

Excerpts from Ulysses S. Grant - Personal Memoirs

In the winter of 1838-9 I was attending school at Ripley, only ten miles distant from Georgetown, but spent the Christmas holidays at home. During this vacation my father received a letter from the Honorable Thomas Morris, then United States Senator from Ohio. When he read it he said to me, "Ulysses, I believe you are going to receive the appointment." "What appointment?" I inquired. "To West Point; I have applied for it." "But I won't go," I said. He said he thought I would, and *I thought so too, if he did.*"

I would not have the anniversaries of our victories celebrated, nor those of our defeats made fast days and spent in humiliation and prayer; but I would like to see truthful history written. Such history will do full credit to the courage, endurance and soldierly ability of the American citizen, no matter what section of the country he hailed from, or in what ranks he fought. The justice of the cause which in the end prevailed, will, I doubt not, come to be acknowledged by every citizen of the land, in time. For the present, and so long as there are living witnesses of the great war of sections, there will be people who will not be consoled for the loss of a cause which they believed to be holy. As time passes, people, even of the South, will begin to wonder how it was possible that their ancestors ever fought for or justified institutions which acknowledged the right of property in man.

All the older officers, who became conspicuous in the rebellion, I had also served with and known in Mexico: Lee, J. E. Johnston, A. S. Johnston, Holmes, [Paul] Herbert and a number of others on the Confederate side; McCall, Mansfield, Phil, Kearney and others on the National side. The acquaintance thus formed was of immense service to me in the war of the rebellion – I mean what I learned of the characters of those to whom I was afterwards opposed. I do not pretend to say that all movements, or even many of them, were made with special reference to the characteristics of the commander against whom they were directed. But my appreciation of my enemies was certainly affected by this knowledge. The natural disposition of most people is to clothe a commander of a large army whom they do not know, with almost superhuman abilities. A large part of the National army, for instance, and most of the press of the country, clothed General Lee with just such qualities, but I had known him personally, and knew that he was mortal; and it was just as well that I felt this.

While preparations for the move were going on I felt quite comfortable; but when we got on the road and found every house deserted I was anything but easy. In the twenty-five miles we had to march we did not see a person, old or young, male or female, except two horsemen who were on a road that crossed ours. As soon as they saw us they decamped as fast as their horses could carry them. I kept my men in the ranks and forbade their entering any of the deserted houses or taking anything from them. We halted at night on the road and proceeded the next morning at an early hour. Harris had been encamped in a creek bottom for the sake of being near water. The hills on either side of the creek extend to a considerable height, possibly more than a hundred feet. As we approached the brow of the hill from which it was expected we could see Harris' camp, and possibly find his men ready formed to meet us, my heart kept getting higher and higher until it felt to me as though it was in my throat. I would have given anything then to have been back in Illinois, but I had not the moral courage to halt and consider what to do; I kept right on. When we reached a point from which the valley below was in full view I halted. The place where Harris had been encamped a few days before was still there and the marks of a recent encampment were plainly visible, but the troops were gone. My heart resumed its place. It occurred to me at once that Harris

had been as much afraid of me as I had been of him. This was a view of the question I had never taken before; but it was one I never forgot afterwards. From that event to the close of the war, I never experienced trepidation upon confronting an enemy, though I always felt more or less anxiety. I never forgot that he had as much reason to fear my forces as I had his. The lesson was valuable.

I always admired the South, as bad as I thought their cause, for the boldness with which they silenced all opposition and all croaking, by press or by individuals, within their control. War at all times, whether a civil war between sections of a common country or between nations, ought to be avoided, if possible with honor. But once entered into, it is too much for human nature to tolerate an enemy within their ranks to give aid and comfort to the armies of the opposing section or nation.

When I had left camp that morning I had not expected so soon the result that was then taking place, and consequently was in rough garb. I was without a sword, as I usually was when on horseback on the field, and wore a soldier's blouse for a coat, with the shoulder straps of my rank to indicate to the army who I was. When I went into the house I found General Lee. We greeted each other and after shaking hands took our seats. I had my staff with me, a good portion of whom were in the room during the whole of the interview.

What General Lee's feelings were I do not know. As he was a man of much dignity, with an impassable face, it was impossible to say whether he felt inwardly glad that the end had finally come, or felt sad over the result, and was too manly to show it. Whatever his feelings, they were entirely concealed from my observation; but my own feelings, which had been quite jubilant on the receipt of his letter, were sad and depressed. I felt like anything rather than rejoicing at the downfall of a foe who had fought so long and valiantly, and had suffered so much for a cause, though that cause was, I believe one of the worst for which a people ever fought, and one for which there was the least excuse.

Introduction to Grant - Ron Chernow

The triumph of the *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, which sold a record breaking three hundred thousand copies in two-volume sets, was vintage Grant. Repeatedly he had bounced back from adversity, his career marked by surprising comebacks, and stunning reversals. He had endured many scenes, constantly growing and changing in the process. Like Twain, Walt Whitman was mesmerized by Grant and grouped him with George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Ralph Waldo Emerson in the quartet of greatest Americans. "In all Homer and Shakespeare there is no fortune or personality really more picturesque or rapidly changing, more full of heroism, pathos, and contrast" he wrote. The plain unadorned Grant had nothing stylish about him, leading sophisticated people to underrate his talents. He was a nondescript face in the crowd, the common man from the heartland raised to a higher power, who proved a simple westerner could lead a mighty army to victory and occupy the presidential chair with distinction.

Dismissed as a philistine, a boor, a drunk, and an incompetent, Grant has been subjected to pernicious stereotypes that grossly impede our understanding of the man. As a contemporary newspaper sniffed, Grant was "an ignorant soldier, coarse in his taste and blunt in his perceptions, fond of money and material enjoyment and of low company." In fact, Grant was a sensitive, complex, and misunderstood man with a shrewd mind, a wry wit, a rich fund of anecdotes, wide knowledge, and penetrating insights. Many acquaintances remembered the "silent" Grant as the

most engaging raconteur they ever met. His weather-beaten appearance during the war, when he wore simple military dress, often caked with mud, could be misleading, for an inner fineness and delicacy lay beneath the rough-hewn exterior. At the same time, Grant could be surprisingly naive and artless in business and politics.

