



GOAL 5 | LESSON PLAN | HIGH SCHOOL **Turning Point: 1863**

Grades: High School

Approximate Length of Time: 3 hours

Goal: Students will be able to discuss the events in July of 1863 that changed the trajectory of the war.

Objectives:

1. Students will be able to complete a graphic organizer, finding key information within primary and secondary sources.
2. Students will be able to address a question about a historic event, providing evidence from primary and secondary sources.

Common Core:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9

Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9

Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.1 & CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.1

Write arguments focused on *discipline-specific content*.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.7 & CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.7

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

NCSS STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES:

- 1—Culture
- 2—Time, Continuity, and Change
- 3—People, Places, and Environment
- 5—Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Description: This is an inquiry lesson where students will do research to answer the inquiry question about a major turning point in the American Civil War. Students will develop a hypothesis, search for evidence in multiple primary and secondary sources, and complete a graphic organizer. Through this process students will develop a strong answer to the inquiry question posed at the beginning.

Inquiry Question: Why is July 1863 considered the major turning point of the American Civil War?

Material:

- Primary Source Documents Packet
- Secondary Source Documents Packet
- Graphic Organizer
- Final Essay
- Highlighters

Procedure:

1. Have students begin with a hypothesis to answer the inquiry question.
2. Students will then read through the Document Packets, highlighting and taking notes as well as filling out the Graphic Organizer as they progress.

Conclusion:

Students will answer the inquiry question either orally or in essay form. They should use evidence from their primary and secondary sources. They can use the documents, their notes, and their graphic organizer. Students can do additional research to bolster their argument.

Students can share their responses with the class.

Assessment in this Lesson:

1. A completed graphic organizer
2. Notes taken on graphic organizer, documents, or other notes sheets
3. A complete answer to the inquiry question with quotes from the provided documents



AMERICAN
BATTLEFIELD
TRUST ★ ★ ★

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Turning Point: 1863 Primary Sources

Read and review the following documents. Highlight information as you go and write down notes about the document that can be used for your future reference and class discussion.

Incidents and Anecdotes of the Civil War By David Dixon Porter

“See,” said Mr. Lincoln, pointing to the map, “what a lot of land these fellow hold, of which Vicksburg is the key. Here is Red River, which will supply the Confederates with cattle and corn to feed their armies. There are the Arkansas and White Rivers, which can supply cattle and hogs by the thousands. From Vicksburg these supplies can be distributed by rail all over the Confederacy. Then there is that great depot of supplies on the Yazoo. Let us get Vicksburg and all that country is ours. The war can never be brought to a close until that key is in our pocket. I am acquainted with that region and know what I am talking about, and, valuable as New Orleans will be to us, Vicksburg will be more so. We may take all the northern ports of the Confederacy, and they will defy us from Vicksburg. It means hog and hominy without limit, fresh troops from all the States of the far South, and a cotton country where they can raise the staple without interference.”

Admiral David Dixon Porter. *Incidents and Anecdotes of the Civil War* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1886), 95-96. <https://books.google.com/books?id=JcJN3RcTKesC&pg=PA1#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

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Lincoln's Unsent Letter to General George Meade

Shortly after the Battle of Gettysburg, Abraham Lincoln composed a letter to General George Meade in which he expressed profound disappointment in Meade's inability to pursue and destroy Robert E. Lee's army. Lincoln did not send the letter--writing such correspondence and storing it away was a favorite coping mechanism of his.

Executive Mansion,

Washington, July 14, 1863.

Major General Meade

I have just seen your despatch to Gen. Halleck, asking to be relieved of your command, because of a supposed censure of mine-- I am very -- very -- grateful to you for the magnificent success you gave the cause of the country at Gettysburg; and I am sorry now to be the author of the slightest pain to you-- But I was in such deep distress myself that I could not restrain some expression of it-- I had been oppressed nearly ever since the battles at Gettysburg, by what appeared to be evidences that your self, and Gen. Couch, and Gen. Smith, were not seeking a collision with the enemy, but were trying to get him across the river without another battle. What these evidences were, if you please, I hope to tell you at some time, when we shall both feel better. The case, summarily stated is this. You fought and beat the enemy at Gettysburg; and, of course, to say the least, his loss was as great as yours-- He retreated; and you did not; as it seemed to me, pressingly pursue him; but a flood in the river detained him, till, by slow degrees, you were again upon him. You had at least twenty thousand veteran troops directly with you, and as many more raw ones within supporting distance, all in addition to those who fought with you at Gettysburg; while it was not possible that he had received a single recruit; and yet you stood and let the flood run down, bridges be built, and the enemy move away at his leisure, without attacking him. And Couch and Smith! The latter left Carlisle in time, upon all ordinary calculation, to have aided you in the last battle at Gettysburg; but he did not arrive-- More At the end of more than ten days, I believe twelve, under constant urging, he reached Hagerstown from Carlisle, which is not an inch over fifty-five miles, if so much. And Couch's movement was very little different--

