation. Although Banks was surprised and very pleased by his black regiments' fine performance during the Siege of Port Hudson in June and July 1863, he nevertheless did all he could to undermine Ullmann. The former Highlander raised five regiments, mainly by impressing blacks against their will, but Banks and his staff saw to it that they were badly equipped, poorly supplied, and not used in major operations.

Not to be outdone by Ullmann, in September 1863, Banks ordered that all able-bodied Negro males between twenty and thirty years of age be drafted into the Corps d'Afrique.²⁵ By October 1863, there were twenty regiments in the corps.

Black units still did not measure up to the standards of other Northern units because of their poor equipment and poorer officers. "The lack of discipline found among some of the Negro troops often

could be blamed on their inefficient, lazy, or corrupt officers,” historian John D. Winters wrote.²⁶ Brig. Gen. George L. Andrews, the commandant of Port Hudson and a regular army officer, was one of many Union officers who realized that the quality of officers in black regiments needed to be vastly improved. Unlike some of the other generals, however, Andrews actually did something about it. He set up a school for white officers assigned to the Corps d’Afrique and personally supervised the instruction. Nevertheless, the entire Union effort to train and employ black regiments and their officers suffered from a total lack of uniformity.²⁷

During the Civil War, 179,000 to 185,000 blacks served in the Union Army. By the end, 12 percent of the 1 million men in the United States Army were African American. Banks’s Department of the Gulf (which included Ullmann) raised twenty-eight regiments by September 1864—more than any other department. In all, the United States Colored Troops (USCT) totaled 145 infantry regiments, twelve regiments of heavy artillery, ten batteries of light artillery, and seven regiments of cavalry. Union African Americans fought in 449 battles during the Civil War, including thirty-nine major engagements, and 68,178 died from wounds, exposure, or disease—more than 37 percent of the total.²⁸

It will probably come as a surprise to many, but there was another side to this coin: tens of thousands of African Americans fought for the Confederacy as well. Pvt. James G. Bates of the Thirteenth Iowa Volunteers was certainly surprised when a black Confederate sniper shot some of his comrades. He wrote to his father: “I can assure you of a certainty, that the rebels have negro soldiers in their army. One of their best sharp shooters, and the boldest of them all here is a negro. . . . You can see him plain enough with the naked eye”²⁹ In fact, the first Union officer killed in action in the Civil War was Maj. Theodore Winthrop, the son of a prominent New England abolitionist family. He was shot down in the Battle of Big Bethel by a black Confederate sniper.³⁰

The Yankees had been warned. Frederick Douglass, himself a former slave, told Abraham Lincoln to his face that, unless he guaranteed the slaves freedom, “they would take up arms for the

rebels.” The president—for the moment—did not listen. As a result, Douglass wrote in September 1861, “There are at the present moment, many colored men in the Confederate Army doing duty not as cooks, servants and laborers, but as real soldiers, having muskets on their shoulders and bullets in their pockets ready to shoot down loyal troops and do all that soldiers may do to destroy the Federal government.”³¹

Horace Greeley essentially agreed in 1863 when he wrote, “For more than two years, Negroes have been extensively employed in belligerent operations by the Confederacy. They have been embodied and drilled as rebel soldiers and had paraded with white troops at a time when this would not have been tolerated in the armies of the Union.”³²

In September 1862, Robert E. Lee ordered a staff officer to determine for him how many armed blacks were serving in the ranks of the Army of Northern Virginia. There were more than three thousand under arms, carrying “rifles, muskets, sabers, Bowie knives, dirks” and all sorts of other weapons.³³ This report was delivered shortly after the Battle of Antietam. Three thousand men would equal more than 7 percent of his army. Lee later commented, “When you eliminate the black Confederate soldier, you eliminate the history of the South.”³⁴

Other generals would have agreed with Lee. “Better Confederates never lived” than the black Confederate soldier. These words were uttered by Nathan Bedford Forrest, who also once called them the best soldiers in the world. He was a slave trader before the war, a Confederate lieutenant general during the war, and the head of the Ku Klux Klan after the war.³⁵ Throughout the Civil War, Forrest had an escort company. Under Forrest’s personal command, the company was usually thrown into action at decisive points in the battle, where the fighting was hottest. About 20 percent of its members were African American. Even today, there is a significant black membership in the Sons of Confederate Veterans.

