Fort Monroe in the Civil War
Was Fort Monroe really “the key to the South”?

LOC TPS US/APUS History
9-12 Grades

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This activity is sponsored in part by the Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources Eastern Region Program, coordinated by Waynesburg University.

Two class periods of 45 – 60 minutes
Description of activity: Students examine the significance of Fort Monroe as a strategic military target and in shaping policy and politics during the Civil War.

Activity Goals
Focus Question: Was Fort Monroe really “the key to the South”?

Context: This should be used to investigate more deeply after students have a basic understanding of events.

Objectives:
Virginia SOLS
USI.1 The student will demonstrate skills for historical and geographical analysis and responsible citizenship, including the ability to
a) identify and interpret primary and secondary source documents to increase understanding of events and life in United States history to 1865;
b) make connections between the past and the present;
c) sequence events in United States history from pre-Columbian times to 1865;
d) interpret ideas and events from different historical perspectives;
e) evaluate and discuss issues orally and in writing;
f) analyze and interpret maps to explain relationships among landforms, water features, climatic characteristics, and historical events;
g) distinguish between parallels of latitude and meridians of longitude;
h) interpret patriotic slogans and excerpts from notable speeches and documents;
i) identify the costs and benefits of specific choices made, including the consequences, both intended and unintended, of the decisions and how people and nations responded to positive and negative incentives.

USI.2 The student will use maps, globes, photographs, pictures, or tables to
d) recognize key geographic features on maps, diagrams, and/or photographs.
USI.9 The student will demonstrate knowledge of the causes, major events, and effects of the Civil War by
a) describing the cultural, economic, and constitutional issues that divided the nation;
b) explaining how the issues of states' rights and slavery increased sectional tensions;
d) describing the roles of Abraham Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, Ulysses S. Grant, Robert E. Lee,
Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson, and Frederick Douglass in events leading to and during the war;
e) using maps to explain critical developments in the war, including major battles;
f) describing the effects of war from the perspectives of Union and Confederate soldiers
(including African American soldiers), women, and enslaved African Americans.

AP US History
Time Period 5: 1844-1877
Key Concepts 5.2, 5,3, Thematic Learning Objectives POL 2.0, MIG 2.0, GEO 1.0,
Causation, argumentation, author's purpose, context, point of view

Assessment: Supporting questions guide thinking and provide structure. Formative assessments check in on learning for accuracy and understanding. Summative assessments gauge the level of actual understanding and provide valuable practice on written assessments.

Activity Details
Primary Sources: find below
Procedure: Supporting questions guide student inquiry. Formative assessments check for understanding. The teacher should lead a class debriefing after completion of the formative assessments before asking students to move on to the summative assessment and action steps.

What you will need before implementing:
This lesson is dependent on computer and internet access for all students. The documents and directions should be shared digitally with all students (through Google Classroom or another format).
Fort Monroe in the Civil War
Was Fort Monroe really “the key to the South”?
Students should take the link for each document except those provided in full (Official Records). Zoom in to see detail and read the bibliographic information provided. Answer the questions that go with each item before moving on. Students should not attempt the summative assessment or action steps before discussion of the formative assessments.

How was Fort Monroe crucial to Union strategy?

Scott's great snake. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1861
J. B. Elliott
[S.l.] 1861.
https://www.loc.gov/item/99447020

When I wish to catch rats, I first stop their holes—Gen'l Scott.” Wood engraving on gold wove paper envelope, ca. 1861. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress (026.00.00) [Digital ID# LC-DIG-ppmsca-33123]

http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2012647347/
- Describe the Union naval strategy known as the Ananconda Plan.
- How was control of the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay and the port of Norfolk important to the success of that plan?

Norfolk, Virginia Sept. the 12th, 1861
Jeff Davis & Beauregard, Norfolk Virginia
R.C. Harden
1861
https://www.loc.gov/resource/glva01.lva00015/

- Examine the perspective of this map. Why do you suppose it was drawn this way?
- What is the context of this map? (What events have already happened? What events have not yet happened?)
“Here, a dozen miles from Fort Monroe, enclosed within a high brick wall on Elizabeth’s left bank, was the Norfolk, or Gosport, Navy Yard, one of the three largest and busiest naval yards in the country.”

Eric Mills, *Chesapeake Bay in the Civil War*, Tidewater Publishers, 1996

- Why was Gosport Navy Yard such an important military asset?