Again, my dear general, I do not believe you appreciate the magnitude of the misfortune involved in Lee's escape-- He was within your easy grasp, and to have closed upon him would, in connection with the our other late successes, have ended the war-- As it is, the war will be prolonged indefinitely. If you could not safely attack Lee last Monday, how can you possibly do so South of the river, when you can take with you very few more then two thirds of the force you then had in hand? It would be unreasonable to expect, and I do not expect you can now effect much. Your golden opportunity is gone, and I am distressed immeasurably because of it--

I beg you will not consider this a prosecution, or persecution of yourself-- As you had learned that I was dissatisfied, I have thought it best to kindly tell you why.

[Endorsed on Envelope by Lincoln:]

To Gen. Meade, never sent, or signed.

Abraham Lincoln to Major General George Meade, July 14, 1863, <https://www.civilwar.org/learn/primary-sources/lincolns-unsent-letter-george-meade>

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Reminiscence of Peace and War By Sara Agnes Rice Pryor

Excerpt

In July, General Lee fought and lost the great battle of Gettysburg, which plunged our state into mourning and lamentation. Never can the world read with dry eyes of the charge of Pickett's brigade and the manner in which it was met. "Decry war as we may and ought," says Rhodes in his "History," "'breathes there the man with soul so dead' who would not thrill with emotion to claim for his countrymen the men who made the charge and the men who met it? General Lee bore the disaster magnificently. An officer, attempting to place on other shoulders some portion of the blame, General Less said solemnly, '*All this has been my fault* – it is *I* that have lost this fight, and you must all help me out of it in the best way you can.'"

The Federal loss in this battle, killed, wounded, and captured, was 23,003, the Confederate 20,451 – making a total of 43,454 good and true men lost, in one battle, to their country. The emblem of mourning hung at many a door among our friends in Richmond and Petersburg. Close upon this disaster came news of the fall of Vicksburg.

...

I had taken my young family to a watering place in the county of Amelia, and there a few homeless women like myself were spending the months of July and August. Everything was so sad there was no heart in any one for gayety of any kind; but one evening the proprietor proposed that the ball room be lighted and a solitary fiddler, "Bozeman," – who was also the barber, - be installed in the musicians' seat and show us what he could do. Young feet cannot resist a good waltz or polka, and the floor was soon filled with care-forgetting maidens – there were no men except the proprietor and the fiddler. Presently a telegram was received by the former. We all huddled together under the chandelier to read it. Vicksburg had fallen! The gallant General Pemberton had been starved into submission. Surely and swiftly the coil was tightening around us. Surely and swiftly should we, too, be starved into submission.

Sara Agnes Rice Pryor, *Reminiscence of Peace and War* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1905), 248-250.
<https://books.google.com/books?id=W4EhAAAAMAAJ&vq=vicksburg&pg=PA248#v=onepage&q=vicksburg&f=false>

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Jefferson Davis: Ex-President of the Confederate States of America, A
Memoir by his Wife, Volume 2
By Varina Davis

Excerpt

When General Lee had returned to Virginia after his repulse at Gettysburg, although he had withdrawn his army thoroughly organized, with confidence and pride unimpaired, and was in full possession of his legitimate line of defence, he was conscious that all had not been accomplished which the late advance was designed to compass.

The tone of the public press and the sentiment of the country indicated dissatisfaction with the result of the campaign, from which grander achievements had been expected than the number of troops and extent of our resources justified. General Lee could not remain entirely indifferent or unaffected by such expressions.

As he paced before his camp-fire on the night of July 4th, when his army was marching by on its way to the Potomac, he said to General Longstreet in the presence of other officers: "It is all my fault." So at Camp Orange, with manly dignity and generosity as remarkable as it is rare, denying no responsibility, indulging in no censures, he took upon himself alone the soul-depressing burden of the day, and wrote to the President the following touching and noble letter:

camp Orange, August 8, 1863.