The caricature of Grant as a filthy "butcher" is ironic for a man who couldn't stomach the sight of blood, studiously refrained from romanticizing warfare, and shied away from a military career. "I never went into a battle willingly or with enthusiasm," he remarked. "I was always glad when a battle was over. Invariably he deprecated war. "It is at all times a sad and cruel business. I hate war with all my heart, and nothing but imperative duty could induce me to engage in its work or witness its horrors." Grant never grew vainglorious from military fame, never gloated over enemy defeats, never engaged in victory celebrations. He has been derided as a plodding, dimwitted commander who enjoyed superior manpower and materiel and whose crude idea of strategy was to launch large, brutal assaults upon the enemy. In fact, close students of the war have shown that the percentage of casualties in Grant's armies was often lower than those of many Confederate generals. If Grant never shrank from sending masses of soldiers into bloody battles, it had nothing to do with a heartless disregard for human life and everything to do with bringing the war to a speedy conclusion.

The relentless focus on Grant's last battles against Robert E. Lee in Virginia has obscured his stellar record of winning battles in the western war long before taking charge of Union forces in early 1864. After that, he did not simply direct the Army of the Potomac, but masterminded the coordinated movements of all federal forces. A far-seeing general, he adopted a comprehensive policy for all theaters of war, treating them as an interrelated whole. However brilliant Lee was as a tactician, Grant surpassed him in grand strategy, crafting the plan that defeated the Confederacy. The military historian John Keegan paid homage to Grant as "the towering military genius of the Civil War" and noted the modernity of his methods as he mobilized railroads and telegraphs to set his armies in motion. Grant, he concluded, "was the greatest general of the war, one who would have excelled at any time in any army." Many Grant biographies dwell at length on the Civil War, then quickly skip over his presidency as an embarrassing coda to wartime heroism. He is portrayed as a rube in Washington, way out of his league. But Grant was an adept politician, the only president to serve two full consecutive terms between Andrew Jackson and Woodrow Wilson. Writing in 1888, British historian James Bryce assigned him to the "from rank" of presidents with Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln.

After that his reputation tumbled, his presidency degraded to an unfair cartoon of an inept executive presiding over a scandal-ridden administration. Recent biographies have begun to rehabilitate Grant in a long overdue reappraisal. While scandals unquestionably sullied his presidency, they eclipsed a far more notable achievement-safeguarding the civil rights of African Americans. Even eminent historians have gotten wrong-sometimes badly wrong-Grant's relationship with the black community. Typical is the view of C. Vann Woodward: "Grant had shown little interest during the war in emancipation as a late-developing war aim and little but hostility toward the more radical war aim of the few for black franchise and racial equality."

In truth, Grant was instrumental in helping the Union vanquish the Confederacy and in realizing the wartime ideals enshrined in the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments. The Civil War and Reconstruction formed two acts of a single historical drama to gain freedom and justice for black Americans, and Grant was the major personality who united those two periods. He was the single most important figure behind Reconstruction, and his historical reputation has

risen sharply with a revisionist view of that period as a glorious experiment in equal rights for all American citizens instead of a shameful fiasco.

What has been critically absent from Grant biographies is a systematic account of his relations with the four million slaves, whom he helped to liberate, feed, house, employ, and arm during the war, then shielded from harm when they became American citizens. Frederick Douglass paired Grant with Lincoln as the two people who had done most to secure African American advances: "May we not justly say ... that the liberty which Mr. Lincoln declared with his pen General Grant made effectual with his sword-by his skill in leading the Union armies to final victory?" For the admiring Douglass, Grant was "the vigilant, firm, impartial, and wise protector of my race." More recently the historian Sean Wilentz has ratified this verdict: "The evidence clearly shows that [Grant] created the most auspicious record on racial equality and civil rights of any president from Lincoln to Lyndon B. Johnson."

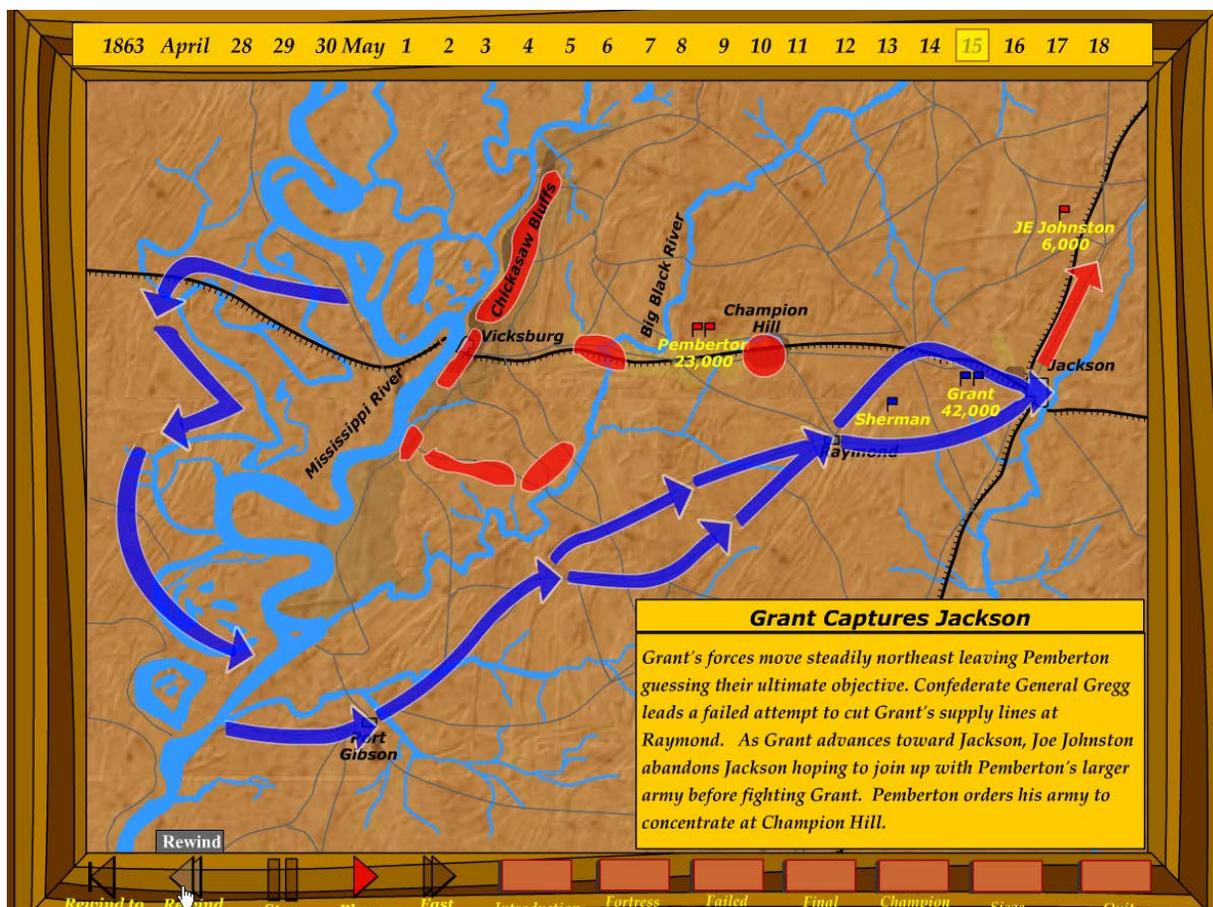
The imperishable story of Grant's presidency was his campaign to crush the Ku Klux Klan. Through the Klan, white supremacists tried to overturn the Civil War's outcome and restore the status quo ante. No southern sheriff would arrest the hooded night riders who terrorized black citizens and no southern jury would convict them. Grant had to cope with a complete collapse of evenhanded law enforcement in the erstwhile Confederate states. In 1870 he oversaw creation of the Justice Department, its first duty to bring thousands of anti-Klan indictments. By 1872 the monster had been slain, although its spirit resurfaced as the nation retreated from Reconstruction's lofty aims. Grant presided over the Fifteenth Amendment, which gave blacks the right to vote, and landmark civil rights legislation, including the 1875 act outlawing racial discrimination in public accommodations. His pursuit of justice for southern blacks was at times imperfect, but his noble desire to protect them never wavered.

