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snubbed the rich”

*Benjamin F. Butler and Class Politics
in Lowell and New Orleans*

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*Benjamin F. Butler, by Silsbee, Case & Co., Boston, ca. 1861–1862. Charles W. Jenks
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Ben. Butler then was ordered down to regulate the city;
He made the rebels walk a chalk, and was that not a pity?
That's the way to serve them out—that's the way to treat them,
They must not go and put on airs after we have beat them. . . .

He sent the saucy women up and made them treat us well[.]
He helped the poor and snubbed the rich; they thought he was the devil,
Bully for Ben. Butler, then, they thought he was so handy;
Bully for Ben Butler then,—Yankee Doodle Dandy.

—A Union song, sung to the tune of Yankee Doodle¹

THE LYRICS OF THE 1862 Union song refocus our attention on the controversial career of Benjamin F. Butler. In particular, the song highlights Butler's proficiency in class politics, proclaiming that “he helped the poor and snubbed the rich.” The song also refers to his much maligned “woman order” in Civil War New Orleans and to making “the rebels walk a chalk,” illustrating Butler’s confrontational, even theatrical, understanding of

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politics. Lawyer and politician, Butler has epitomized the image of the unprincipled nineteenth-century master of patronage. He also has come to represent the often tragic ineptitude of many of the war's politically-appointed generals. On both counts, these stereotypes ignore Butler's accomplishments and entirely misconstrue his motivations. Moreover, they fail to appreciate the sources of Butler's political education in antebellum Lowell, Massachusetts, and how much his legal and political career there shaped his rule in New Orleans. Additionally, Butler's surprising successes in New Orleans should force us to rethink our assumptions about politically appointed military officers.

At first blush, one may be overwhelmed by the number of differences between Lowell and New Orleans. Slavery flourished in New Orleans and the city's African American population, free and enslaved, far surpassed Lowell's. Lowell thrived on industry while New Orleans prospered mostly on trade. But both cities had grown quite large by antebellum standards. As early as 1850, Lowell had become the second largest city in Massachusetts with a population of 33,000.² New Orleans, the South's largest city, had grown to over 170,000 people by the Civil War. Additionally, both cities had experienced an influx of immigrants during the late 1840s and 1850s, significantly increasing the number of white, foreign-born residents. In both cities, many native-born whites reacted to the arrival of immigrants—mostly Catholic—by joining the American party, known more widely as the Know Nothing party. The Know Nothings enjoyed great success in the mid 1850s through its defense of Protestantism and native-born rights. Both cities also possessed highly sophisticated capitalist economies thoroughly enmeshed in domestic and foreign markets. Lowell exported goods throughout the nation; New Orleans not only served as the export center for the Mississippi River basin and its own urban artisans, but also as the cornerstone of the domestic slave trade. Finally, the economies of both cities relied on the labor of an urban proletariat, each with its own well-developed working-class culture. Workers in Lowell and New Orleans, surprisingly, had more in common with each other than they did with the subsistence family farmers in their own “sections” of the country. They joined unions, participated in strikes, and became active Democratic party members. Coming from Lowell, Ben Butler instantly recognized the economy, the politics, and even the culture of New Orleans. Indeed, his earlier career in the Merrimac Valley made him feel right at home on the banks of the Mississippi.

In Lowell and New Orleans, Butler mobilized allies in the face of a determined and organized opposition. In Lowell, that meant rallying the Democratic party for annual elections. Whether his opponents were Whigs, Know

Nothings, or Republicans, his most steadfast supporters would be working-class men, immigrants, and Catholics. Once in New Orleans, Butler faced a similar, albeit far more difficult, task of rallying New Orleans whites to the Union in the face of Confederate resistance. Confronted with such a daunting political challenge, Butler again embraced immigrants, Catholics, and wage earners. He recognized the class-based hostility many white New Orleans workers felt toward the Confederacy and successfully captured their allegiance for the federal government. Butler would find that the political tactics he had used in Lowell, including dramatic confrontations and patronage, worked with considerable success in this Southern city.

Charlotte Butler moved to Lowell with her young son when Ben was about twelve years old. His mother, a widow, kept the family afloat by opening a boarding house that also served as Butler's introduction to working-class life. The young Ben proved to be an avid reader and a quick learner, and Charlotte kept him in school. Ben worked in a Lowell bookstore, but mostly he pursued his education. After graduating from Lowell High School, he attended Waterville College in Maine (now Colby College), where he performed well in the classroom. After graduation in 1838, he read law in Lowell until he was admitted to the bar in 1840. Young Ben's career path, which in retrospect seems simple and clear, had one serious failing. Eager for a military career, he sought admission into West Point, but failed. Ben's family lacked the political ties necessary to gain him entry, and this rejection likely fueled his working-class distrust of the politics of privilege.³

In his voluminous autobiography, Butler recalled Lowell's factories with an odd mix of pride and disgust, praise and condemnation. The almost simultaneous ringing of the factory bells throughout the city filled him with ambivalence. On the one hand, he admired the chimes ringing "as nearly in unison as was possible without the aid of electricity," while on the other, he denounced the long hours and control over workers' lives that the bells symbolized. At his most generous, he could fulsomely praise the factory owners for their "humane, philanthropic, and far-sighted economic business regulations," including the housing and religious instruction they made available to their workers.⁴ Butler even joined the ranks of the factory owners himself, acquiring a large share of the Middlesex Mills. Eventually, he would become so prominent in the business elite in Lowell that he became one of five men appointed to oversee the Bay State Mills after its bankruptcy. Typical of his concerns, he voted to restart the mill in order to keep its workers employed, but he was defeated.⁵