Mr. President: Your letters of July 28th and August 2d have been received, and I have waited for a leisure hour to reply, but I fear that will never come. I am extremely obliged to you for the attention given to the wants of this army, and the efforts made to supply them. Our absentees are returning, and I hope the earnest and beautiful appeal made to the country in your proclamation may stir up the whole people, and that they may see their duty and perform it. Nothing is wanted but that their fortitude should equal their bravery, to insure the success of our cause. We must expect reverses, even defeats. They are sent to teach us wisdom and prudence, to call forth greater energies, and to prevent our falling into greater disasters. Our people have only to be true and united, to bear manfully the misfortunes incident to war, and all will come right in the end.

I know how prone we are to censure, and how ready to blame others for the non-fulfilment of our expectations. This is unbecoming in a generous people, and I grieve to see its expression. The general remedy for the want of success in a military commander is his removal. This is natural, and in many instances proper. For, no matter what may be the ability of the officer, if he loses the confidence of his troops, disaster must sooner or later ensue.

I have been prompted by these reflections more than once, since my return from Pennsylvania, to propose to your Excellency the propriety of selecting another commander for this army. I

have seen and heard of expressions of discontent in the public journals at the result of the expedition. I do not know how far this feeling extends in the army. My brother officers have been too kind to report it, and so far the troops have been too generous to exhibit it. It is fair, however, to suppose that it does exist, and success is so necessary to us that nothing should be risked to secure it. I therefore, in all sincerity, request your Excellency to take measures to supply my place. I do this with the more earnestness because no one is more aware than myself of my inability for the duties of my position. I cannot even accomplish what I myself desire. How can I fulfil the expectations of others? In addition, I sensibly feel the growing failure of my bodily strength. I have not yet recovered from the attack I experienced the past spring. I am becoming more and more incapable of exertion, and am thus prevented from making the personal examinations and giving the personal supervision to the operations in the field which I feel to be necessary. I am so dull that in making use of the eyes of others I am frequently misled. Everything, therefore, points to the advantages to be derived from a new commander, and I the more anxiously urge the matter upon your Excellency, from my belief that a younger and abler man than myself can readily be obtained. I know that he will have as gallant and brave an army as ever existed to second his efforts, and it would be the happiest day of my life to see at its head a worthy leader; one that would accomplish more than I could perform, and all that I have wished. I hope your Excellency will attribute my request to the true reason, the desire to serve my country, and to do all in my power to insure the success of her righteous cause.

I have no complaints to make of anyone but myself. I have received nothing but kindness from those above me, and the most considerate attention from my comrades and companions in arms. To your Excellency I am specially indebted for uniform kindness and consideration. You have done everything in your power to aid me in the work committed to my charge, without omitting anything to promote the general welfare. I pray that your efforts may at length be crowned with success, and that you may long live to enjoy the thanks of a grateful people.

With sentiments of great esteem, I am very respectfully and truly yours,

R. E. Lee, General. To His Excellency Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States.

Varina David, Jefferson Dave: Ex-President of the Confederate States of America, A Memoir by his Wife, Volume 2 (New York: Belford Co. 1890), 392-396.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2001.05.0038%3Achapter%3D39>

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Name: _____

Date: _____

Secondary Sources

Read and review the following resources. Highlight information as you go and write down notes about the resource that can be used for your future reference and class discussion.

The Entire Civil War Animated Map

Watch the video on civilwar.org. <https://www.civilwar.org/learn/maps/entire-civil-war-animated-map>

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The Battle of Gettysburg National Park Service

Fought over the first three days of July 1863, the Battle of Gettysburg was one of the most crucial battles of the Civil War. The fate of the nation literally hung in the balance that summer of 1863 when General Robert E. Lee, commanding the "Army of Northern Virginia", led his army north into Maryland and Pennsylvania, bringing the war directly into northern territory. The Union "Army of the Potomac", commanded by Major General George Gordon Meade, met the Confederate invasion near the Pennsylvania crossroads town of Gettysburg, and what began as a chance encounter quickly turned into a desperate, ferocious battle. Despite initial Confederate successes, the battle turned against Lee on July 3rd, and with few options remaining, he ordered his army to return to Virginia. The Union victory at the Battle of Gettysburg, sometimes referred to as the "High Water Mark of the Rebellion" resulted not only in Lee's retreat to Virginia, but an end to the hopes of the Confederate States of America for independence.