The Rebels were enrolling African Americans in their ranks from day one, despite the edict from their government, forbidding the recruitment of Negroes into the Confederate Army, unless they were musicians. The company commanders ignored this regulation. (Being Confederates, they tended to ignore a great



Nathan Bedford Forrest (1821-77), a former slave trader and a leader in the Ku Klux Klan. Like several other Confederate generals, including Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and Patrick Cleburne, he advocated freeing any slave who would serve in the Southern army, and he personally freed more than forty himself.

many regulations anyway.) Typically, the potential black recruit was asked only one question. "Will you fight?" If the answer was "Yes, sir," he immediately received his first order: "Fall in!" The graycoats had been using blacks in combat more than a year before Brig. Gen. David Hunter in South Carolina, Sen. James H. Lane of Kansas, and General Butler pioneered their use on the other side.³⁶ It is one of history's ironies that the Civil War was fought by an integrated army and a segregated army. The Confederate Army was integrated. The Union Army was largely segregated.

One man who was acutely aware that the Southerners had stolen a march on the North in using African Americans as combat troops was Henry Halleck, the general in chief of the Union Army. On March 31, 1863, he called upon Ulysses S. Grant to recruit African Americans when he wrote, "Again, it is the policy of the Government to use the Negroes of the South, as far as practicable, as a military force, for the defense of forts, depots, & etc. . . . In the hands of the enemy, they [Negroes] are used with much effect against us; in our hands, we must try to use them with the best possible effect against the rebels."³⁷

So how many African Americans fought for the South? Confederate records are, as usual, too inadequate to give us precise numbers. Thanks to the blockade, the South had no paper and, by the end of the war, its people were writing letters on the back of wallpaper. Older letters were also reused. The new sentences were written between the lines of the older text. By 1864, most military units did not have written rosters. In addition, most Confederate records were destroyed by Appomattox Day. Estimates of the number of black combat soldiers vary from 65,000 to 100,000, with 80,000 to 96,000 being the best estimates, in my view, based on the report to General Lee. Ed Kennedy, a historian, a graduate of Command and General Staff College, and a retired colonel, seems to agree. He estimated that 7 percent to 8 percent of the Confederate forces were black.³⁸ This estimate coincides with my own estimates. Incidentally, the black Rebels were much better led than their Union counterparts because they had the same officers as the white Rebels.

There were a great many other blacks who served the Southern army in noncombatant roles, such as mule skinnners, cooks, hospital

orderlies, and the like. Many of these deserted or went over to the Union when they got the chance. Black combat soldiers, on the other hand, tended to stay with their units at least as well as their white counterparts.

Why, the question must be asked, did they fight for the South? Some of these Confederate blacks substituted for their owners and would earn their freedom if they survived the war. Others were free blacks fighting for their homes and families. Southern blacks were Southerners too, and slave cabins were burned by the Yankees, just like the plantation houses (see chapters V and following). The number of blacks in Taylor's army may have exceeded 8 percent. As early as the spring of 1861, an entire black militia regiment formed in New Orleans and volunteered to serve the Confederate State of Louisiana, and Gov. Thomas O. Moore accepted them.

By 1864, Banks's recruiters had closed the gap, and the number of blacks serving in the Army of the Gulf outnumbered the number of African Americans fighting for the South. Banks, however, did not make very good use of his black regiments. Their main tasks were to guard the wagon trains and rear-area posts. To the north, however, Maj. Gen. Frederick Steele, a professional soldier, used his "Colored" soldiers as combat troops and with some excellent results, as we shall see.

Although Banks was theoretically a military commander, there was a definite political component in his job, and he was much more comfortable working in that area than in the military sphere. Banks, in fact, sometimes let political considerations delay and even undermine military operations. To a lesser degree, so did Abraham Lincoln.