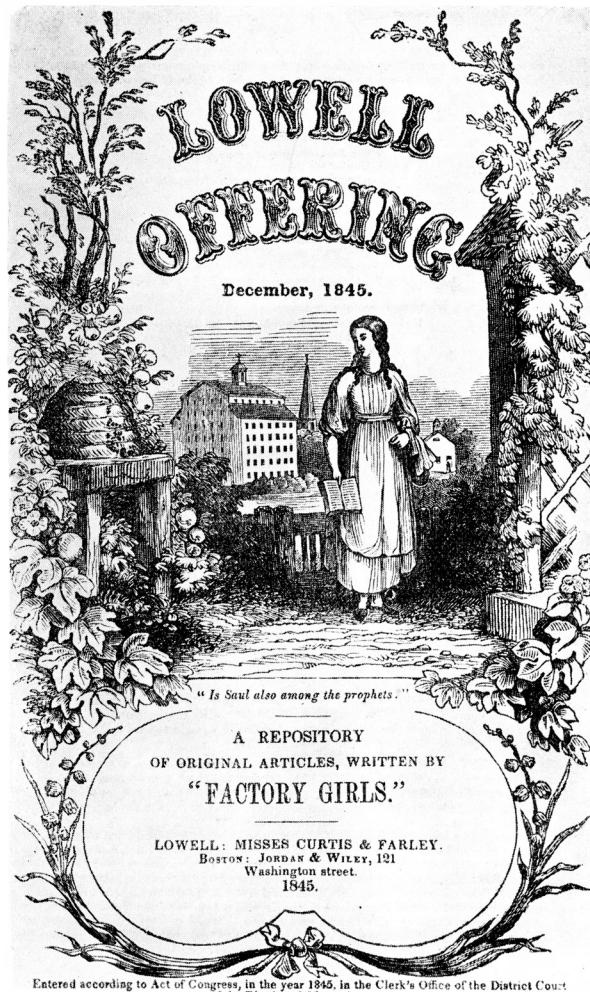
Butler never felt any passion for Lowell's factories. In his memoirs, he devoted much time to recalling the social problems the factories created. He disliked the "pass system" that required workers to present references from former employers in order to obtain employment elsewhere in the city. The long hours, hard manual labor, and rushed meals of Lowell workers also earned his censure. Convinced that factory discipline destroyed the lives of many working poor, Butler looked to politics for a remedy and began his political career in 1840. As he recalled, "thus instructed and convinced" by his own observations and consultations with doctors, "my first political action was an endeavor to procure from the legislature an enactment making ten hours a day's work in manufacturing employments."⁶ Within a year, the young attorney had thrown in his lot with Lowell's workers, helping to start *Vox Populi*, a Democratically-inclined labor newspaper that embraced a wide range of labor reforms.⁷

Politically, he found sympathy for his aims among Lowell's Democrats. The antebellum Northern Democratic party, usually condemned as racist and dominated by Southern masters, varied considerably by community. In the Northeast, the party represented a coalition of urban laborers, many of them Catholics, and immigrants disenchanted with their working conditions. In Massachusetts, the party even possessed a strong antislavery element.⁸ In this milieu, Butler formed his labor politics.

Hans Trefousse, one of Butler's more skilled biographers, attributed the Lowell Democrat's politics to a genuine compassion—even identification—with the male and female workers he knew as a boy. The women who boarded at Charlotte Butler's house, Trefousse wrote, befriended the young Ben. "He became so familiar with factory workers' problems that he gained a sympathy for the laborer which stayed with him throughout his life." Other biographers have advanced differing explanations for the young attorney's radicalism. Robert S. Holzman believed that Butler backed labor reform because the young attorney needed money and "his first clients were factory girls." For Holzman, such opportunism marked Butler's whole life.⁹ Skeptics also argue that Butler's antebellum Democratic politics produced tangible rewards, including terms in the state house and senate, nominations for even higher offices, and profitable federal patronage appointments for his brother-in-law. Such an analysis, however, ignores Butler's lifelong support for labor which implies more ideologically driven motivations.

Butler's 1859 campaign speech to a Democratic rally in Charlestown, Massachusetts, illustrates his sincere interest in the commonwealth's poor. After answering Republican charges that all Democrats supported the expansion of

The Lowell Offering.
From Harriet J. H. Robinson, *Loom and Spindle; or, Life Among the Early Mill Girls*. With a sketch of “*The Lowell Offering*” and Some of its Contributors (*New York & Boston, 1898*). Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society.



Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1845, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the District of Massachusetts.