"History & Culture" National Park Service, Date accessed April 2018,
<https://www.nps.gov/gett/learn/historyculture/index.htm>

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Lincoln Urgent in Lost Letter to General By Michael E. Ruane

Vicksburg had just fallen to Union forces. The Confederates were trapped north of the Potomac River after their defeat at Gettysburg. And after two years of civil war and battlefield calamity, Abraham Lincoln thought he saw the glimmer of victory.

On July 7, 1863, three days after Vicksburg's surrender and four days after Gettysburg, Lincoln took out a sheet of blue-lined paper and wrote to his general in chief, urging that the fleeing rebels be destroyed. If they were, Lincoln wrote, "the rebellion will be over."

But the Confederates escaped over the flooded river seven days later, the war went on for almost two more blood-soaked years, and Lincoln's six-line, handwritten note of optimism vanished into the crumbling files of history.

Yesterday, the National Archives announced that the long-lost note, complete with a misspelled word and Lincoln's neat schoolboy signature, had been found last month in the downtown stacks by an archivist doing research for a Discovery Channel documentary.

Archivist of the United States Allen Weinstein said in an interview that it was the biggest such find since the discovery in 2003 of a diary written by President Harry S. Truman.

"It's incredibly exciting," Weinstein said.

The note, on yellowed stationery and headed "War Department Washington City" was written to Gen. Henry W. Halleck. The besieged Confederate city of Vicksburg, Miss., had fallen July 4 to the forces of Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, and Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia had just been defeated at Gettysburg by union forces under Gen. George G. Meade.

The war-weary Lincoln sensed the possibilities.

"Now, if Gen. Meade can complete his work so gloriously prosecuted thus far, by the litteral or substantial destruction of Lee's army," Lincoln wrote, "the rebellion will be over."

Archives officials said the text of the note was known to historians because Halleck forwarded it to Meade in a telegram that was preserved in the official war records. But the handwritten note had been lost for decades.

Weinstein pointed out that the Archives has a billion documents in its historic building downtown, and 9 billion systemwide. Asked if there could be other lost documents of note, he said, "There must be."

On May 14, archivist Trevor Plante, who specializes in 19th-century military history, was in the stacks searching for material for the upcoming documentary on Gettysburg, according to Plante

and Weinstein. Plante said that morning he chanced on a tattered folder labeled "telegrams received by Halleck." Inside, he said, he spotted the note in the dim light, recognized Lincoln's handwriting and thought, "Whoa!"

But it was not until he researched further that he discovered that while historians had quoted the telegram, no one had ever cited the original note. He said he realized: "Hey, this is even more important than I thought it was."

Plante said it is not certain exactly where Lincoln wrote the note, nor where Halleck received it, but both were in Washington. Meade, who had been in command of the Army of the Potomac only about a week, had just left Gettysburg en route to Frederick in pursuit of the enemy.

Lincoln, tormented by incompetent commanders in the first years of the war, often prodded his generals to take action. He once famously goaded Gen. George B. McClellan by asking to borrow McClellan's army since the general didn't seem to be using it.

Now Lincoln was urging Halleck to urge Meade to go after Lee.

After Halleck telegraphed the note to Meade, he continued to badger Meade to attack. Meade, whose army had been battered at Gettysburg, finally took offense and offered to resign. Halleck backed down, Plante said, but on the afternoon of the 14th, as the rebels splashed to safety, an anguished Lincoln took pen to paper and wrote to Meade:

"My dear general, I do not believe you appreciate the magnitude of the misfortune involved in Lee's escape. He was within your easy grasp, and to have closed upon him would, in connection with our other late successes, have ended the war.

"As it is, the war will be prolonged indefinitely," Lincoln wrote. "Your golden opportunity is gone, and I am distressed immeasurably because of it."

It was one of the harshest letters Lincoln wrote during the war. And he never sent it.

Instead, he wrote on the envelope: "To Gen. Meade, never sent, or signed."

Plante said that letter and the envelope, now in the Library of Congress, came to light years ago, but not during Meade's lifetime.

Michael E. Ruane, "Lincoln Urgent in Lost Letter to General." *Washington Post*, June 8, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/07/AR2007060701240.html>.