In December 1862, Lincoln asked the military governor of Louisiana, Brig. Gen. George F. Shepley, to hold elections in the two congressional districts behind Northern lines.³⁹ The turnout was gratifyingly high, and Michael Hahn and Benjamin F. Flanders were elected to Congress. Lincoln, meanwhile, decided to make Louisiana the first Southern state to be reconstructed.

Banks agreed with Lincoln on this matter and tried to play poor whites against planters in occupied Louisiana. His attempts to create and then benefit from class warfare failed, however, because

both classes united against the Northern invader. The Yankees and their sympathizers were far from united themselves. With Hahn and Flanders gone to Washington, leadership of the Louisiana Republicans passed to Thomas Jefferson Durant, a lawyer and a Philadelphia native. Durant had very radical ideas for 1863. He favored universal suffrage—even to the point of allowing blacks and women to vote. He soon came into conflict with Banks, who feared that Durant's ideas would scuttle his efforts to set up a free state of Louisiana.

On December 9, 1863, Abraham Lincoln instituted the 10 percent rule. He (and the Federal government) would recognize the legitimacy of any free state government in which the number of people taking the oath of loyalty exceeded 10 percent of the number of people who voted in the 1860 election. On January 11, 1864, Banks ordered a gubernatorial election. Only men who signed the oath of loyalty would be allowed to vote. Election day was set for February 22.

There were three main candidates for governor: Flanders (the radical), Hahn (the moderate), and J. Q. A. Fellows (the conservative). Hahn, who was Banks's man, attacked Flanders' views on black suffrage and hammered on the fact that Flanders considered blacks equal to whites. Eleven thousand people voted—including Union soldiers, who were allowed to vote by General Banks. By thus stuffing the ballot boxes, Banks was able to double Lincoln's 10 percent requirement and made himself look very good. With the election over, Banks was able to abolish General Shepley's position and transferred Butler's lieutenant to Virginia. Hahn, meanwhile, joined a group of New England financiers and committed himself to backing the Bobbin Boy for president of the United States in 1864, so Banks won all the way around. Sometimes his skills as a political operator can only be marveled at.

Banks's department extended from Pensacola to Baton Rouge, and his area of responsibility extended from Florida to Brownsville, Texas, on the Mexican border. In late 1862, it controlled 36,000 men, 22,000 of whom were in New Orleans. The Confederate Department of Louisiana had only four thousand men. Banks organized his men into an infantry corps (the Nineteenth) and

four infantry divisions, numbered First through Fourth, and commanded by Maj. Gen. Christopher C. Augur; Brig. Gen. Thomas W. Sherman; Brig. Gen. William H. Emory; and Brig. Gen. Cuvier Grover, respectively. In August 1863, Banks was reinforced with Maj. Gen. Cadwalader C. Washburn's Thirteenth Corps from Vicksburg.⁴⁰ When it arrived in New Orleans, Banks gave up command of the Nineteenth, which was taken over by Maj. Gen. William B. Franklin. Banks now had more than 50,000 men. There were only 21,000 Confederate soldiers west of the Mississippi, and they were scattered over thousands of square miles in Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Indian Territory.

Meanwhile, Butler's plan to invade Texas never really died. The New England textile and financial interests were constantly lobbying for it, and so was the State Department, especially Secretary Seward and Charles Francis Adams, who wanted to disrupt the Confederate trade with Europe via Mexico.⁴¹

On July 29, 1863, Lincoln wrote to Secretary of War Stanton and asked if they should not renew the effort to invade Texas. Such a move might forestall French intervention in Mexico, Lincoln thought, and also silence the lobby at home.⁴² As a result, on July 31 and August 6, 1863, Gen. Henry W. Halleck, the general in chief of the Union Army, ordered Banks to invade Texas—even though Halleck did not believe in the operation himself.