- How does this image convey Fort Monroe as a focus of military strength?
The Union army encampment at Hampton, Virginia Showing picket lines and Fortress Munroe [sic].
Robert Knox Sneden 1832-1918.
[1861-1865]
https://www.loc.gov/item/gvhs01.vhs00245/

- Why was this map created?
- What recent events were indicated here?
- In what ways does this show the military significance of Fort Monroe?
Fortress Monroe, Va. and its vicinity
Jacob Wells
[New York], Virtue & Co., c1862.
https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3884h.cw0548000/

- What do you notice about the location of Fort Monroe in relation to Hampton Roads harbor and surrounding land?

- Considering the time of its origin, what was the likely purpose of this map?
John E. Wool to Edwin M. Stanton, Monday, May 12, 1862 (Telegram regarding military affairs)
The Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress
Series 1. General Correspondence. 1833-1916.
http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/P?mal:15:/temp/~ammem_yspi:
Transcription
http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mal:@field(DOCID+@lit(d1592400))

- What events were recounted here?

- How did Fort Monroe prove to be strategically important at this point in the war?

Formative Assessment Task:

Without control of Fort Monroe, could the Union have taken control of Norfolk?
the Chesapeake Bay? the Outer Banks and eastern North Carolina?

Draw a political cartoon/create a broadside depicting the military importance of Fort Monroe during the Civil War.
How did events at Fort Monroe affect Union policy?

Read Butler’s letters to Lt. Gen. Winfield Scott and Sec. of War Simon Cameron’s letter to Butler from the Official Records


http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/m/moawar/
PRISONERS OF WAR, ETC.

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF VIRGINIA,

Fort Monroe, May 23, 1861.

Lieut. Gen. WINFIELD SCOTT:

Saturday, May 23.—I had written thus far when I was called away to meet Major Cary, of the active Virginia volunteers, upon questions which have arisen of very considerable importance both in a military and political aspect and which I beg leave to submit herewith.

On Thursday night three negroes, field hands belonging to Col. Charles K. Mallory now in command of the secession forces in this district, delivered themselves up to my picket guard and as I learned from the report of the officer of the guard in the morning had been detained by him. I immediately gave personal attention to the matter and found satisfactory evidence that these men were about to be taken to Carolina for the purpose of aiding the secession forces there; that two of them left wives and children (one a free woman) here; that the other had left his master from fear that he would be called upon to take part in the rebel armies. Satisfied of these facts from cautious examination of each of the negroes apart from the others I determined for the present and until better advised as these men were very serviceable and I had great need of labor in my quartermaster's department to avail myself of their services, and that I would send a receipt to Colonel Mallory that I had so taken them as I would for any other property of a private citizen which the exigencies of the service seemed to require to be taken by me, and especially property that was designed, adapted and about to be used against the United States.

As this is but an individual instance in a course of policy which may be required to be pursued with regard to this species of property I have detailed to the lieutenant-general this case and ask his direction. I am credibly informed that the negroes in this neighborhood are now being employed in the erection of batteries and other works by the rebels which it would be nearly or quite impossible to construct without their labor. Shall they be allowed the use of this property against the United States and we not be allowed its use in aid of the United States?

Major Cary demanded to know with regard to the negroes what course I intended to pursue. I answered him substantially as I have written above when he desired to know if I did not feel myself bound by my constitutional obligations to deliver up fugitives under the fugitive-slave act. To this I replied that the fugitive-slave act did not affect a foreign country which Virginia claimed to be and that she must reckon it one of the infelicities of her position that in so far at least she was taken at her word; that in Maryland, a loyal State, fugitives from service had been returned, and that even now although so much pressed by my necessities for the use of these men of Colonel Mallory's yet if their master would come to the fort and take the oath of allegiance to the Constitution of the United States I would deliver the men up to him and endeavor to hire their services of him if he desired to part with them. To this Major Cary responded that Colonel Mallory was absent.

Trusting that these dispositions and movements will meet the approval of the lieutenant-general and begging pardon for the detailed length of this dispatch, I have the honor to be, most respectfully, your obedient servant,

BENJ. F. BUTLER,
Major-General, Commanding.
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PRISONERS OF WAR, ETC.

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF VIRGINIA,
FORT MONROE, May 27, 1861.

Lieutenant-General Scott.