Perhaps the most explosively persistent myth about Grant is that he was a "drunkard," with all that implies about self-indulgence and moral laxity. Modern science has shown that alcoholism is a "chronic disease," not a "personal failing as it has been viewed by many." Because Grant's drinking has been scrutinized in purely moralistic terms, his admirers have felt the need to defend him from the charge as vigorously as detractors have rushed to pin it on him. The drinking issue, both real and imaginary, so permeated Grant's career that a thoroughgoing account is needed to settle the matter. This biography will contend that Grant was an alcoholic with an astonishingly consistent pattern of drinking, recognized by friend and foe alike: a solitary binge drinker who would not touch a drop of alcohol, then succumb at three- or four-month intervals, usually on the road. As a rule, he underwent a radical personality change and could not stop himself once he started to imbibe. Alcohol was not a recreation selfishly indulged, but a forbidden impulse against which he struggled for most of his life. He joined a temperance lodge in early adulthood and lent the movement open support in later years. While drinking almost never interfered with his official duties, it haunted his career and trailed him everywhere, an infuriating, ever-present ghost he could not shake. It influenced how people perceived him and deserves close attention. As with so many problems in his life, Grant managed to attain mastery over alcohol in the long haul, a feat as impressive as any of his wartime victories.

The Battle of Vicksburg

Even as he pursued circuitous approaches to Vicksburg, Grant remained holed up for hours aboard the Magnolia, puffing intently on cigars and studying maps unfurled on a mahogany table before him. With its succession of natural barriers, Vicksburg was a riddle that he pondered with all-consuming concentration. "Heretofore I have had nothing to do but fight the enemy," he explained to Julia. "This time I have to overcome obstacles to reach him." During a parry aboard the flagship, the convivial James McPherson worried that Grant, oblivious to the crowd, was wearing himself down with hard work and attempted to lure him away from his desk. "General, this won't do; you are injuring yourself; join with us in a few toasts, and throw this burden off your mind." Grant smiled up at McPherson. "Mac, you know your whisky won't help me to think; give me a dozen of the best cigars you can find, and, if the ladies will excuse me for smoking, I think by the time I have finished them I shall have this job pretty nearly planned."

On April 1, Dana informed Stanton that Grant had ditched plans for indirect moves on Vicksburg. Lincoln had foreseen the failure of such tortuous approaches, telling a reporter he considered "all these side exhibitions through the country dangerous." Pale, haggard, the president suffered anxious moments as he impatiently awaited news of a breakthrough from Mississippi. His prayers were soon answered. As the Mississippi waters receded, exposing more dry land, Grant opted for a more direct approach to Vicksburg. In a stupendous leap of military daring, he decided to run his gunboats past its batteries at night, establishing a beachhead for his troops south of the city. Just how rough this would be was strikingly demonstrated on March 25, when Grant ran two steam rams past its over size guns. The Switzerland, though it absorbed a shot in its boiler room, floated past the fortress largely unharmed. The Lancaster, by contrast, was pulverized by Confederate fire.



"The wreck floated down and lodged at our lower pickets, bot- tom up," Grant told Halleck. "She was very rotten and worthless."

In addition to scooting gunboats and transports past miles of batteries, Grant would have to march his troops down the western Mississippi shore, then ferry them to dry land on the other bank. From there they would have to cut themselves off from their supply base and live off the land as they drove inland, taking the state capital at Jackson before turning on Vicksburg from the east. The strategy was fraught with danger, raising the prospect that Grant, operating in enemy territory, might be trapped between two Confederate armies—the Vicksburg garrison and any Confederate army that raced to its rescue from the east. It was also questionable whether such a large army could simply batten off the bounty of southern agriculture. Nevertheless, Grant was confident he could subjugate Vicksburg. As Cadwallader Washburn (sic) informed Elihu, "I hear that he says he has a plan of his own which is yet to be tried in which he has great confidence."

Grant watched the proceedings silently, a cigar tucked in his mouth. When the flotilla came within range of Vicksburg's arsenal, Confederate cannon ignited in a thunderous pyrotechnic display—"Magnificent, but terrible," Grant called it for an hour and a half sulphurous smoke drifted everywhere. To illuminate their targets, the rebels kindled bonfires on the Vicksburg shore and burned a wooden house on the Louisiana side, casting a lurid reddish glow over the ships speeding by. Instead of trying to widen their distance from the batteries, the flotilla hugged the eastern bank, leading shore batteries to overshoot their marks. Dana clocked 525 discharges of fire, of which only 68 hit the target. One heavily bombarded steamer, the Henry Clay, went down in flames. "The boat itself took fire and burned to the water's edge and floated downstream a burning mass," Grant reported to Halleck. One other transport was slightly harmed. Miraculously, that was the total damage. While most, if not all, of the gunboats were repeatedly hit, they came through this perilous stretch unscathed, with only fourteen people wounded and none killed.