Notes: _____

Vicksburg Campaign: Unvexing the Father of Waters

By Terrence J. Winschel

Excerpt

Vicksburg and the Mississippi River circa 1863. Biographer Lloyd Lewis accurately portrays the Mississippi River in the mid-nineteenth century as "the spinal column of America." He refers to the great river as "the trunk of the American tree, with limbs and branches reaching to the Alleghenies, the Canadian border, the Rocky Mountains." For more than two thousand miles the river flowed silently on its course to the sea, providing a natural artery of commerce. Vessels of all descriptions, heavily laden with the rich agricultural produce of the land, glided along the Mississippi's muddy waters en route to world markets. Indeed, the silent water of the mighty river was the single-most important economic feature of the continent, the very lifeblood of America. One contemporary wrote emphatically, "The Valley of the Mississippi is America."

Upon the secession of the Southern states — and in particular Louisiana and Mississippi — the river was closed to unfettered navigation, which threatened to strangle Northern commercial interests. With the advent of civil war, President Abraham Lincoln gathered his civil and military leaders to discuss strategy for opening the Mississippi River and ending what he termed a "rebellion" in the southern states. Examining a map of the nation, Lincoln made a wide sweeping gesture with his hand then placed his finger on the map and said, "See what a lot of land these fellows hold, of which Vicksburg is the key. The war can never be brought to a close until that key is in our pocket." It was the president's contention that, "We can take all the northern ports of the Confederacy, and they can defy us from Vicksburg. It means hog and hominy without limit, fresh troops from all the states of the far South, and a cotton country where they can raise the staple without interference." Lincoln assured his listeners that, "I am acquainted with that region and know what I am talking about, and, as valuable as New Orleans will be to us, Vicksburg will be more so."

These powerful statements from the sixteenth president were no exaggeration. Confederate cannon mounted along the bluffs commanding the Mississippi River at Vicksburg were trained on the river, denying that important avenue of commerce to Northern shipping. It is important to further note that Vicksburg was also the connecting link between the eastern and western parts of the Confederacy, what Jefferson Davis referred to as "the nailhead that held the South's two halves together." In addition, the city sat astride a major Confederate supply route over which the armies of Braxton Bragg and Robert E. Lee received much-needed food, clothing, medicine, and ammunition, as well as fresh troops.

It was imperative for the administration in Washington to regain control of the lower Mississippi River, thereby reopening that avenue of commerce. It would also split the Confederacy in two, sever that vital supply route, achieve a major objective of the Anaconda

Plan (the Union's overall strategic plan for the defeat of the Confederacy), and effectively seal the doom of Richmond.

Prominent military men of the time understood the significance of the Mississippi River, and Vicksburg in particular. William T. Sherman, a man destined to play a vital role in the military operations that centered on Vicksburg, wrote, "The Mississippi, source and mouth, must be controlled by one government." So firm was his belief that Sherman stated, "To secure the safety of the navigation of the Mississippi River I would slay millions. On that point I am not only insane, but mad." General-in-Chief Henry W. Halleck wrote in similar, albeit less eloquent terms, "In my opinion, the opening of the Mississippi River will be to us of more advantage than the capture of forty Richmonds." And finally, Confederate President Jefferson Davis, in writing to Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton after the fall of Vicksburg, stated his view, "I thought and still think you did right to risk an army for the purpose of keeping command of even a section of the Mississippi River. Had you succeeded, none would have blamed, had you not made the attempt few would have defended your course."

...

On the morning of July 4, 1863, white flags fluttered in the breeze above the fortifications of Vicksburg. Marching out from their works, Confederate soldiers furled their flags, stacked their arms, and turned over their accouterments. A victorious Union army marched in and took possession of Vicksburg — the fortress city on the Mississippi River that had eluded them for so long.

Grant rode into the city along the Jackson Road and down to the Warren County Courthouse where he watched the Stars and Stripes raised above the building. He then rode down to the waterfront where he personally thanked and congratulated Admiral Porter for the assistance rendered by the United States Navy during the operations for Vicksburg. Almost as an afterthought, he sent a message to Washington informing President Lincoln of the city's surrender. It took several days for the message to reach the capital during which time the only remaining Confederate bastion on the Mississippi River — Port Hudson, Louisiana — fell into Union hands. Upon receipt of Grant's message, Lincoln sighed, "Thank God," and declared "The Father of Waters again goes unvexed to the sea."

Terrence J. Winschel "Vicksburg Campaign: Unvexing the Father of Waters" Civil War Trust, Date accessed April, 2018, <https://www.civilwar.org/learn/articles/vicksburg-campaign-unvexing-father-waters>.