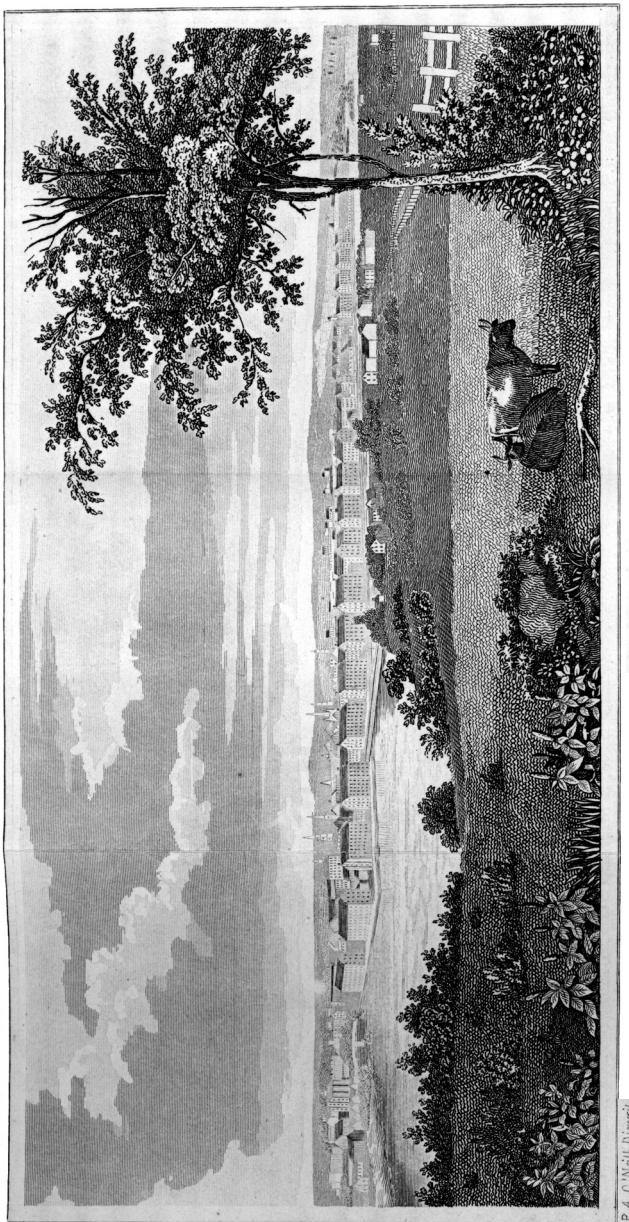
slavery in the west, Butler redirected the discussion from the plains of Kansas to the cities of Massachusetts. The inmates of the state almshouses, he noted, had suffered horribly under successive Know Nothing and Republican party administrations. During 1858, he said, 666 of the 2,700 inmates in the state almshouses had died—a shocking 25 percent of the people housed there. The dead included, he added, 341 children. As Butler exclaimed to the partisan crowd, these children “died like dogs in a kennel in our own almshouses, while we were weeping over the imaginary wrongs of Kansas.” Mocking the antislavery movement, he asked, “Where is Mrs. Stowe?”¹⁰ For Butler, politics had to focus on improving the lives of the poor.

Butler’s interest in the welfare of the poor also extended to tax policy. During the antebellum period, the federal government raised most of its income

through the sale of western land and a tariff on imports. Butler claimed that these taxes fell disproportionately hard on the lowest income groups, who therefore deserved tax relief. In his acceptance letter for the Democratic nomination for the Eighth Congressional District, Butler detailed his ideas for reforming the tax code. Ideally, he hoped for establishment of a graduated income tax based on wealth. “Direct taxation,” he said, “more nearly appor-tions the burden to the benefit received from the government, causing wealth to pay for its protection, instead of laying a heavy duty almost solely upon the necessities of the poor man’s life.” Butler acknowledged, however, that administering such a tax would require too large a bureaucracy, so he argued instead for a fair tariff. Taxes on imports, he said, should fall “as light as possible on the necessities of life.” Taxes on manufactured goods should be considered in light of their ability to protect the jobs of American factory workers.¹¹ His idea that the rich should pay a higher share of the nation’s tax burden because they benefited the most from government’s protection of their wealth placed him in the most radical circles of the urban Democratic party.

Like most antebellum Democrats, Butler displayed little sympathy for African Americans, whether enslaved in the South or nominally free in the North. He showed no interest in abolishing slavery or even in halting its growth during the pre-Civil War years. As northern Democratic politics grew increasingly racist in the 1850s, Butler became swept up in that powerful current. His racial politics reached their nadir in the late 1850s, when he opposed allowing black men into the state militia. A high-ranking officer, Butler regarded the idea of black militia service as “an insult to the men in the ranks.”¹²

Despite his history of exploiting the racial prejudices of his constituents, there is evidence that Butler’s racism may have been more a product of the partisan imperatives of the mid and late 1850s than a lifelong bias. Earlier, Butler appeared to harbor some sympathy for the African American community as part of his broader interest in the working class. During the early 1850s, he joined the faction of the Massachusetts Democratic party that allied with antislavery Free Soilers. Gaining control of the state senate in 1851, the coalition Butler joined elected the famous antislavery U.S. senator Charles Sumner.¹³ Furthermore, he may have had antislavery leanings even before the organization of that politically expedient coalition. In 1846, the Free Will Baptist Church of Lowell engaged Butler’s services to settle a boundary dispute. It is hard to imagine that the Free Will Baptists, a “comeouter” denomina-tion formed in 1780 by antislavery dissenters angry with the acceptance of slaveholders to communion, would have hired a lawyer with decidedly pro-slavery views.¹⁴



P.A. O'Neill Engraver

LOWELL.