At once Grant galloped off excitedly to get a firsthand glimpse of the ships downstream.

The next morning he mingled with the armada at New Carthage where crew members were in high spirits. For Grant it had been a sensational triumph, his huge wager paying off brilliantly. Best of all, Pemberton did not seem to realize that the gunboat operation represented the first step of an unfolding sequence that would bring Grant's army en masse to his doorstep. Prematurely celebrating, the Vicksburg Whig Nairpapo editorialized that Grant's gunboats "are all more or less damaged, the men dissatisfied and demoralized."

Once the gunboats cleared Vicksburg, Grant focused on the next stage of his master plan: to march his army down the west bank of the Mississippi, starting from Milliken's Bend, under extremely adverse conditions. "This whole country is under water," Grant told his father, "except strips of land behind the levees along the river and bayous and makes operations almost impossible." He committed the entire machinery of his army, putting it irrevocably in motion. That his army managed to march down a watery shoreline in stormy weather was a wonder. Alligators slithered in nearby bayous. Soldiers and wagons sank in the soft, oozing mud, and it sometimes took eighteen horses to dislodge a single heavy gun from the muck. The soldiers lacked time to wash or change mud smeared clothing. In the amused view of one Iowa soldier, "We are all as dirty as hogs, we are all lousy." Nonetheless, the raw recruits plowed ahead with a lusty sense of purpose, throwing off knapsacks and grabbing axes to construct roads. They drained swamps and stripped wood from houses and barns, laying corduroy roads across boggy turf. Since the volunteer ranks included mechanics and other skilled craftsmen, they succeeded in building two floating

bridges, each more than three hundred feet, across flooded plains. Proud of his resourceful soldiers, Grant had no qualms about dismounting from his horse to lend a helping hand. More and more he had developed a mystique as the unglamorous man who got things done. "There was no Bonaparte, posturing for effect," observed an officer. "There was no nonsense, no sentiment; only a plain business man of the republic, there for the one single purpose of getting that command across the river in the shortest time possible."

In this campaign of dazzling deceptions, Grant had another trick up his sleeve. He had Sherman take ten regiments and eight gunboats left behind by Porter and feign an attack north of Vicksburg, at Haynes' Bluff not far from his failed assault at Chickasaw Bayou in December. For two days in late April, Union gunboats lobbed shells, Sherman's artillery chimed in with sporadic fire, and infantry lined up as if girding for a major attack. "The enemy are in front of me in force such as has never before been seen at Vicksburg," a Confederate commander implored Pemberton. "Send me reinforcements." Exactly as Grant had hoped, Pemberton proved a sucker for the ruse and summoned back three thousand troops who had gone to do battle with him.

Grant's unorthodox strategy paid off handsomely. Porter's fleet sprinted past the blockade that night while Grant had McClernand land his troops on the west side of the river. He had decided to effect a surprise landing at Bruinsburg, Mississippi, a spot of steep hills and thick forest sixty miles south of Vicksburg. The unexpected choice of Bruinsburg came after a local slave informed Grant that the shoreline was unguarded there, enabling his army to travel straight into the interior on dry, elevated land, past fertile plantations. Riding with Grant that night, Dana recorded Grant's extraordinary equanimity and horsemanship at this tense moment: "The night was pitch dark, and, as we rode side by side, Grant's horse suddenly gave a nasty stumble. I expected to see the general go over the animal's head, and I watched intently, not to see if he was hurt, but if he would show any anger. I had been with Grant daily now for three weeks, and I had never seen him ruffled or heard him swear... instead of going over the animal's head, as I imagined he would, he kept his seat. Pulling up his horse, he rode on, and, to my utter amazement without a word or sign of impatience."

The nocturnal maneuver was a tour de force of audacity. McClernand's "troops marched across the point of land [top of levee] under cover of nights unobserved," Grant recalled. "By the time it was light the enemy saw our whole fleet, iron-clads, gunboats, river steamers and barges, quietly moving down the river three miles below them, black, or rather blue, with National troops." By the morning of April 30, one corps under McClernand and one division under McPherson had floated across the Mississippi, and Grant never forgot the blissful moment when they all debarked safely on the eastern shore: "When this was effected I felt a degree of relief scarcely ever equalled since ...I was on dry ground on the same side of the river with the enemy."

For the direction of his march, he made a breathtaking decision. Instead of driving straight north toward Vicksburg, sticking close to the river and his supply base, he would veer inland in a northeast direction toward the state capital of Jackson. His basic concept was to throw his army between Pemberton's main force in Vicksburg and a collateral force in Jackson and defeat the enemy piecemeal. The danger was that he might get crushed between two converging armies, whereas his intent was a one-two punch to destroy the Jackson force first, then turn west and finish off Pemberton in Vicksburg.

Free from swampy terrain, Grant pursued his quarry with a sure step. The first town to fall on May 1 was Port Gibson, where he routed eleven thousand soldiers in daylong fighting and established a bridgehead. As Washburne observed, "The boys went in with such a shout as you never heard, and the enemy ran like the very devil and our boys after them, closing up the day with perfect success." Legend has it that Grant thought the town "too beautiful to burn." He boasted to Halleck afterward that "our victory has been most complete and the Enemy thoroughly demoralized." The road to the Big Black River and Jackson now lay wide open. Grant implemented his plan to have troops feed off local plenty and patrols gathered abundant hams, chickens, mutton, bacon, and molasses, accompanied by sweet potatoes, corn, and strawberries. When a disgruntled farmer rode up on a mule to complain that his farm was stripped bare, a Union general taunted him: "Well, those men didn't belong to my division at all, because if they were my men they wouldn't even have left you that mule."