"Old Brains" Halleck was born in Westernville, New York, on January 16, 1815, the son of a farmer. He hated farming, so he ran away from home and was adopted by his maternal grandfather, who successively sent him to the Hudson Academy, Union College, and West Point. He graduated third in his class in 1839. He subsequently won a reputation as an outstanding engineer, writer, and military thinker. He studied law in his spare time. Highly gifted intellectually, Halleck participated in the Mexican War and played a major role in writing the California constitution. He left the army in 1854, joined a prestigious California law firm, and was even offered a seat in the United States Senate but declined, probably because he could not afford the pay cut. Meanwhile, he made a fortune as a lawyer and as a publisher. In 1861, on the recommendation of Winfield Scott, Lincoln appointed Halleck to the rank of major general in the regular army. He was sent to St. Louis, where he commanded the Department of the Mississippi.



Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck (1815-72) was nicknamed "Old Brains." As general in chief of the Union Army (1862-64), he was one of the main advocates of the Red River campaign idea. A brilliant engineer and highly gifted intellectually, he was a mediocre strategist who had clearly been promoted beyond his capabilities. Lincoln demoted him in March 1864.

Early in the war, Halleck looked good, thanks to the successes of his subordinates. Grant captured Forts Henry and Donelson and repulsed the Rebels at Shiloh; Samuel R. Curtis secured Missouri for the Union by defeating the Confederates at Pea Ridge; and John Pope captured Island No. 10 in the Mississippi River. As a result, Halleck's territory was expanded. When he attempted to command an army in the field, however, Halleck's luster dulled considerably. His advance on Corinth, Mississippi, was terribly slow, and the Confederate commander, Pierre G. T. Beauregard, evacuated the town on his own schedule and with few losses, despite being outnumbered more than two to one. Lincoln nevertheless recalled Halleck to Washington as general in chief of Union forces.

Although he was a good administrator, Halleck was a poor general in chief because he bent with the political winds and did not like to make decisions. He shifted responsibility at every opportunity and was difficult to pin down on any issue. Gideon Welles wrote in his diary that Halleck "originates nothing, anticipates nothing . . . takes no responsibility, plans nothing, suggests nothing, is good for nothing."⁴³ Clearly over his head in his position, Halleck wanted to carry out Lincoln's orders to invade Texas to the letter—but not to the spirit. He wanted Banks to launch a token invasion of the state, but he wanted his main effort in 1864 to be an offensive up the Red River; furthermore, he wanted it to appear that all of this was Banks's idea. Halleck could always take the credit later, if things worked out. Typically, Halleck's orders to Banks did not include any specific plans. Not even objectives were given.⁴⁴

Banks believed that the best way to invade Texas was via the Sabine Pass, at the mouth of the Sabine River. From here, he could establish a base, take Houston, and move into the hill country, where he would be joined by the German immigrants. On August 31, he ordered General Franklin to load a brigade from the First Division, Nineteenth Corps (six thousand men), aboard sixteen transports to take the pass. The spearhead consisted of four gunboats. Neither the Union Army nor the navy wasted any time in planning the operation.

The Battle of the Sabine Pass was fought on September 8, 1863, and was arguably the most lopsided Southern victory of the war. The defenders consisted of forty-six Confederate infantrymen from the Jeff Davis Guards and six guns from the First Texas Heavy

Artillery Regiment, commanded by Lt. Richard W. Dowling, an Irish tavern owner. Firing from behind the walls of a mud fort, ambitiously dubbed Fort Griffin, the Rebels brought an accurate and devastating fire on the Union vessels. The first rounds hit the gunboat *Sachen* and cut its main steam pipe, knocking it out of action. Next, Dowling's gunners blasted the gunboat *Clifton* and pierced her boilers. Like the *Sachen*, she ran aground. The rest of the flotilla retired and limped back to New Orleans without landing a single infantryman. Both abandoned gunboats were forced to surrender. The Federals lost fifty men killed or wounded and 350 captured, including the naval commander of the expedition, Capt. Frederick Crocker. The entire operation was a minor disaster. The Confederates suffered no casualties.