*Cityscape of Lowell. From Henry A. Miles, Lowell, As It Was, And As It Is (Lowell, 1845).
Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society.*

Butler's support for the working class, as well as his membership in the Democratic party, brought him close contacts with Irish Catholic immigrants, a group with which he personally identified. Speaking in the Massachusetts state senate in 1859, Butler proclaimed what few of his Republican or Know Nothing opponents ever would have said: "I thank God, sir, that in some far off degree the old Irish blood runs in my veins."¹⁵ He would not be the last Massachusetts politician to boast of his Irish ancestry, but he was among the first. Nor did he shy away from censuring harsh English policies that had starved the Irish during the late 1840s and 1850s.¹⁶ When first elected to the state house, he urged that body to reimburse the Catholic Church for the Ursuline Convent that a Charlestown mob had burned in 1834. Later, when Henry Gardner, the Know Nothing governor, attempted to disband militia companies made up of Irish immigrants, Butler refused the direct order. The governor dismissed him from the militia, a serious blow to a man who so enjoyed the status of military rank.¹⁷ Happily for Butler, his fellow officers responded to the governor's action by electing him a brigadier general, a higher rank than he had previously held. As a result, he led Massachusetts's first troops south during the Civil War.

Butler's defense of immigrants in 1859 flew in the face of a Republican plan to limit their voting rights. This legislative fight offered a sarcastic speaker such as Butler a number of prime rhetorical opportunities. He began his speech by quoting from a pro-suffrage rights petition authored by German immigrants who, ironically, had voted Republican in recent elections. Siding with these Republican voters, Butler used their words to mock his foes and call for immigrants to "have the entire right equally with American citizens." Butler asked his audience to consider why citizenship was extended only to men born in the United States.

I don't like the amendment to the [Massachusetts] Constitution which makes a man's right depend upon the speed of the clipper that brought him to this country. If he does not get within three leagues of the coast it is supposed he is not an American citizen. Was there ever anything so monstrous as that a man's rights should depend upon whether a ship is a steam vessel, a clipper, or a Dutch sailor?

Pushing his point further, he joked about the logic of using a person's place of birth as the determining factor. The baby whose parents rode the steam vessel, he noted, may have been born here but "the beginning of things was on the other side of the water."¹⁸ Butler's pro-immigrant stand made him an effective speaker at Democratic events throughout the state. One correspondent who

had heard one of his addresses in 1853 wrote that “there has hardly been a meeting that has done more good. The Irish people are fast coming round to their support of the new [state] Constitution and you gave them a grand lift last night.”¹⁹

Butler mildly condemned a former ally who had joined the Republicans but still supported immigrant voting rights. “When he left us because of his desire to benefit the black and give him his freedom, he did not, at the same time, couple with that the hate of the Irishman.”²⁰ But another former Democrat who had converted to Know Nothingism was gone for good: “He is no democrat, and between us there is an impassable gulf.” Butler reserved his harshest criticisms for the anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic Know Nothing party. He thought that years of Know Nothing party control in Boston had made the “legislature . . . a by-word for corruption.” Citing a scandal involving a Know Nothing legislator and his mistress touring the state on public funds, he denounced the party as famous “for visiting houses of debauchery.”²¹

Butler’s support for wage earners extended to two other issues that resonated throughout his antebellum political career. Like other Bay State radicals, Butler supported the ten-hour factory work day. He also advocated the secret ballot, a move to guarantee that wage earners could vote without fear of retribution by their employers. Both of these issues came to a head in Lowell in the 1851 elections. Butler had pieced together a coalition ticket of Free Soilers and Democrats, with all ten candidates committed to ten-hour day legislation regardless of party affiliation. The local ten-hour day movement had gained momentum because of a recent increase in work hours in the Lowell mills. Just before election day, Butler spoke at a city hall rally censuring “the recent extension of the working time by the agents of the Mills, in this city.”²² Nine of the ten coalition candidates won on election day, only to have the mayor and city council, who opposed the ten-hour day, invalidate the election because of allegedly fraudulent ballots cast in Ward 4. Both Free Soilers and Democrats bitterly protested the cancellation of all election results on the basis of fraud in one ward. The *Lowell American*, a Free Soil newspaper, called it “CHEATING the people.”²³ Nevertheless, the decision stood.

A second election scheduled for November 24, sent all parties scrambling for advantage. With control of the state legislature hanging in the balance, Lowell’s vote assumed critical importance. On the Monday before the balloting, the owners of Hamilton Mills erected a sign threatening its employees who failed to repudiate Butler and the Democrats: “Whoever, employed by this corporation, votes the Ben Butler ten-hour ticket on Monday next, will be discharged.” As Butler later told the story, the ten-hour movement wavered.

REGULATIONS

To be observed by all persons employed by
THE LOWELL MANUFACTURING COMPANY.

The overseers are to see that all those employed in their rooms are in their places in due season; they may grant leave of absence to those employed under them, when there are spare hands in the room to supply their places; otherwise they are not to grant leave of absence, except in cases of absolute necessity.