For days after crossing at Bruinsburg, Grant stayed on horseback, traveling like a humble private, his saddle devoid of fancy trappings. Temporarily deprived of personal belongings, he had only the clothes on his back and couldn't change his underwear. As Washburne wrote whimsically, "I am afraid Grant will have to be reprov'd for want of style. On this whole march for five days he has had neither a horse nor an orderly or servant, a blanket or overcoat or clean shirt, or even a sword. His entire baggage consists of a tooth-brush." Dana was startled when Grant bedded down for the night on moist grass. "I have an overcoat here; let me put it under you," Dana offered. "I'm too sleepy; don't disturb me," replied Grant, drawing his knees to his chest and nodding off in seconds. The message of Grant's businesslike bravery filtered down to average soldiers. "He could stand any hardship they could stand and do their thinking beside," reflected one officer. "They went with him like men to a game; no despondency, all alert and eager, glad to know inaction had ended and vigorous work had begun."

At first, Sherman feared that Grant planned to supply the army of forty-five thousand men by a long, single road soon glutted with wagons. But an emboldened Grant had no intention of clinging to this supply route and bet everything on his radical departure of feeding off the land, although he never lost touch entirely with his supply base. To his commanders, he laid out a formula for crippling civilian productive capacity in their path: "Impress upon the Cavalry the necessity of keeping out of people's houses, or taking what is of no use to them in a Military point of view. They must live as far as possible off the country through which they pass and destroy corn, wheat crops and everything that can be made use of by the enemy in prolonging the war ... In other words cripple the rebellion in every way without insulting women and children or taking their clothing, jewelry, etc." Faced with these immense logistical challenges, Grant drew on his old quartermaster experience as never before.

When Sherman floated his corps across the Mississippi on May 7, Grant's army was complete and ready for battle. If Grant ever had a go-for-broke moment in the war, it was now as he commenced his high-speed march to Jackson. He wanted to maintain the tempo and badger the enemy with unrelenting pressure. He sent small forces north toward Vicksburg to precipitate minor flurries of fighting and trick Pemberton into thinking that was his intended route, while he rallied his army with ringing words: "Other battles are to be fought. Let us fight them bravely. A grateful country will rejoice at our success, and history will record it with immortal honor" It was a thrilling but terrifying moment as he set out for the interior and left behind communications with Washington and the outside world. The short general with the forgettable appearance infused a winning spirit into his elated troops. "O, what a grand army this is," wrote a young soldier. "I shall never forget

the scene today, while looking back upon a mile of solid columns, marching with their old tattered flags streaming in the summer breeze, and harkening to the firm tramp of their broad brogans keeping step to the pealing fife and drum, or the regimental bands discoursing 'Yankee Doodle' or 'The Girl I Left Behind Me'"

On May 9, the War Department in Richmond had placed Joseph Johnston, a general whom Grant greatly respected, in charge of defending Mississippi, and by nightfall on the thirteenth he arrived in Jackson after an extended train trip from Tennessee. Although enriched by fresh regiments from Georgia and South Carolina, Johnston had only six thousand troops to repulse an imminent Union attack. That same night, Grant's soldiers waded through foot-deep puddles in a rainy, headlong rush toward the state capital. He ordered Sherman and McPherson to hit Jackson hard at dawn. Seeing that it was foolhardy to hold the town against overwhelming odds, Johnston beat a hasty retreat north, and Jackson collapsed with stunning speed, becoming the third southern capital after Nashville and Baton Rouge to succumb to the Yankee interlopers. By three o'clock on the afternoon of May 14, Union forces chased away the last Confederates. Six months earlier, Jefferson Davis had assured his followers that Mississippi citizens would "meet and hurl back these worse than vandal hordes." Instead Grant had registered a hugely lopsided victory.

The same day Jackson fell, Grant gained access to a message Johnston had dashed off to Pemberton: "I am anxious to see a force assembled that may be able to inflict a heavy blow upon the enemy." Johnston wanted Pemberton to break out of Vicksburg with a large column of soldiers and unite their two forces to stop Grant. As soon as he divined Confederate intentions, Grant started barking out rapid-fire orders. He knew his own mind and needed no consultation. The all-important goal was to separate Pemberton and Johnston. Two of Grant's corps commanders, McClernand and McPherson, would hurry west and confront Pemberton, while Sherman stayed behind and pinned down Johnston at a safe distance. Grant galloped west to meet McPherson's men, having accomplished his paramount objective: he had flushed Pemberton and a portion of his army from their Vicksburg defenses, forcing them to fight in the open.

The armies of Grant and Pemberton clashed at Champion's Hill, where Pemberton massed about twenty thousand men. Dug in for miles along a wooded ridge seventy feet high, the rebel position presented distinct challenges to their twenty-nine thousand blue-coated foes. Grant's men would have to traverse ground broken by gullies and ravines. As the battle got under way, Grant found McClernand too timid and dilatory in his forward movements even as McPherson punched away with sure-handed gusto. Both sides discharged fire in thunderous, nonstop volleys. "The rattle of musketry was incessant for hours," wrote a journalist. "Cannons thundered till the heavens seemed bursting." By midafternoon Pemberton's forces were routed and Grant's units trailed them until after sundown.

More than two thousand of Pemberton's men had been killed or wounded and three thousand prisoners taken, but the Union toll soared to staggering levels as well. In a matter of hours, the gallant Hovey had sacrificed a full third of his division, rendering it a bittersweet victory. As he said, "I cannot think of this bloody hill without sadness and pride ...It was, after the conflict, literally the hill of death." Grant's joy was somewhat constrained by knowledge that if McClernand had enacted his assigned role, they might have rolled up Pemberton's army. Nonetheless, Vicksburg was now severed from the outside world and it seemed a foregone conclusion that it would fall.

That night Grant slept on the porch of a house that had been converted into a Confederate field hospital and was crammed with dead and mutilated bodies from Champion's Hill. As at Shiloh, the horror of battle only hit him in its aftermath. Once again, death in individualized form affected him more powerfully than mass death. He later offered this candid admission: "While a battle is raging one can see his enemy mowed down by the thousand, or the ten thousand, with great composure; but after the battle these scenes are distressing, and one is naturally disposed to do as much to alleviate the suffering of an enemy as a friend."