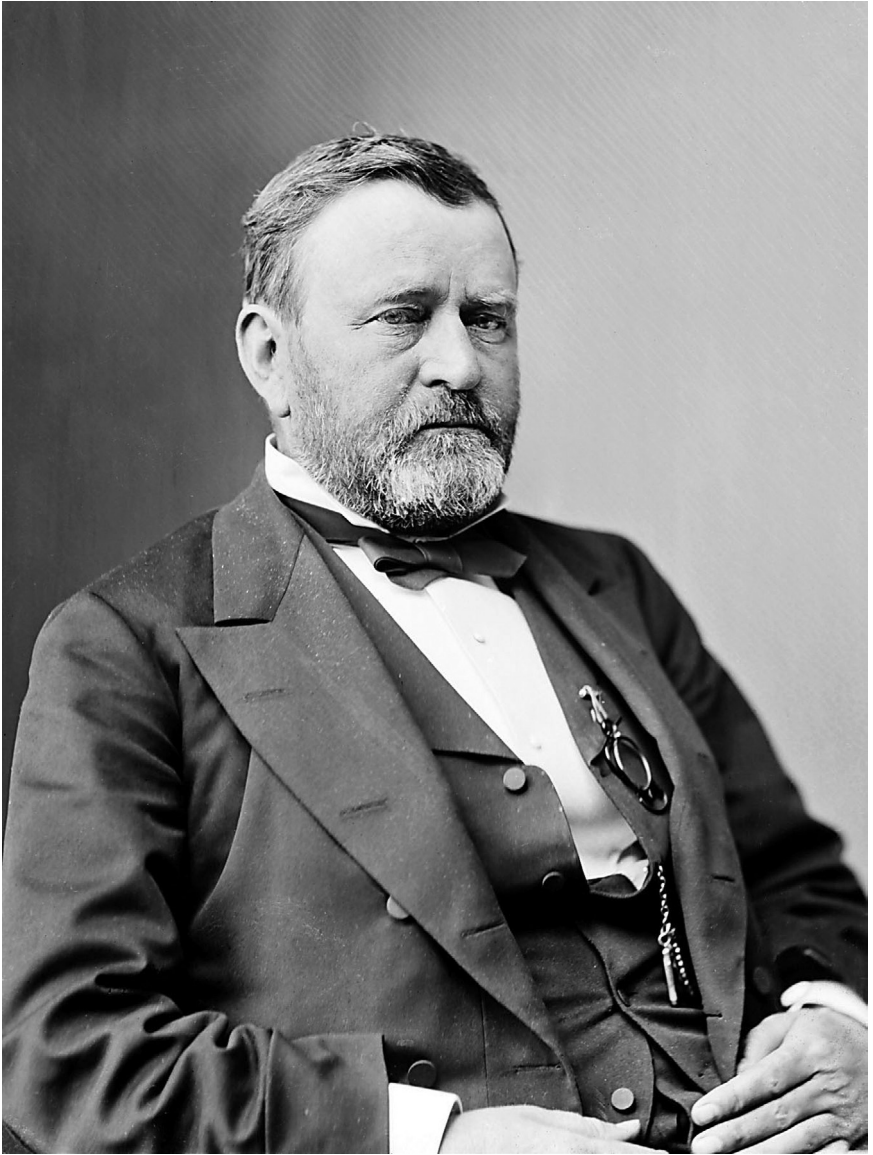
Banks, who used politicians' tactics, officially blamed the "ignorance" of the navy for the fiasco. The rift between the general and Admiral Porter began here and only widened with time.⁴⁵

Incidentally, Banks, Lincoln, and others were quite wrong in their beliefs that most of the German immigrants were Union sympathizers, as would be proven beyond a shadow of a doubt during the Red River campaign. It is true that some of them were conscientious objectors, but they did not want to shoot anybody—and that included Rebels. Others simply did not want to fight in what they regarded as a "foreign war." Many, however, joined the Confederate Army, where they fought more effectively than Union Germans. "When these people [the conscientious objectors] are set against the actual service records of the Germans as a whole, any criticism of the Germans as a group becomes mere carping nonsense," the historian of the Thirty-Second Texas Cavalry Regiment wrote later. He recalled that many of them spoke German and were completely European in their ideas. Anyone entering their camp, he said, might think that he was entering an encampment of the Prussian Guards.⁴⁶