Sir: * * * Since I wrote my last dispatch* the question in regard to slave property is becoming one of very serious magnitude. The inhabitants of Virginia are using their negroes in the batteries and are preparing to send the women and children south. The escapes from them are very numerous and a squad has come in this morning to my pickets bringing their women and children. Of course these cannot be dealt with upon the theory on which I designed to treat the services of able-bodied men and women who might come within my lines, and of which I gave you a detailed account in my last dispatch. I am in the utmost doubt what to do with this species of property. Up to this time I have had come within my lines men and women with their children, entire families, each family belonging to the same owner. I have therefore determined to employ as I can do very profitably the able-bodied persons in the party, issuing proper food for the support of all and charging against their services the expense of care and sustenance of the non-laborers, keeping a strict and accurate account as well of the services as of the expenditure, having the worth of the services and the cost of the expenditure determined by a board of survey to be hereafter detailed. I know of no other manner in which to dispose of this subject and the questions connected therewith. As a matter of property to the insurgents it will be of very great moment, the number that I now have amounting as I am informed to what in good times would be of the value of $60,000. Twelve of these negroes I am informed have escaped from the batteries on Sewall's Point which this morning fired upon my expedition as it passed by out of range. As a means of offense therefore in the enemy's hands these negroes when able-bodied are of the last importance. Without them the batteries could not have been erected, at least for many weeks. As a military question it would seem to be a measure of necessity to deprive their masters of their services. How can this be done? As a political question and a question of humanity can I receive the services of a father and mother and not take the children? Of the humanitarian aspect I have no doubt; of the political one I have no right to judge.

* * * * * * * * * * *

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,
B. F. BUTLER.

WASHINGTON, May 30, 1861.

Major-General Butler.

Sir: Your action in respect to the negroes who came in your lines from the service of the rebels is approved.

The Department is sensible of the embarrassment which must surround officers conducting military operations in a State by the laws of which slavery is sanctioned. The Government cannot recognize the rejection by any State of its federal obligations nor can it refuse the performance of the federal obligations resting upon itself. Among these federal obligations, however, none can be more important than that of suppressing and dispersing armed combinations formed for the purpose of overthrowing its whole constitutional authority. While

* See Butler to Scott, May 24, p. 752.
CAPTURED AND FUGITIVE SLAVES.

therefore you will permit no interference by the persons under your
command with the relations of persons held to service under the laws
of any State you will on the other hand so long as any State within
which your military operations are conducted is under the control of
such armed combinations refrain from surrendering to alleged masters
any persons who may come within your lines. You will employ such
persons in the service to which they may be best adapted, keeping an
account of the labor by them performed, of the value of it and of the
expense of their maintenance. The question of their final disposition
will be reserved for future determination.

SIMON CAMERON,
Secretary of War.

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF FLORIDA,
Fort Pickens, June 23, 1861.

Lieut. Col. E. D. TOWNSEND,
Assistant Adjutant-General, Washington, D. C.

COLONEL: * * * I shall not send the negroes back as I will never
be voluntarily instrumental in returning a poor wretch to slavery but
will hold them subject to orders.

* * * * * * * * * * * *

I am, colonel, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

HARVEY BROWN,
Colonel, Commanding.

HEADQUARTERS SCHENCK’S BRIGADE,
Camp Upton, Va., July 6, 1861.

Capt. JAMES B. FRY,
Assistant Adjutant-General, Headquarters Arlington.

Sir: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your communica-
tion of the 2d instant with letters of Mrs. Caroline F. Noland and
John G. England, referred from the headquarters of the Army, in relation
to two slaves belonging to persons in Rockville, Md., which slaves
are claimed to be in this camp. I am requested to give my attention
to the matter of these slaves and if they are within the limits of my
command to have them returned to their owners when demanded.
And I am also reminded that the case of one of them was referred to
me some days since when as would appear from one of the accompany-
ing letters the order of the general commanding was not executed in
consequence of the interference of some of the soldiers. I return now
all the letters on the subject and have to make in reply this statement:

When the negroes are alleged to have taken refuge or been first
seen within the limits of the First or Second Ohio Regiments I was
not in command. That is understood to relate to a time when the
troops were encamped within the Department of Washington. After-
ward on the day when certain parties appeared in this camp with the
letter of Assistant Adjutant-General Townsend of the 25th of June,
referred to me from headquarters, I happened to be temporarily absent.
Colonel McCook, of the First Ohio Regiment, the senior officer present,
gave his immediate attention to the matter; and I refer to the inclosed
statements from himself and Lieutenant-Colonel Parrott to show that
there was no such evasion of or refusal to execute the order of the

* Not found.
On what grounds did Benjamin Butler base his decision to take runaway slaves under the protection of Fort Monroe?