By the morning of May 17, Grant's army lay within ten miles of Vicksburg. It now squared off against a rebel army that had assumed advantageous positions on the Big Black River, a bayou choked with detritus and fallen trees. Pemberton's men improvised defenses by stacking cotton bales from a nearby plantation and tossing dirt over them. Tired, their spirits deflated, those men were no match for the elan of Grant's invigorated troops. The big Union breakthrough came from the impetuous action of Brigadier General Michael Lawler. A hearty, corpulent Illinois farmer—"a fine type of the generous, rollicking, fighting Irishman," said an admiring journalist—Lawler brandished his sword and ordered his men to charge at the enemy across a cotton field. Deflecting a deadly torrent of musket fire, they struggled across the bayou in mud up to their armpits. Grant would never have ordered this risky maneuver, but the exhausted Confederates, unnerved by Lawler's daring, immediately stuck cotton on their bayonets in a sign of surrender. On the spot, nearly two thousand prisoners fell to Union forces. Grant refused to quibble with success. As he observed, "When it comes to just plain hard fighting, I would rather trust old Mike Lawler than any of them." One victim was Fred Grant, who was grazed in the right thigh by a bullet, again raising questions about Ulysses' paternal judgment in permitting him to loiter in the vicinity of battle.

It had been another one-sided triumph for Grant. The Confederate army suffered 1,751 killed or captured while Grant's lost only 276 killed or wounded. Retreating rebels burned the main bridge over the Big Black—some drowned as they splashed in terror to the other side—and Grant constructed three temporary bridges in one day, slapped together with wood taken from dismantled houses and barns in the area. That night, Grant and Sherman sat together on a log by the river, illuminated by bonfires of pitch pine, and watched their columns snake across the Big Black, a sight so vivid Sherman said it made "a fine war picture."

In less than three weeks, Grant had traversed 30 miles on foot and handily won five consecutive battles in a bravura campaign that would be enshrined in military textbooks. He had shown true virtuosity in spontaneously coordinating many moving parts and adapting to shifting enemy positions. With the Army of the Tennessee, he had created the mobile, lightning-quick army for which Lincoln yearned in contrast to the hidebound eastern forces. As Lincoln's secretary John Nicolay exclaimed, "The praise of our western soldiers is on every lip, Illinois valor particularly receiving as it properly should, large honor." Contrary to his image of securing victories at heavy cost, Grant had sacrificed 4,300 men versus 7,200 for the Confederates, even though he had tackled a combined Confederate force at Vicksburg, Grand Gulf, and Jackson of more than 60,000 men, much larger than the 43,000 he transferred across the Mississippi. "Grant is now deservedly the hero," Sherman proclaimed. "He is now belabored with praise by those who a month ago accused him of all the sins in the calendar." One journalist traveling with Grant's army summed up his new stature: "Nothing like this campaign has occurred during this war. It stamps Gen. Grant as a man of uncommon military ability—proves him the foremost one in the west; if not in the nation." The New York Times, noting that Grant had captured fifty guns and six thousand prisoners, stressed

that this whirlwind operation had been accomplished "in a foreign climate, under a tropical sun ablaze with the white heat of summer, with only such supplies as could be gleaned from the country."

As Grant's columns strode confidently toward Vicksburg, scenes of ecstatic jubilation greeted them as they passed abandoned plantations and were applauded by former slaves. One ex-slave, seated on a lawn, rocking back and forth in joy, kept shouting, "Glory, hallelujah, glory, hallelujah ... Bless God, bless God. I never spected to see dis day." As his defeated men slunk away from the Big Black, John Pemberton peered into his blighted future. Back at Vicksburg, fearing the worst, he had his men herd cows, sheep, and hogs into the city in anticipation of a prolonged siege. Those Vicksburg residents who thought the "Gibraltar of the West" unassailable were shocked by the tattered, defeated soldiers shuffling back into town. "I shall never forget the woeful sight of a beaten, demoralized army...humanity in the last stage of endurance," said one observer. "Wan, hollow-eyed, ragged, foot-sore, bloody, the men limped along unarmed, followed by siege guns, ambulances, gun carriages and wagons in aimless confusion."

Grant as President - We are all Americans

If there were many small things Grant didn't know about the presidency, he knew one big thing: his main mission was to settle unfinished business from the war by preserving the Union and safeguarding the freed slaves. As Walt Whitman noted, Grant had signed on for "a task of peace, more difficult than the war itself."

No less committed to the Radical side of the Republican agenda, he signed a bill on March 19 conferring equal rights on blacks in Washington, D.C. The fate of blacks and white Republicans in the South was a far more vexed matter that would dominate Grant's tenure in office. Everybody agreed that readmitting former Confederate states to the Union was long overdue. Three states-Virginia, Mississippi, and Texas-had yet to resume their rightful place, and Grant saw their harmonious return as an overriding objective. As ever, he had to tread a fine line between retribution and reconciliation. On April 7, he asked Congress to authorize elections in Virginia and Mississippi to ratify new state constitutions, while insisting that those constitutions should "secure the civil and political rights of all persons within their borders," black and white alike." Between January and March 1870, Virginia, Mississippi, and Texas returned to the Union as they pledged to protect black rights.

Virginia seemed the easy success story, electing a northern-born Republican governor, Gilbert C. Walker, allied with Democrats and moderate Republicans. Mississippi, by contrast, with its black majority, would turn into an overheated furnace of violently competing interests. Hope for Reconstruction rested on its provisional Maine-born governor, Adelbert A. Ames, whom Grant also named commander of the Fourth Military District, which encompassed Arkansas as well. With his thick handlebar mustache, long goatee, and high forehead, the thirty-three-year-old Ames had graduated high in his West Point class and won the Medal of Honor for his valor at the first battle of Bull Run. By war's end he had attained the rank of brevet major general. Soon he would be married to Ben Butler's daughter. Fired by a crusading spirit, Ames saw carpetbaggers as apostles of "northern liberty" who had "a hold on the hearts of the colored people that nothing can destroy." He oversaw elections for a new Mississippi constitution that made the state eligible for readmission to the Union. "When I took command of this military district," he recalled, "I found that the negroes who had been declared free by the United States were not free, in fact that they were living

under a code that made them worse than slaves; and I found that it was necessary, as commanding officer, to protect them, and I did." Delivering on his promise, Ames appointed the first black officeholders in Mississippi history. Upon entering the U.S. Senate in February 1870, he combated segregation in the U.S. Army and stood in the forefront of the campaign waged against the Ku Klux Klan. For his efforts on behalf of downtrodden blacks, Ames was to brave years of unremitting violence from the white power structure in the state.