Smarting over the defeat at Sabine Pass, Banks launched a series of amphibious landings along the Texas coast in late 1863. The Confederates did not have enough forces to defeat them or even to contest some of them, so the operations were successful. Footholds and beachheads were established at Brazos Island near Brownsville, on Matagorda Bay, at Arkansas Pass, and at Rio Grande

City.⁴⁷ Banks's dispatches and the newspaper reports made them sound like great successes, but they really did not amount to very much. The only real Union victory was the capture of Brownsville, which fell on November 5. Gov. Andrew Jackson Hamilton set up his capitol and a pro-Union government there a few days later.

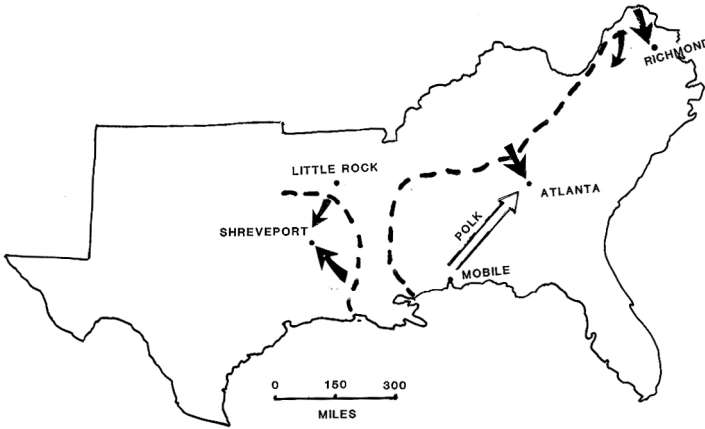
Back in Washington, Old Brains was displeased by the landings, which Banks had undertaken without informing him. On January 4, 1864, he wrote Banks and told him that William Tecumseh Sherman and Frederick Steele, the commander of the Seventh Corps in Little Rock, both agreed with him (Halleck) that the Red River route was the shortest and best way to invade Texas. Halleck did not mention that the greatest Union general of them all, Ulysses S. Grant, opposed the Red River operation. As Grant saw it (quite correctly, as events later proved), even if it were successful, the Red River campaign would do little to help the Union war effort, because there were no vital objectives west of the Mississippi River. Even if Banks captured Shreveport, the Trans-Mississippi Department would still be intact and tens of thousands of Union troops would be strung out over a long and tenuous supply line. Grant felt that the proper objective for Banks's army was Mobile. He understood that the war would be won or lost in 1864, and it would be won or lost east of the Mississippi. Here, at the beginning of 1864, Gen. George Meade's Army of the Potomac (73,000 men) faced Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia (38,000 men) north of Richmond.⁴⁸ North of Atlanta, Grant (later Sherman) faced the Army of Tennessee (Gen. Joseph E. Johnston) with slightly better odds.⁴⁹ Sherman's three armies (George H. Thomas's Army of the Cumberland, James B. McPherson's Army of the Tennessee, and John M. Schofield's Army of the Ohio) totaled 99,000 men and had 257 guns. Johnston had 42,000 men and 113 guns, before Polk reinforced him.⁵⁰ If Banks's Army of the Gulf drove on Mobile, the worse-case scenario would be that the Rebel Army of Mississippi (almost 20,000 men under Lt. Gen. Leonidas Polk) would be tied down. If he was not engaged by Banks, Grant foresaw, Polk would not remain idle: he would reinforce Joseph E. Johnston, who was defending Atlanta. On the other hand, if Banks advanced on Mobile, the Rebel divisions west of the Mississippi would not be able to do much to interfere with his operations because of the Union inland water navy.