All persons in the employ of the Lowell Manufacturing Company are required to observe the regulations of the overseer of the room where they are employed; they are not to be absent from work without his consent, except in cases of sickness, and then they are to send him word of the cause of their absence.

They are to board in one of the boarding-houses belonging to the company, and to conform to the regulations of the house where they board; they are to give information at the counting room of the place where they board, when they begin; and also give notice whenever they change their boarding-place.

The company will not employ any one who is habitually absent from public worship on the Sabbath.

It is considered a part of the engagement that each person remains twelve months, if required; and all persons intending to leave the employment of the company, are to give two weeks' notice of their intention to their overseer, and their engagement with the company is not considered as fulfilled, unless they comply with this regulation.

The pay-roll will be made up to the last Saturday of every month, and the payment made to the Carpet Mill the following Saturday, and the Cotton Mill the succeeding Tuesday, when every person will be expected to pay their board.

The company will not continue to employ any person who shall be wanting in proper respect to the females employed by the company, or who shall smoke within the company's

premises, or be guilty of inebriety or other improper conduct.

The tenants of the boarding-houses are not to board or permit any part of their houses to be occupied by any person, except those in the employ of the company.

They will be considered answerable for any improper conduct in their houses, and are not to permit their boarders to have company at unseasonable hours.

The doors must be closed at 10 o'clock in the evening, and no person admitted after that time without some reasonable excuse.

The keepers of the boarding-houses must give an account of the number, names and employment of their boarders when required, and report the names of such as are guilty of any improper conduct.

The buildings and yards about them, must be kept clean and in good order, and if they are injured otherwise than from ordinary use, all necessary repairs will be made and charged to the occupant.

It is desirable that the families of those who live in the houses, as well as the boarders, who have not had the smallpox, should be vaccinated; which will be done at the expense of the company for such as wish it.

Some suitable chamber in the house must be reserved and appropriated for the use of the sick, so that others may not be under the necessity of sleeping in the same room.

No one will be continued as a tenant who shall suffer ashes to be put into any place other than the place made to receive them, or shall by any carelessness in the use of fire or lights, endanger the company's property.

These regulations are considered a part of the contract with all persons entering into the employment of the Lowell Manufacturing Company.

W. C. APPLETON, Agent.

Joel Taylor, Printer, Lowell.

*Broadside. Lowell Manufacturing Company, Joel Taylor, printer, 1847.
 Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society.*

In this tense atmosphere, Butler took the stage in a hall “filled almost to suffocation.”²⁴ Identifying himself with “the rights of free men,” he delivered a rousing affirmation of democracy and the importance of the wage earning classes. Accusing the Hamilton Mills of telling their employees to “vote as your masters permit you to do, and thereby become their slaves,” Butler stated that “I am here to serve you and to save you from bondage.”²⁵ Such language was not unique to Butler during this election. The Democratic and Free Soil newspapers wrote about the rights of free men and about how the Whigs sought the workers’ enslavement and dependence. The *Lowell Advertiser*, for example, urged its readers to “BE MEN, not serfs or slaves.” Across the North during the Jacksonian period, Democrats had used this language of free men and democracy, juxtaposing it with bondage and slavery.²⁶

Butler, however, went beyond the standard political rhetoric. He followed his pro-democracy language with a grand and dramatic political threat, the kind of rhetorical gesture that would also mark his career during the Civil War. While many of his contemporaries understood the theatrical elements of antebellum politics, Butler’s showmanship went far beyond grandiloquence and countered the mill owners’ threats with one of his own. In his 1851 defense of the right of Lowell workers to vote without fear of being fired, Butler shouted a warning unlike any other in antebellum American politics:

As God lives and I live, by the living Jehovah! if one man is driven from his employment by these men because of his vote, I will lead you to make Lowell what it was twenty-five years ago,—a sheep pasture and a fishing place; and I will commence by applying the torch to my own house. Let them come on. As we are not the aggressors, we seek not this awful contest.²⁷

The Hamilton Mills owners folded like cowardly poker players and retracted their threat the next day. The coalition won the election, and Butler’s star rose in the party. While the ten-hour day legislation did not survive the legislative process, he did learn the value of dramatic—yet eerily plausible—threats of working-class violence. As he would at New Orleans, Butler played on his opponents’ worst fears about what he and his proletarian allies might do. A tactical success, his threat earned him the deep enmity of his opponents and the gratitude of his fellow Democrats.²⁸

Butler’s flair for the dramatic, obviously established by 1851, had deep roots in his Lowell experience. His years as a trial lawyer helped to train him for the public arena. Hans Trefousse saw Butler’s considerable success as an attorney as based on “audacity almost as much as on solid law.” In September 1847,

for instance, the standing justice of the Lowell Police Court, Nathan Crosby, cited Butler for contempt of court. According to the warrant for his arrest, Butler had ended the court session by “threatening violence to the person of said justice—by using menacing gestures and insulting attitudes towards said justice in his presence.” The warrant detailed Butler’s conduct, “uttering and saying insulting and contemptuously in open court” such memorable words as: “I’ll let you know what I want when you come down from that bench” and “damn him I should like to pull him off that bench.” While he denied having said such things, Butler’s conduct earned him several days in jail and a hearing before Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw of the Supreme Judicial Court. It also brought him both publicity and results.²⁹

