

Confederate reaction to “Beast” Butler’s orders, 1862

Introduction

In April 1862 Union forces led by Captain David G. Farragut steamed past the weak Confederate defenses and captured New Orleans. During the occupation of the city Union troops were repeatedly insulted by New Orleans women and one woman went so far as to empty a chamber pot on an officer’s head from her window. The women hoped their actions would prompt a reaction from Union troops that would incite paroled Confederates to action. General Benjamin F. Butler’s men showed remarkable restraint against the insults, but Butler realized that it was only a matter of time before one of them, pressed too far, would react. As military governor of the city, Butler issued General Orders 28 on May 15, 1862, which declared that any woman behaving disrespectfully would be “treated as a woman of the town plying her avocation.” In other words, they were to be regarded as prostitutes and therefore were subject to arrest. While reaction in the North was mixed, the South saw “Beast” Butler’s ruling as an affront to womanhood, dishonorable and offensive.

In response, on May 19, Confederate General P. G. T. Beauregard issued his own General Orders 44, shown here. Beauregard’s orders reprinted Butler’s orders and stated that they were to be read aloud to Confederate troops in order to stir their emotions. “Arouse friends, and drive back from our soil, those infamous invaders of our homes and disturbers of our family ties.” Butler’s orders backfired as they only served as a tool for increasing Southern anger against the Northern occupiers.

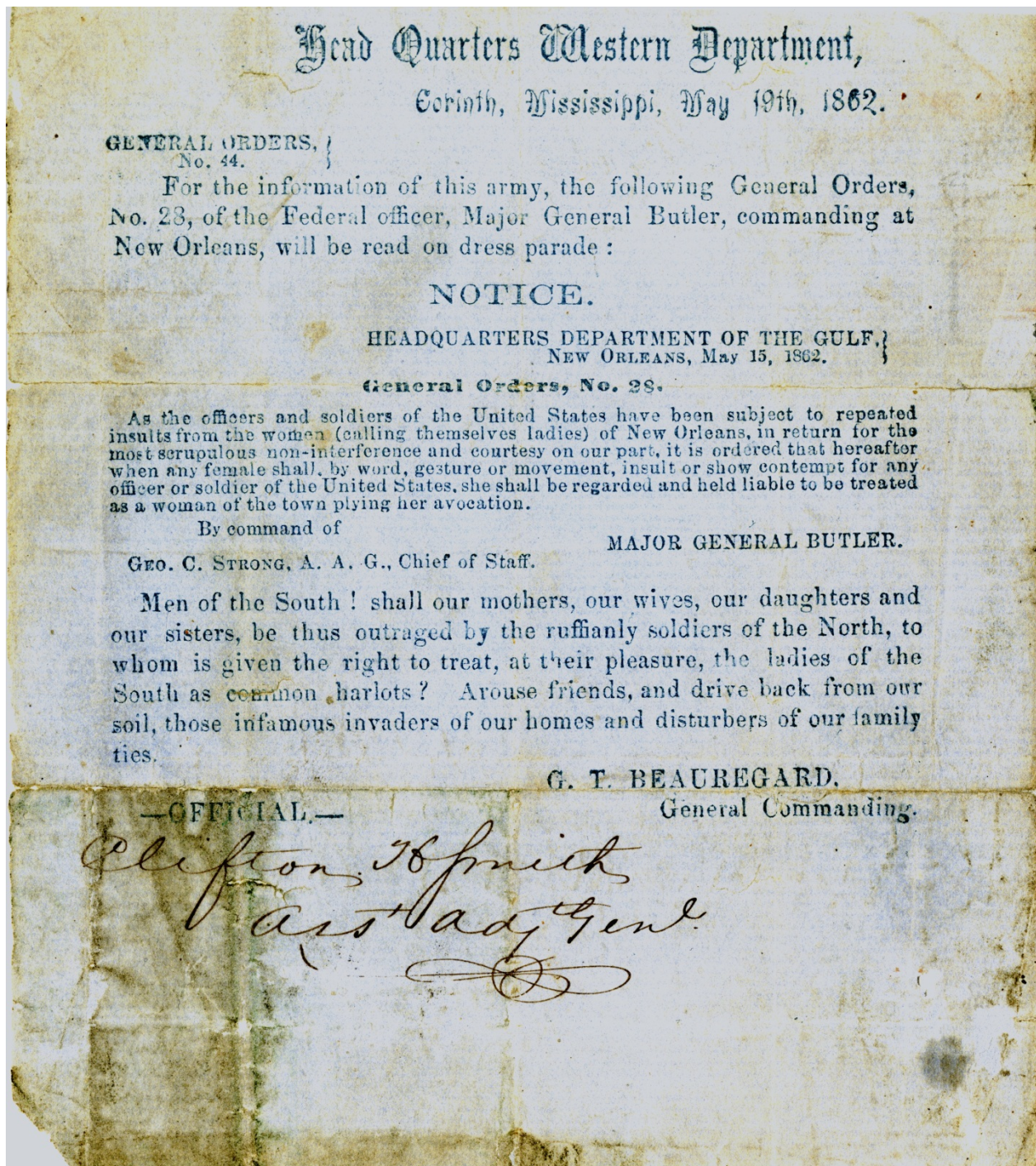
Questions for Discussion

Read the introduction, view the image, and read the transcript. Then apply your knowledge of American history as well as evidence from the document to answer the following questions:

1. Provide the reasons General Butler issued General Orders, No.28.
2. Why did the female residents of New Orleans consider Butler’s orders highly offensive?
3. How do these documents illustrate the difficulties of an army occupying a hostile territory?
4. Define the following from General Beauregard’s orders: ruffian[ly], harlot. Why do you think General Beauregard used both of these terms?
5. Explain why Butler’s orders had the opposite effect he expected.

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Image



P. G. T. (Pierre Gustave Toutant) Beauregard, General orders, no. 44, May 19, 1862 (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC00666)

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Transcript

Head Quarters Western Department,

Corinth, Mississippi, May 19th, 1862.

GENERAL ORDERS, }
No. 44. }

For the information of this army, the following General Orders, No. 28, of the Federal officer, Major General Butler, commanding at New Orleans, will be read on dress parade:

NOTICE.

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF THE GULF, }
NEW ORLEANS, May 15, 1862. }

General Orders, No. 28.

As the officers and soldiers of the United States have been subject to repeated insults from the women (calling themselves ladies) of New Orleans, in return for the most scrupulous non-interference and courtesy on our part, it is ordered that hereafter when any female shall, by word, gesture or movement, insult or show contempt for any officer or soldier of the United States, she shall be regarded and held liable to be treated as a woman of the town plying her avocation.

By command of

GEO. C. STRONG, A. A. G., Chief of Staff.

MAJOR GENERAL BUTLER.

Men of the South! shall our mothers, our wives, our daughters and our sisters, be thus outraged by the ruffianly soldiers of the North, to whom is given the right to treat, at their pleasure, the ladies of the South as common harlots? Arouse friends, and drive back from our soil, those infamous invaders of our homes and disturbers of our family ties.

G.T. BEAUREGARD.

General Commanding.

- OFFICIAL -

Clifton H. Smith

Ass^t Adj^t Gen^l