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What Gettysburg Proved

By Allen C. Guelzo

It took no more than a few days after the Battle of Gettysburg for the men who had fought there to realize how important it had been. “The Battle of Gettysburg, like Waterloo, must stand conspicuous in the history of all ages,” wrote a staff officer, Frank Aretas Haskell, who himself would die less than a year later in a much less conspicuous battle at a place called Cold Harbor. And even by the most remote measure, Haskell was right.

For over a year before, the Confederate general Robert E. Lee and his homespun Army of Northern Virginia had defied every expectation, and routinely humiliated every thrust its opposite number, the Army of the Potomac, had made at the Confederacy’s vitals in Virginia. Union generals – George McClellan, Ambrose Burnside, Joe Hooker – had been installed, and just as readily removed, until by 1863, a soldier in the 16th North Carolina could boast that they were merely waiting for the Yankees “to put up another General for us to whip.” When instead it was the Confederates who were defeated at Gettysburg, the surprise was almost unbearable. “The campaign is a failure,” wrote one rebel officer to his sister on July 17, “and the worst failure that the South has ever made ... and no blow since the fall of New Orleans has been so telling against us.”

And that was entirely apart from the actual blood bill Gettysburg demanded. Lee reported 2,592 Confederates killed, 12,700 wounded and 4,150 “captured or missing” – 20,451 casualties in all, out of the approximately 80,000 he had brought into Pennsylvania. Other estimates pegged the rebel losses at closer to 28,000. This meant that the Army of Northern Virginia suffered something comparable to 2 sinkings of the Titanic, the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, 10 repetitions of the Great Blizzard of 1888 and 2 Pearl Harbors, combined.

What this triggered were several lifetimes’ worth of recriminations, slander and shunning among the veterans of the Army of Northern Virginia, beginning with J.E.B. Stuart, the Army’s cavalry commander. Stuart had incontinently ridden the bulk of Lee’s horse-soldiers in a lengthy joy ride around the Union Army instead of providing the necessary screening the Confederate Army needed in Pennsylvania, and when Stuart’s cavalry rejoined Lee midway through the battle, they were much too late to affect its outcome. This began an ever escalating round of denunciations that blamed Stuart for depriving Lee of his “eyes and ears,” and allowing Lee to stumble without warning into a Union trap at Gettysburg. Just behind Stuart on the indictment list were two of Lee’s principal infantry commanders, James Longstreet and Richard Ewell, who were blamed for failing to execute Lee’s orders promptly and enthusiastically.

The truth was that cavalry in the Civil War was not the “eyes and ears” of anything (cavalry in 19th-century warfare did not perform intelligence-gathering), and if Longstreet and Ewell failed to move as swiftly as the critics charged, the real fault lay with Lee and his staff for failing to impart sufficient urgency to those orders. But in the postwar decades, Lee became the South’s

knightly saint, and it was easier to pin blame on Stuart (who died in 1864) or on the taciturn Longstreet and the eccentric Ewell.

It may have given some Southerners a grim spark of satisfaction to realize that the victorious Army of the Potomac endured nearly as much finger-pointing after the battle – not because it won, but because it didn't win more dramatically. Certainly the Union forces paid as steep a price at Gettysburg as their enemies: the Army's commander, the grizzly tempered George Gordon Meade, reported 3,155 killed, 14,529 wounded and 5,365 "captured or missing." But in 1900, Thomas Livermore painstakingly recalculated unit reports and put the reckoning at 3,903 dead, 18,735 wounded and 5,425 "missing," so that the total casualty list edged up to 28,063. The deaths on the second day of the battle alone may have made it the single costliest day of the war.

But George Meade got little thanks for holding off the Confederate onslaught. Shoved into command only three days before the battle, Meade had scarcely enough time to take up the reins before he was hurled into battle. He was a cautious, fussy general, and he was conscious of being on the other side of the political fence from President Abraham Lincoln and the Radical Republicans in Congress. He had not wanted to fight at Gettysburg in the first place, and afterward he displayed little eagerness to come to grips with the retreating Confederates and finish them off.