Ulysses S. Grant (1822-95), seen here as president of the United States (1869-77). He unsuccessfully opposed the entire Red River Expedition. Grant was named general in chief of the Union Army on March 10, 1864—too late to stop the operation, which began on March 12.

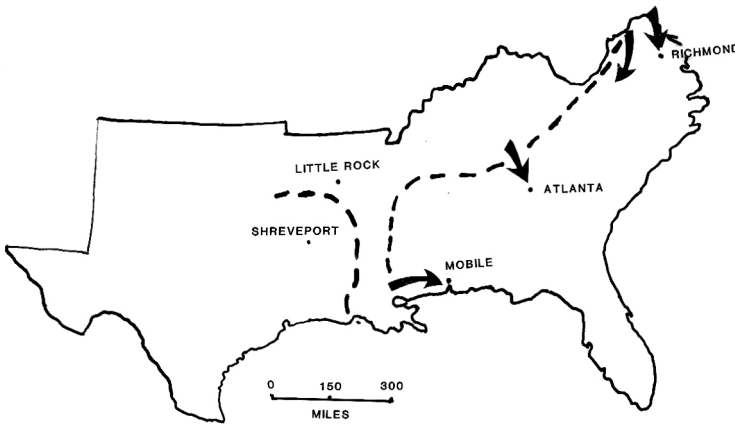
Events worked out exactly as Grant prophesied. Banks drove on Shreveport, and Polk reinforced Johnston with 14,000 men. Map 1.1 shows the strategy advocated by General Halleck. Grant's strategy is shown in map 1.2.

HALLECK'S STRATEGY, 1864



Map 1.1: Halleck's strategy

GRANT'S STRATEGY, 1864



Map 1.2: Grant's strategy

When the war began, in my opinion, the South could have won the war one of three ways: diplomatically, militarily, or politically. The diplomatic option was lost when Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. Prior to that, British and French intervention on the side of the Confederacy was possible. The aristocracy of both countries leaned in that direction, and the common people—even though they strongly opposed slavery—needed the South's cotton. By issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln made the abolition of slavery a major Union war objective, second only to preserving the Union. In doing so, he seized the moral high ground. It was no longer possible for Great Britain and France to ally with the Confederacy. Their own populations were too dead set against it.

After Gettysburg and Vicksburg, Southern military victory was no longer a realistic possibility. This left the South with only the political option. If the Republicans lost the 1864 elections and the peace party replaced them, a negotiated settlement was possible—perhaps even likely. Holding Atlanta until after the election was thus the key to the entire war. Because the Army of the Gulf turned up the Red River instead of driving on Mobile, Leonidas Polk was able to reinforce the defenders of Atlanta with 14,000 men.⁵¹ Had Jefferson Davis retained Joseph E. Johnston as the commander of the Army of Tennessee, or replaced him with an abler army commander than John Bell Hood, Polk's corps could have made all of the difference. The Confederate States of America could very conceivably have survived the war.

Strangely enough, the only Union general of any stature who agreed with Grant was Nathaniel P. Banks. Banks, however, did not know Grant's opinion. This information had been deliberately withheld from him by Halleck, and Banks was not the kind of man to stand alone. When he received Halleck's dispatch of January 11, 1864, which stated that the best military minds in the Republic agreed that the Red River campaign was the best route to invade Texas and should be implemented, Banks—as he often did—reversed himself 180 degrees. Always anxious to please Halleck and “the powers that be,” on January 16, Banks caved completely and committed himself to a campaign up the Red River to Shreveport and into east Texas. To make matters worse, in order to help induce Banks to commit to this course of action, Halleck had promised to

reinforce the Army of the Gulf with an entire 10,000-man corps from Sherman's army. The Red River campaign had thus already shifted the balance of power in the decisive battle for Atlanta by 24,000 men, and it had not even begun. We have seen how Polk was able to provide Johnston, the defender of Atlanta, with 14,000 men he should not have had. Now Sherman would have to attack with 10,000 men fewer than he should have had.