Benjamin Butler’s private life holds another key to his political education. In 1844, he married Sarah Hildreth, the daughter of an established Democratic family in neighboring Dracut, Massachusetts. At the time of their engagement, Sarah worked as a professional actress. Noted for her performance as Ophelia, Sarah was touring in Cincinnati when Ben traveled there to propose to her.³⁰ Although she immediately quit the stage upon her marriage, she never lost her sense of herself as a public figure who commanded attention. On one of her prolonged visits to her husband during the war, Sarah wrote

*Benjamin F. Butler with dog,
sixth plate daguerreotype
by Lorenzo G. Chase,
Boston, 1845–1847.
#1.302, Collections of the
Massachusetts Historical
Society.*



Benjamin F. Butler and Class Politics

to her sister that “it was my duty to play the courtier to the people who have it in their power to send troops here and everything else that is wanted.”³¹ Transferring her stage experience to the parlor and headquarters where she “played” the part of “the courtier,” Sarah would have been a knowledgeable person to whom Ben could turn for strategies on how to exploit the public arena.

While Butler’s sense of the dramatic may have exceeded that of many of his peers, he also learned a more mundane political skill during his antebellum years in Lowell. Patronage, the lifeblood of the country’s fledgling democracy, became one of Butler’s most effective weapons and he quickly learned how to turn federal jobs and money into political support. Sarah Hildreth’s parents gave him access to the local Democratic party’s upper echelons. A political neophyte when he married into the Hildreth clan, Butler quickly found himself working the patronage network of Middlesex County Democrats. Sarah’s brother Fisher Hildreth proved to be one of Ben’s most consistent and useful allies. Fisher owned and managed the *Lowell Daily Advertiser*, which printed Butler’s speeches verbatim and supported his positions through good times and bad. In return, Butler fought to make sure that Hildreth fed well at the federal patronage trough. He rewarded him with the Lowell postmaster-

Benjamin F. Butler, sixth plate daguerreotype, silver-coated copper in leather case. ca. 1855–1860, unknown photographer. #1.303, Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society.





Chamber pot, 14 cm x 27 cm (handle to handle) x 22 cm, white glazed ce-

ramic, with red stripe along rim and handles, ca. 1866. Such pots proved popular on post-war steamboats that plied the Mississippi River and its tributaries. This one depicting Butler, retrieved from a vessel that traveled between New Orleans and Shreveport, was similar to others found in each of the ship's staterooms and in the "ladies cabin." Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

ship and continually helped him negotiate the torturous shifts in Democratic party factionalism and sectional politics. Indeed, patronage is an important key to understanding Butler's career. His need to please Southern politicians who controlled federal patronage in the 1850s compelled him to take his unpopular stands on slavery and even to support Jefferson Davis for the 1860 Democratic party presidential nomination. By the time he arrived in New Orleans, Butler had learned the power of patronage and would wield it skillfully against Davis's Confederacy.³²

When Butler left Lowell at the head of his beloved local militia in the spring of 1861, he took with him a working-class outlook and a range of skills and tactics that he had honed in the industrial city. His troops would be among the first to arrive in Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, securing those cities for the Union. One year later, he would find himself leading 15,000 U.S. troops as they conquered and then occupied the Confederacy's largest city, New Orleans. Throughout these wartime experiences, Butler would draw repeatedly on the political lessons and dramatic flourishes he had mastered on the banks of the Merrimac.

Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. Butler took command of the city of New Orleans in early May 1862. When he departed eight months later, the Confederates

roundly hated him. Jefferson Davis placed a bounty on his head and ordered any commander who captured Butler to kill him at once. Southerners decorated the bottom of chamberpots with his likeness and newspapers denounced him with a range of names, though none stuck so well as “Beast” Butler. His enemies reviled him as a thief, a profiteer, and a bully, horribly disrespectful toward women. Worst of all, however, may have been his ability to rally the city’s poor whites to the Union.

Butler received much hate mail while governing New Orleans, most of it aimed at his desire to use the government to help the poor. One letter came from the self-styled “President of the council of ten,” a group formed to threaten the U.S. commander “with the Corsican *Vendetta*.” The “President of the council of ten” opposed Butler because “it seems to be a settled purpose with you, not only *to rob us in the name of the poor*, but to incarcerate our people on the most frivolous pretext. In fact committing acts of barbarism that would shame an African or a Hottentot indian.”³³ Butler’s aid to the city’s poor boiled down to theft, according to the “president.” A letter from Louisiana’s Confederate governor Thomas O. Moore conveys similar complaints, though with greater grammatical polish:

General Butler’s attempt to incite the poor against the more wealthy is characteristic of the man, and is as mean as it is contemptible. He springs from a race that has ever been purse-proud when fortune favored them, and idolatrous worshippers of the almighty dollar. He comes from a section of country that has done more than any other to degrade and cheapen labor and reduce the laboring man to the condition of slave—a section that has warred against slavery because its natural tendency is to keep up the price of white labor, and elevate the white laborer—a section that has always contended that the government should take care of the rich and leave the rich to take care of the poor.