So, when news arrived on July 14 that Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia had crossed the Potomac River, Lincoln (who was not a man given to displays of emotion) put his head down on his desk and wept. "We had them in our grasp," Lincoln wailed, "We had only to stretch forth our hands & they were ours." Lincoln eventually managed to choke out a thank-you message to Meade, assuring the touchy general how "very — very — grateful" he was "for the magnificent success you gave the cause of the country at Gettysburg." But eight months later, Lincoln effectively superseded Meade by bringing Ulysses S. Grant from the western theater of the war and making Grant general in chief of the Union armies.

Looked at unemotionally, it was not Meade, but an unnoticed array of junior officers in the Union Army, making split-second, intuitive decisions on their own initiative, who pushed the Confederates back. It was midlevel brigade commanders like Strong Vincent, George Sears Greene and Samuel Sprigg Carroll who sprang into situations and headed off disasters that a few minutes' hesitation would have brought down on all their heads. It was John Buford, skillfully playing his handful of cavalymen like decoys to buy time for Union infantry to reach him. It was the one-armed Oliver Otis Howard, sizing up Cemetery Hill as the real key to the battle and making sure that it was fortified by Union artillery. By contrast, moving onto the unfamiliar landscape of Pennsylvania seems to have paralyzed Lee's otherwise cocksure and aggressive subordinates. Longstreet, Ewell and the others spent an inordinate amount of time looking over their shoulders, looking to Lee for specific direction, and allowing one opportunity after another to slip nervelessly through their fingers. In that respect, the Confederates lost the Battle of Gettysburg much more than Meade and the Army of the Potomac won it.

But win it they did, and as that realization sank in, it rejuvenated the sagging weariness of the Union as no other single event in the war. “At no time during the war was the depression among the people of the North so great as in the spring of 1863,” remembered James G. Blaine, and largely because “the anti-slavery policy of the President was ... tending to a fatal division among the people.” But Gettysburg, coming as it did on the same weekend that Vicksburg, the Confederacy’s last citadel on the Mississippi River, surrendered to Grant, transformed that depression. In September, Lincoln was able to say, “Peace does not appear so distant as it did.”

Lincoln was, for once, being overly optimistic. By allowing the Confederates to escape after Gettysburg, Meade had unwittingly guaranteed that Lee would live to fight not just another day, but for almost another two years. But even if Gettysburg was not exactly the “turning point” of the war, it still marked the last time that Lee was able to seize the strategic momentum. And it marked something even more important in Lincoln’s mind. The American republic was, in 1863, a dangerously isolated democratic flower in a garden full of aristocratic weeds, and if the Civil War succeeded in sundering the United States into two separate pieces, it would be the final confirmation that democracies were unstable and unworkable pipe dreams. “The central idea pervading this struggle,” Lincoln said in 1861, “is the necessity ... of proving that popular government is not an absurdity,” for “if we fail it will go far to prove the incapability of the people to govern themselves.”

That “proving” was what Gettysburg – and its roll of dead – provided. In November, when Lincoln came to dedicate a national cemetery for over 3,500 of the battle’s Union dead, it seemed to him that the willingness to lay down life in such numbers simply to preserve a democracy was all the evidence needed to illustrate democracy’s transcendent value. In their sacrifice, “the brave men, living and dead, who struggled here” had shown that democracy was something more than opportunities for self-interest and self-aggrandizement, something that spoke to the fundamental nature of human beings itself, something that arched like a rainbow in the political sky.

If there was to be a legacy to Gettysburg, it would not belong to Lee or to Meade. It would reach beyond even the limits of the Civil War. It would be a legacy for democracy itself, a “new birth of freedom.”

But first, of course, there would still be a war to win.

Allen C. Guelzo, “What Gettysburg Proved.” New York Times, July 1, 2013, <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/07/01/what-gettysburg-proved>.

Notes: _____

Graphic Organizer

Turning Point: 1863

Use this page to organize your ideas and information from the primary and secondary source documents. Use this completed page to answer the inquiry question.

Hypothesis:

Event (notes on the event)

Event (notes on the event)

Major Players, their Actions/Thoughts

Major Players, their Actions/Thoughts

Gettysburg

Vicksburg

Results

Considered a Turning Point –

When –

Why -

Considered a Turning Point –

When –

Why -

Results



Essay

Why is July 1863 considered the major turning point of the American Civil War?

Be sure to:

- Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s),
- Establish the significance of the claim(s) with evidence – using quotes from primary and secondary source material
- Create an organization that logically sequences the claim(s)
- Use words, phrases, and clauses as well as varied syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, and between reasons and evidence.
- Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.
- Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from or supports the argument presented.