Why did he refuse their return to their previous owner?

Why did Butler believe that all of the runaway slaves must be provided safe haven and not only the able bodied who could earn their keep with their labor?

What long term impact do you think this policy may have had on Federal policy?

Examine

Stampede among the Negroes in Virginia - their arrival at Fortress Monroe / from sketches by our Special Artist in Fortress Monroe.

1861

https://www.loc.gov/resource/ppmsca.33130/

What is being depicted here? What was the immediate impact of Butler’s decision to provide safe haven?

How did the artist characterize the interaction between the US troops and African Americans?


- Who do you believe was in the right and why? Benjamin Butler, Abraham Lincoln, or Charles Mallory
- How would you characterize Abraham Lincoln’s initial stance on the issue of runaway slaves? What concerns most likely shaped his opinion at the time?
- How did the fate of the runaway slave and actions of the US government depend on the Union or Confederate status of the slave owner?
- How did Lincoln’s opinions on slavery change over the course of the war?

Formative Assessment Task:
In what way does the author argue that this was a turning point in Union policy-making in the war?

Explain Gary Gallagher’s argument that it was really the Union army that brought the end of slavery in the South. Do you agree with him? Explain why you do or do not agree with his assertion.
John A. Dix to Abraham Lincoln, Thursday, January 15, 1863 (Opinion on garrisoning Fort Monroe and Yorktown with black troops)

The Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress
Series 1. General Correspondence. 1833-1916.
[Link to the letter](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mal&fileName=mal1/211/2119400/malpage.db&recNum=0)

transcription
[Link to transcription](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mal:@field(DOCID+@lit(d2119400))

- How did General Dix characterize the importance of Fort Monroe to Union forces?
- What advice did General Dix give to President Lincoln regarding the stationing of troops at Fort Monroe?
- What reservations did he have about stationing African-American troops there?

Formative Assessment Task:
What does this discussion demonstrate about military concerns at Fort Monroe? What insight does it provide about attitudes on race? What concerns shaped Dix’s opinion on this matter? How did his concerns compare to those of President Lincoln? What might account for those differences?
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OPTIONAL Additional sources for review:

[Fort Monroe, Va. Officers and ladies on porch of a garrison house]
Photograph of the Federal Navy, and seaborne expeditions against the Atlantic Coast of the Confederacy, specifically of Fort Monroe, Va.
[1864]
https://www.loc.gov/item/cwp2003000748/PP/

[Fort Monroe, Va. The "Lincoln Gun," a 15-inch Rodman Columbiad]
Summary
Photograph of the Federal Navy, and seaborne expeditions against the Atlantic Coast of the Confederacy -- specifically of Fort Monroe, Va.
Created / Published
[1864]
https://www.loc.gov/item/cwp2003000747/PP/
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[Fort Monroe, Va. 3d Pennsylvania Heavy Artillery on parade]
Photograph of the Federal Navy, and seaborne expeditions against the Atlantic Coast of the Confederacy, specifically of Fort Monroe, Va.
1864 December.
https://www.loc.gov/resource/cwpb.03674/

[Fort Monroe, Va. Officers of 3d Pennsylvania Heavy Artillery]
Photograph of the Federal Navy, and seaborne expeditions against the Atlantic Coast of the Confederacy, specifically of Fort Monroe, Va.
1864 December.
https://www.loc.gov/item/cwp2003000750/PP/

Optional resource - if needed - a concise overview:
Overview of Fort Monroe during Civil War
Brian Matthew Jordan
https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Fort_Monroe_During_the_Civil_War#start_entry
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SAQ as Summative Assessment Task:
A. Explain the Union’s overall naval strategy against the Confederacy.
B. How was Fort Monroe a key element in carrying out military operations in eastern Virginia?
C. To what extent did General Butler’s decision about “contrabands of war” shape Union policy?

Take a stand
Write a letter to either President Lincoln or General Benjamin Butler advising him on some aspect of his policy/decision-making regarding runaway slaves.

Debate: Which was the more important act - Butler’s decision to provide for the safety and well-being of runaway Confederate slaves or Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation?