

THE AMERICAN NATION : A HISTORY

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OUTCOME OF THE CIVIL WAR

1863-1865

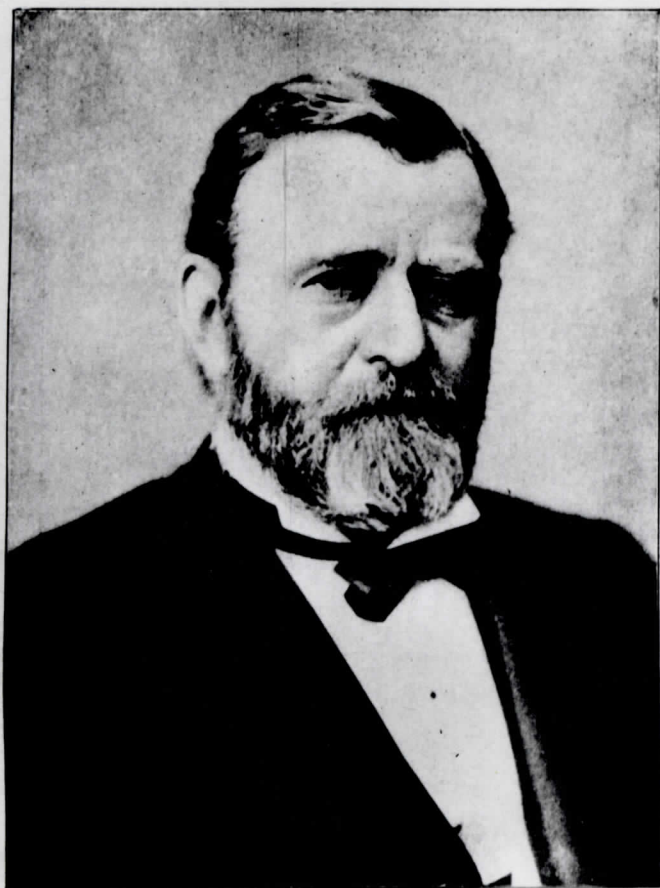
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U. S. Grant

ULYSSES SIMPSON GRANT

the crushing must constantly become more ruthless, if the conflict be protracted and uncertain. The thorough-going soldier regards the short, sharp, un-sparing method as in the end the humane method, even though the woman and the babe become homeless. It all belongs to the dreadful business, and such things the world will continue to behold until the curse of war shall cease.

No more striking example of what pitiless war may on occasion bring a humane man to do, and no more striking example of the adamant nerve of the greatest of Union soldiers can be named, than the conduct of Grant, in 1864, as regards the exchange of prisoners. What Andersonville was, all the world knows—thirty-two thousand Union soldiers huddled within a stockade enclosing twenty-six and one-half acres, though in the midst of forests, without the shelter even of trees, against the frost or the burning sun, with scanty and irregular food supply, with a scanty and polluted supply of water, in rags and filth, dragging on month after month of hopeless life. The Confederates desired to exchange them for an equivalent number of their own prisoners in Union hands. The North urged, with breaking hearts, that her sons might be set free from such an abyss of suffering. It may well be believed that the great captain's own heart was oppressed, for he was far from being cruel. But on April 17, 1864, he refused to exchange prisoners; and on August 18, at City Point, when things were

at a most critical pass, he explained his refusal: "It is hard on our men held in southern prisons not to exchange them, but it is humanity to those left in the ranks to fight our battles. Every man we hold, when released on parole, or otherwise, becomes an active soldier against us at once, either directly or indirectly. If we commence a system of exchange which liberates all prisoners taken, we will have to fight on until the whole South is exterminated. If we hold those caught, they amount to no more than dead men. At this particular time, to release all rebel prisoners in the North would insure Sherman's defeat, and would compromise our safety here."¹

Rhodes, whose chapter on this topic is especially painstaking and accurate, finds this subject more difficult to deal with than any other connected with the Civil War.² All other things, men once opposed can discuss with charity and good-nature; but as to the treatment of prisoners the soreness persists. The northern man is not more convinced that there were needless horrors in southern prisons than is the southern man that there were needless horrors in northern prisons. While the former flushes at the thought of Andersonville, Libby, and Salisbury, the latter still nurses wrath over Fort Delaware, Elmira, Johnson's Island, and Camp Douglas. The accusations of inhumanity from the South are just as earnest and circumstantial as those that come

¹ *War Records*, Serial No. 120, p. 607.

² Rhodes, *United States*, V., 483.