

# ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

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## The Capture of New Orleans

By Charles J. Wexler

### Resources

If you can read only one book

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year.
Hearn, Chester G.	<i>The Capture of New Orleans, 1862</i> . Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996.

### Books and Articles

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year.
Browning, Robert M., Jr.	<i>Lincoln's Trident: The West Gulf Blockading Squadron During the Civil War</i> . Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2015.
Duffy, James P.	<i>Lincoln's Admiral: The Civil War Campaigns of David Farragut</i> . New York: Wiley, 1997.
Dufour, Charles L.	<i>The Night the War Was Lost</i> . Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990.
Hearn, Chester G.	<i>When the Devil Came Down to Dixie: Ben Butler in New Orleans</i> . Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997.
Hess, Earl.	<i>The Civil War in the West: Victory and Defeat from the Appalachians to the Mississippi</i> . Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012.
Johnson, Robert Underwood and Clarence Clough Buel, eds.	<i>Battles and Leaders of the Civil War. Being for the Most Part Contributions by Union and Confederate Officers. Based Upon "The Century War Series", 4 vols.</i> New

	York: The Century Co. 1884-1888, based on “The Century War Series” in <i>The Century Magazine</i> , November 1884 to November 1887, 2:13-102.
Pierson, Michael D.	<i>Mutiny at Fort Jackson: The Untold Story of the Fall of New Orleans</i> . Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008.
United States Navy Department	<i>Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion</i> , 30 vols. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1894-1922, Series I, volume 18, Series II, volume 1.
United States War Department	<i>The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies</i> , 70 vols. in 128 parts. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901, Series I, volume 6.

### Organizations

Organization Name	Description, Contact information including address, email
Fort Jackson National Historical Monument	The Plaquemines Parish Government operates the Fort Jackson Museum & Welcome Center located at 38039 Highway 23, Buras, LA 70041. For information on visiting hours please call 504-393-0124.

### Web Resources

### Other Sources

### Scholars

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### Topic Précis

The capture of New Orleans on April 29, 1862 gave Union forces under Flag Officer David Glasgow Farragut and Major General Benjamin Franklin Butler control of the Confederacy's largest port on the Mississippi River. This not only denied Confederate forces a major center of trade and industry, New Orleans' capture gave Union forces control of the lower Mississippi River valley, which they quickly exploited. Two masonry fortifications guarded the southern approaches on the Mississippi River, Forts St. Philip and Jackson. Both state and Confederate officials felt any attack on New Orleans would originate not from the Gulf but from upstream. Fortifications including Island No. 10, Fort Pillow, and Vicksburg guarded these northern approaches. Defenses at the forts were improved and a collection of warships, locally procured or converted, was added to the defense of the city. The first clash with Union warships, occurred on October 12, 1861 at the Battle of the Head of the Passes with no decisive result. It was also in the early fall that Confederate Secretary of the Navy Mallory inaugurated a major shipbuilding program which included two ironclads to be built to defend New Orleans, the *Mississippi*, and the *Louisiana*. A muddled command structure saw a 14 ship River Defense Fleet under Captain John A. Stephenson, Captain William C Whittle commanding New Orleans station without authority over anything afloat and two other naval commanders charged with finishing the two ironclads. While the Confederates organized their defenses, Union Captain David Farragut assembled the West Gulf Blockading Squadron and prepared to attack New Orleans supported by ground forces under Major General Benjamin Butler. Farragut began his attack on April 15, 1862, using a mortar fleet to bombard Fort Jackson and later Fort St. Phillip. On April 24 Farragut moved to pass the forts and attack New Orleans. Opposed by the Confederate River Defense Fleet the two sides inflicted damage and casualties on each other but by dawn on April 24, Farragut had thirteen operational ships upstream past the two forts. On April 25 Farragut reached New Orleans. Local Confederate forces abandoned the city as indefensible and on April 29 Farragut occupied the city. The two forts, bypassed and facing both the mortar fleet and Butler's troops, surrendered on April 28. Neither Confederate ironclad was fully operational, and both were destroyed by the Confederates to avoid them falling into Union hands. General Butler occupied New Orleans and earned himself the sobriquet "Beast" for, among other reasons, his infamous General Order Number 28 treating any woman who showed disrespect to Union soldiers as a "woman of the town." In Richmond the loss of New Orleans resulted in the creation of a Joint Special Committee of the House of Representatives to investigate the causes. The capture of New Orleans demonstrated the pitfalls Confederate defenders faced in the first full year of the war. Resource demands from pressing campaigns elsewhere drained New Orleans of valuable soldiers and materials. Divided leadership responsibilities and inter-service rivalries hindered operations and did not seriously consider a seaborne attack from the Gulf. The time needed building a modern navy centered on armored casemate ironclads with limited logistical capabilities meant any delay proved fatal. Union forces, on the other hand, developed a clear plan to capture the city. The Capture of New Orleans shut down the largest Confederate port and secured the lower Mississippi River valley for Federal forces.

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