Moore’s comments are worth quoting at length since his anger typified so much of the Southern response to Butler’s rule:

the workingmen of the South know full well that this war on the part of the North is not so much against the institution of slavery as it is against its influence upon labor. Men get better prices for their services where slavery exists, than in the free states. Labor in the South is capital. Consequently it is the object of all who depend upon labor, directly or indirectly, for a support, to keep up its price. There are those in the South who have not sense enough to understand this question in its true light, hence we find a few, not natives, or to the manor born, however, who may be found

affiliating with the invaders. If all such will only leave the South with the invaders, their coming will have done some good. We want no white men among us who would consent to take the negro's place.³⁴

Moore's claim that slavery benefited ordinary white laborers has been widely questioned by historians, who have characterized bound labor as exerting a downward pull on wages in the slave states. But it is Moore's attention to the issue, not his logic, that is so remarkable. Like the man threatening the "Corsican vendetta," the governor expressed genuine concern that Butler had detached working-class whites from whatever loyalty they may have felt to the "slaveholder's republic." Whether Moore's economic reasoning makes sense or not, he clearly felt the need to win back the hearts and minds of many of his fellow citizens. He had every reason to be concerned.

For his part, Butler did everything he could to add to the worries of these two men. He explained his thinking at a ceremony staged in his honor after he returned to Lowell from the Crescent City in early 1863. He described New Orleans in terms reminiscent of his class-based vision of antebellum Lowell politics:

I stand before you the same Democrat, who for many years battled for the rights of the people at the North, and now battle[s] for the same rights in the South. I have found that this rebellion is a rebellion against the working classes, without distinction of color; and I have stood upon that question where I have ever stood, and where I shall ask you to stand. . . . The rebellion was begun and is carried on for the purpose of creating a landed aristocracy, which shall give to four hundred thousand the government of eight millions of white and four millions of blacks.

The Confederacy claimed to be a popular revolution, but enactment of military conscription belied that boast. Butler described the aristocracy and working class he had found in New Orleans:

I found that the aristocracy looked upon us as their enemies; and I found that the working and middle classes looked upon us as friends. Within the first month 14,000 of those who compose the bone and sinew of New Orleans had taken the oath of allegiance. . . . and from that day I found no man owning slaves who would take the oath of allegiance, except for the purpose of saving his property. . . . I found the working men true to the Union, and I found the slave owners false to the Union. I dealt kindly with the working men, and I dealt harshly with the slave-holders.

Butler claimed that he had added 1,000 poor men to the federal payroll and

fed 34,000 people, about one half of them first generation immigrants, every day. These people, Butler asserted, did not have a “voice in the newspapers abroad or at home”; therefore, only the complaints of the rich had been heard, not the thanks of the poor.³⁵

Butler did not dispute angry Confederate claims that he had exploited class divisions in New Orleans’s white society. It is interesting to note, however, that these class lines pre-dated Butler’s arrival in the city. Internal divisions between rich and poor whites had plagued Confederate efforts to wage a unified war against the federal government.³⁶ Additionally, the city’s religious and ethnic divisions further exacerbated class tensions, fueling sharp conflicts in the political arena. Many poor whites had resisted Confederate rule from the outset of the war, helping to explain why Butler thought he could win over many working-class whites with restoration of federal control.

Ethnic, class, and religious tensions had complicated Confederate control of New Orleans. Although long dead as a national force, the Know Nothing party still reigned over New Orleans politics even in 1861. Indeed, the party remained “the most dominant political force until the invasion of the city by the Federal troops.” The Know Nothings had pledged to eliminate “Catholics and immigrants from American politics,” even through “terroristic methods.”³⁷ Their continued presence provoked deep divisions in a city with an immigrant population of 38 percent. As events unfolded in the first year of the war, hostility between immigrants and natives took on a number of forms. Most important, immigrants avoided Confederate military service. As the *New Orleans Daily Crescent* complained, “nearly one-half of our male population, capable of bearing arms, have sworn that they are aliens, [and] claim exemption from military service in consequence thereof.”³⁸

Many of the immigrants were wage earners who had grown suspicious of Confederate nationalism. Early in the construction of the city’s defense fleet, the labor force repeatedly shut down operations whenever the Confederate government could not pay them in a timely fashion.³⁹ Distrust and a legacy of class conflict produced a sustained crisis for the Confederate navy in November 1861. With the government anxious to complete the large iron-clad rams C.S.S. *Mississippi* and *Louisiana*, workers went on strike for five days. Appeals to nationalist sentiment proved of no avail. Asa Tift, overseeing the construction of the *Mississippi*, visited the city’s working-class district of Algiers and “did everything I could to induce them to resume their work. I told them of the importance of their doing so, and asked them if there was complaint or disagreement with us or the Government. They said no, but the wages were insufficient.” Louisiana workers, accustomed to labor conflict, struck first,

but they soon persuaded other men who had been brought in from distant Richmond, Virginia, to join them. The response of local shipbuilders and employers appeared equally unpatriotic, given the urgent need for ironclad rams to protect the city. The shipbuilders urged Tift to bust the strike by holding out, for weeks if necessary, in an effort to preserve the old wage scale.⁴⁰ In this instance, both employers and employees applied lessons from earlier labor conflicts, equally unmindful of the exigencies of defending the city from attack.