One of Grant's most vocal Mississippi critics was his brother-in-law Judge Lewis Dent. Conservative Republicans had nominated Dent for governor against the more liberal James Alcorn, a prominent planter, hoping Dent's association with Grant might mislead credulous blacks into supporting him. In fact, far from being sympathetic to black suffrage, Dent believed southern whites possessed a God-given right to rule and that black voting would "inevitably lead to a black-man's party and eventually to a war of races," he told Grant. The upshot would be "to alienate from the planters the ancient confidence and affection of this race." Refusing to bow to nepotism this time, Grant issued a stern warning to Dent that he would resist him. "Personally, I wish you well, and would do all in my power proper to be done to secure your success; but in public matters, personal feelings will not influence me." Dent lost the election.

Grant also began to commit critical federal resources to ensuring black welfare. In 1867 the Bureau of Education had been created to educate freed people, but Congress had consistently slashed its budget, threatening to shut it down Grant intervened to save it. "With millions of ex-slaves upon our hands to be educated," he stated, "this is not the time to suppress an office for facilitating education. The Bureau shall have another trial." To guarantee its success, Grant drafted John Eaton, the chaplain who had done superlative work resettling freed slaves during the war and who again enjoyed Grant's unconditional support. Without Grant, Eaton declared, "the Bureau could hardly have become- what it has been said to be-the most influential office of education in the world."

On a personal level, Grant extended an olive branch to Confederate generals. In May 1869, Robert E. Lee came to the White House to discuss a railroad venture. As at Appomattox, Grant attempted to smooth over an awkward situation with a little levity and small talk. "You and I, General," said Grant, "have had more to do with destroying railroads than building them." Lee would not be drawn into this sort of pleasantries. According to Badeau, he "refused to smile, or to recognize the raillery. He went on gravely with the conversation, and no other reference was made to the past." "The diplomat John Lothrop Motley, who was there, detected "a shade of constraint" in Lee's manner. On political matters, Lee worked hard to sound reasonable, expressed approval of the Fifteenth Amendment, and professed to see no "prodigious harm" in permitting blacks to vote. "All the Southern States should be in harmony with the National Government," he declared. But before too long, Lee rose to his feet, bid Grant a frosty farewell, and departed. The two wartime titans were destined never to meet again. Lee died on October 12, 1870.

Ulysses S. Grant by Geoffrey Perret – Reconstruction

Reconstruction was nearly four years old when Grant was sworn in as President. As general-in-chief he had tried to impose the will of Congress on the defeated and occupied South, insofar as Andrew Johnson allowed him to do so. Grant had no doubt that only the military could make a success of Reconstruction. But the tools he needed were being stripped from his hands by the rapid demobilization of the Union Army. When the war ended there were a quarter of a million Union

soldiers occupying the ten former states of the Confederacy. Four years later there were eleven thousand soldiers in those states nearly half were in Texas, guarding the Mexican border.

Johnson, meanwhile allowed seven of the rebel states back into the Union without having to do anything beyond pledge their allegiance to the Federal government. This was all wrong, thought Grant. The former states should be considered territories and, like other territories, told they had to achieve certain standards before they could join the union. Military occupation should continue, to ensure protection for the freed men, until the former rebel states were prepared to treat black people the same as whites. Meanwhile, former slaves should be given the rudiments of an education. Only after they had learned to read and write should they be allowed to vote, and only after these southern territories had met the requirements of the Reconstruction Acts would they be readmitted into the Union. This process might take ten years but it would have a much better chance of success than Johnson's policy of appeasing the former slaveholders and leaving blacks to their fate.

Not that radical Reconstruction held out much promise of a happier outcome. The South had been flooded with carpetbaggers eager to loot whatever the war had not destroyed. At the same time, power at the state level was often thrust into the hands of blacks. While a few were able and conscientious, most were inexperienced, poorly educated and reviled by the white people they had to deal with. The chaotic proceedings of the black-dominated legislature imposed on South Carolina were taken as proof by white people across the South that giving political power to blacks was the North's revenge for Fort Sumter. That it had nothing to do with justice and everything to do with punishment.

Reconstruction, as Grant inherited it as President, had failed, but he hoped there was still a chance to make it work. The Fourteenth Amendment forced the courts to recognize that black people had rights, yet blacks still did not have the most important political right of all-the ballot. The Fifteenth Amendment, which was already making its way through Congress when he became President, would put ballot papers in their hands. Grant, who in 1865 thought it was a mistake to allow illiterates to vote-and there was hardly a slave who could read and write- had changed his mind. By 1869 he thought giving blacks the vote was the last chance of saving Reconstruction.

The evening of March 30, 1870, he signed the Fifteenth Amendment into law. The Army fired a one-hundred-gun salute, announcing the event to Washington and the world. Tens of thousands of people, black and white, paraded by torchlight down Pennsylvania Avenue. Grant came out and from the front steps of the White House told the crowd he had no doubt that the rights guaranteed by the Fifteenth Amendment would be used wisely. He had written a message to Congress a few hours earlier, calling the amendment "the most important event that has occurred since the nation came into life."

All the same, the new legislation was fundamentally flawed. During its passage through Congress it had, in effect, been gutted of the kind of provisions that would make a real difference. It did not, for one thing, extend voting rights to everyone regardless of race, creed, gender or color. Nor did it ban literacy tests, property ownership, or educational requirements. Ironically, it was northern states rather than the Old South that refused to budge over suffrage qualifications. California, for example, would not let the Chinese vote. In Rhode Island, naturalized citizens had to own real estate before they could vote, and other New England states imposed tests of literacy. In

Pennsylvania, you had to prove you paid state taxes and so on. Here, then, was a way of flouting the intention of the Fifteenth Amendment for any state so inclined.

Congress nonetheless threw its weight behind the new law by passing an enforcement act in May 1870, punishing any use of force, bribery, or intimidation to deprive people of their voting rights. Three more enforcement acts followed, in an ongoing attempt to provide Federal protection for people exercising their Fifteenth Amendment rights, in the South or the North, whether in rural areas or the cities.

The last of the enforcement acts, which Grant signed into law in April 1871, was aimed specifically at the Ku Klux Klan. For the first time the Federal government would punish criminal acts committed by individuals. Until now, these has been dealt with by state and local governments. This new legislation altered the relationship between the individual and the Federal government, making him directly accountable to Washington for his actions. A few years earlier such a step would have been considered impossible.

