

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

Union and Confederate Military Leadership

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Resources

If you can read only one book

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year.
Eicher, John H. and David J. Eicher	<i>Civil War High Commands</i> . Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.

Books and Articles

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year. “Title,” in <i>Journal</i> ##, no. # (Date): #.
Holzer, Harold	<i>Lincoln on War: Our Greatest Commander in Chief Speaks to America</i> . Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2011.
McPherson, James M.	<i>Tried by War: Abraham Lincoln as Commander in Chief</i> . New York: The Penguin Press, 2008.
_____.	<i>Embattled Rebel: Jefferson Davis as Commander in Chief</i> . New York: The Penguin Press, 2014.
Newell, Clayton R. and Charles R. Shrader	<i>Of Duty Well and Faithfully Done: A History of the Regular Army in the Civil War</i> . Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011.
Woodward, Steven E.	<i>Jefferson Davis and His Generals: The Failure of Confederate Command in the West</i> . Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990.

Organizations

Grant and His Generals

Web Resources

URL	Name and description
https://www.battlefields.org/learn/topics/civil-war-leaders	The website of the American Battlefield Trust is an excellent resource and superb place to gain basic information on Civil War military leadership.

Other Sources

Scholars

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Topic Précis

Throughout the Civil War, both the Union and Confederate militaries drew leadership from common education, tradition, and political and military organizations that dated back to the American Founding. Thus, the belligerent armies and navies retained and utilized similar organizations and methods throughout the conflict. While Confederate leadership in the eastern theater early in the war displayed remarkable talent and enjoyed marked success, mediocre or poor civilian and military leadership in other theatres counterbalanced their efforts. In contrast, Union leadership overcame problematic personalities and early reversals in every theater of war and rose to the challenges of high command. Union leadership, both civilian and military, persevered through failures until experience and promotion brought superior leaders to the fore. Both the Union and Confederate militaries followed precedents established during the American Revolution, codified in the Constitution of the United States. Military leadership was subordinated to Civilian control by the inexperienced Abraham Lincoln in the Union and the vastly more experienced politically and militarily Jefferson Davis in the Confederacy. Both sides had a Secretary of War to direct the war effort serving directly under the President, in the North two men and in the South five men served in this capacity. Both sides also had a general-in-chief who directed military matters. In the north Scott, McClellan, Halleck and Grant served consecutively as general-in-chief. In the Confederacy five soldiers were initially appointed full general and none were appointed general-in-chief until January 31, 1865 when Lee was confirmed in that post. The process for filling these military roles was also the same—the

president appointed army general and naval flag officers who were confirmed by the Senate.

The United States (Union) began the conflict with a military establishment already in place, though it was weakened by the defection of roughly a third of its officer corps to the Confederacy. In the eastern theater the Union' unified army went through a succession of generals from McClellan to Hooker to Meade and finally Grant. Union high command in the Western theater was divided initially between Frémont and Anderson, replaced respectively by Halleck and Sherman. Sherman was replaced by Buell. Separate Union armies were commanded by Grant and Pope. These commands went through consolidation and division as the war progressed and leadership was also changed with Rosecrans and Thomas leading armies in the west. In March 1864 Grant was promoted to general-in-chief and began a campaign involving a number of armies in both eastern and western theaters to simultaneously strike Confederate armies on all fronts. The strategy was sound but failed due in part to failure among the high-command of secondary advances on several fronts. Despite frequent changes in the composition of the officers in command of its field armies, the Union high command achieved victory in April 1865 with the surrender of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox Court House, Virginia on April 9, 1865 and the composite Confederate army in North Carolina at Durham Station, North Carolina on April 26, 1865.

While the Confederate high command went through many changes throughout the war, its leadership at the Army level was generally more stable than that of its Union counterpart. Initially organized as two armies in the Eastern theater under Beauregard and J.E. Johnston, after Bull Run the Confederate forces were combined into one army under Johnston. After Johnston's wounding at Seven Pines Lee was given command and he consolidated all Confederate forces under the Army of Northern Virginia and remained intact under his command for the remainder of the war. The Confederacy's high command of its western armies experienced frequent failure and thus, more change over the course of the war. Dedicated to a dispersed defensive strategy in 1861 and into the spring of 1862, a series of small corps-sized armies were formed to protect the coast and frontiers of the Confederacy, and each operated with relative independence of the others. Generals in charge of these armies were Pemberton, Bragg, Van Dorn, Polk, Hardee, Crittenden and A.S. Johnston. J.E. Johnston was given overall command of Confederate forces in the Western theater in 1862 after recovering from his wounds at Seven Pines. This arrangement broke down due to clashes between Johnston and Jefferson Davis so that by 1863 there were two Confederate armies in the west one under Bragg and one under Johnston. Johnston was replaced by Hood in 1864 who was in turn subordinated to Beauregard who was given overall command of Confederate forces in the west in late 1864.

Both the Union and Confederate military leadership operated with similar organizations and methods throughout the Civil War. Despite the remarkable success of Confederate General Robert E. Lee and his principal subordinates in the Army of Northern Virginia, most Confederate military leadership at the army level and higher civilian officers failed. In contrast, Union military leadership at the highest level overcame initial reverses and personality problems, and it dramatically improved as the war progressed. In part, this is attributable to hidden talents in the Union's initial mid-level leadership which

were revealed as the war progressed and merit-based promotions brought the best men to the top – men such as Grant, Sherman, Meade, Sheridan, and Thomas, who led the Union to victory in the costliest war in American History.