The change was due entirely to the rise of terrorism. A number of white-supremacy organizations flourished in the South. The Klan was not only the biggest and best organized, but it had a prestige that eclipsed the rest. Established in Pulaski, Tennessee, in 1866, it was not expected to be anything more than a social club where Confederate veterans could sit around and exaggerate their exploits in the war and mock the damn Yankees until it became almost possible to forget who had actually won.

The Klan's grand wizard was Nathan Bedford Forrest, onetime slave dealer and feared Confederate general. Forrest's treatment of black soldiers during the war was like many a modern Balkan atrocity. In 1867, as the reaction to Reconstruction ignited violence across the South, it was but a short, hurried step from being a social club to becoming an organization that made bedsheets into garments, crosses into burning brands, and murder into something respectable people committed after the sun went down. The object of the Klan was not to bring back slavery but to maintain white supremacy. As its members, brandishing rifles and shotguns and ropes, galloped up to the wretched hovels and shacks of impoverished blacks, they were pursuing most of the benefits of slavery, but without the trouble and expense.

Grant's efforts to enforce the rights of blacks were being hampered not only by the flawed character of the Fifteenth Amendment but by the continuing reduction of the military's presence in the South. Congress kept cutting the Army's budget and Sherman, as general-in-chief, reduced the number of troops stationed in the former Confederacy to little more than three thousand men. Sherman did not believe in Reconstruction. On the contrary. He opposed nearly every Reconstruction measure and enforced Grant's policies reluctantly. In a speech in New Orleans in May 1871 he openly derided the anti-Klan legislation. Sherman's contempt for Grant the politician came close to wrecking the friendship they had forged in the war. By the time Grant's first administration ended they were barely on speaking terms and Sherman had moved his headquarters to St. Louis.

Grant, meanwhile, was smashing the Klan. The ink was hardly dry on the anti-Klan law before the Department of Justice began indicting hundreds of people in North Carolina. Soldiers made the arrests and Federal courts heard the cases. In Mississippi, some seven hundred people were indicted for terrorist activities. Grant declared South Carolina was in a condition of lawlessness" suspended

habeas corpus and unleashed a roundup of hundreds of suspected terrorists. An estimated two thousand Klansmen packed up their robes and quit the state.

Many of those charged with crimes of violence pleaded guilty rather than risk being tried by an all-black jury, something that did not happen often, but often enough to frighten even hardened lynchers. Most of those indicted were convicted and punished. By 1872 the Klan had been shattered. The twentieth-century version is a re-creation, with no direct links to the original Klan. Breaking the KKK was Grant's biggest contribution to Reconstruction but, as he realized, it wasn't enough.

One evening, sitting in the White House library with Jesse and Julia, he was plunged in gloom. A telegram had arrived from the governor of Louisiana, who feared yet another outbreak of mob violence was brewing. After a while Grant shifted in his chair and groaned. "Oh, if the South could only see!"

Encyclopedia Britannica - Reconstruction (1865-77)

In U.S. history, period during and after the American Civil War in which attempts were made to solve the political, social, and economic problems arising from the readmission to the Union of the 11 Confederate states that had seceded at or before the outbreak of war. As early as 1862, Pres. Abraham Lincoln had appointed provisional military governors for Louisiana, Tennessee, and North Carolina. The following year, initial steps were taken to reestablish governments in newly occupied states in which at least 10 percent of the voting population had taken the prescribed oath of allegiance. Aware that the presidential plan omitted any provision for social or economic reconstruction, the Radical Republicans in Congress resented such a lenient political arrangement under solely executive jurisdiction. As a result, the stricter Wade-Davis Bill was passed in 1864 but pocket vetoed by the President.

After Lincoln's assassination (April 1865), Pres. Andrew Johnson further alienated Congress by continuing Lincoln's moderate policies. The Fourteenth Amendment, defining national citizenship so as to include blacks, passed Congress in June 1866 and was ratified, despite rejection by most Southern states (July 28, 1868). In response to Johnson's intemperate outbursts against the opposition as well as to several reactionary developments in the South (e.g., race riots and passage of the repugnant black codes severely restricting rights of blacks), the North gave a smashing victory to the Radical Republicans in the 1866 congressional election.

That victory launched the era of congressional Reconstruction (usually called Radical Reconstruction), which lasted 10 years starting with the Reconstruction Acts of 1867. Under that legislation, the 10 remaining Southern states (Tennessee had been readmitted to the Union in 1866) were divided into five military districts; and, under supervision of the U.S. Army, all were readmitted between 1868 and 1870. Each state had to accept the Fourteenth or, if readmitted after its passage, the Fifteenth Constitutional Amendment, intended to ensure civil rights of the freedmen. The newly created state governments were generally Republican in character and were governed by political coalitions of blacks, carpetbaggers (Northerners who had gone into the South), and scalawags (Southerners who collaborated with the blacks and carpetbaggers). The Republican governments of the former Confederate states were seen by most Southern whites as artificial creations imposed from without, and the conservative element in the region remained hostile to them. Southerners particularly resented the activities of the Freedmen's Bureau, which Congress had established to feed, protect, and help educate the newly emancipated blacks. This

resentment led to formation of secret terroristic organizations, such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Knights of the White Camelia. The use of fraud, violence, and intimidation helped Southern conservatives regain control of their state governments, and, by the time the last Federal troops had been withdrawn in 1877. The Democratic Party was back in power.

About 1900, many U.S. historians espoused a theory of racial inferiority of blacks. The Reconstruction governments were viewed as an abyss of corruption resulting from Northern vindictiveness and the desire for political and economic domination. Later, revisionist historians noted that not only was public and private dishonesty widespread in all regions of the country at that time but also that a number of constructive reforms actually were introduced into the South during that period: courts were reorganized, judicial procedures improved, public-school systems established, and more feasible methods of taxation devised. Many provisions of the state constitutions adopted during the postwar years have continued in existence.

The Reconstruction experience led to an increase in sectional bitterness, an intensification of the racial issue, and the development of one-party politics in the South. Scholarship has suggested that the most fundamental failure of Reconstruction was in not effecting a distribution of land in the South that would have offered an economic base to support the newly won political rights of black citizens.