New Orleans immigrants also deliberately weakened the city's defenses. On April 27, 1862, in the middle of the Union campaign to seize New Orleans, the Confederate garrison of Fort Jackson mutinied against its officers, spiked the fort's cannon, and shot at officers who attempted to stop them. Later that night, half the fort's garrison deserted and surrendered to nearby Union troops. The next morning, Confederate officers believed that even those soldiers who remained in the fort could not be relied upon to fight, so they hauled down the flag despite the fort's strong position and abundant supplies. Regarding the prisoners taken from Fort Jackson, one U.S. officer wrote that "they seemed . . . heartily tired and disgusted with the thralldom under which they have so long labored, and well satisfied with their recovered liberty."⁴¹

Confederate officers blamed the mutiny on the ethnic origins of their soldiers. The commander of Fort Jackson claimed that his troops "were mostly foreign enlistments, without any great interests at stake in the ultimate success of the revolution." William Robertson, a captain in Fort Jackson, manifested the same sentiment when he wrote that "no officers and I believe no native Southerners were involved in this disgraceful affair."⁴² Months before, these same troops had, in the words of Maj. Gen. Mansfield Lovell, "mutinied and refused to go [to Fort Jackson], and had to be forced on board the transports by other regiments." General Lovell further complained that he had refused to issue ammunition to some Confederate regiments because they had "manifested such an insubordinate disposition, that I was unwilling to put ammunition in their hands."⁴³ These troops, in other words, mutinied for political reasons.

The behavior of other Confederate troops in southeastern Louisiana indicates that the mutiny at Fort Jackson did not represent an isolated incident. Rather, it was part of a larger military and political collapse occasioned by the growing inability of the Confederacy to force its citizens into state service. General Lovell complained that the garrison of Fort Quitman "mutinied and disbanded, and both officers and men returned to New Orleans." Of the four other garrisons posted along the coast, two more "became demoralized,

disbanded, and returned to New Orleans.”⁴⁴ Other units suffered wholesale desertions, including the 20th Louisiana Infantry and the city’s “Confederate Guards.” Shortly after occupying the city, Butler reported that “more than one-half of that army has left him [Lovell], and perhaps one-third has returned to this city, put on citizens’ clothes, and are quiet.”⁴⁵

The apathetic or mutinous conduct by some immigrants in Confederate units also may have had roots in the treatment they received in print and on the city’s streets. Newspapers that continually referred to the U.S. Army as “Hessians” gleefully reported that Confederate crowds jeered their own units composed of immigrants as “Union soldiers in disguise” and “aiders and abettors of the Lincolnites.”⁴⁶ Confederate exclusion of the foreign-born from full citizenship undoubtedly contributed to the mutinies that so plagued New Orleans’s defenses. By contrast, the United States government offered full citizenship to any immigrant who received an honorable discharge from service. Thus, the Confederacy’s treatment of its immigrant population must stand as a critical cause for the persistence of Unionist sentiment, the relatively warm reception U.S. forces received, and the ease with which the city fell.

Arriving in the city hard on the heels of anti-Confederate unrest, Butler allied himself with the same class of working men he had represented as a Democrat in antebellum Lowell. Butler’s tactics and the likelihood of his success, drove Confederates like the “Corsican vendetta” writer and Gov. Moore to heightened anger. Mutinous Confederates and their immigrant neighborhoods clearly represented potential allies for the United States government. Butler recognized that the political sympathies of immigrants could be won over by judicious action. His official correspondence includes letters from immigrants such as Ernest Wench who claimed that many Germans, faced with Confederate conscription, agreed to serve but concluded “to surrender [*sic*] to the U.S.A. so soon as a chance would offer to do so.” Likewise, one I. L. Nosits informed Butler that Hungarians in the South “kept aloof” from the Confederacy because they only fight “for ‘principals and right.’”⁴⁷ When the U.S. government distributed food relief to the city, over 90 percent of the recipients were foreign-born. Most of the whites who enlisted in the U.S. 2nd Louisiana Infantry were born outside of the United States, strong evidence of immigrant unhappiness with Confederate rule.⁴⁸ Butler’s deliberate and open solicitation of the immigrant working class further drove a wedge into a social chasm that had long troubled the city of New Orleans and the Confederacy.

As the city’s chief administrator, Butler controlled both a large budget and the right to appoint men to high-paying government jobs. A politician to the core, he used government jobs to build a patronage network as he had with

Fisher Hildreth and others in Lowell before the war. He fired secessionists from city jobs and hired potential allies, often carpetbagging Massachusetts Democrats. Even before he left Massachusetts, Butler had quarreled with Republican governor John A. Andrew over the appointment of officers in the regiments that Butler had recruited. Butler, of course, wanted to appoint Democrats to the positions—which brought with them large salaries and status—while the governor wanted to promote Republicans. Butler won, and immediately began drawing from these ranks after his arrival in New Orleans. Once in command of the city, he appointed Col. Jonas H. French as the chief of police, a logical choice since French had been the army's provost marshal. French also had been an active Democrat in Massachusetts before Butler promoted him to colonel. Additionally, he had been elected three times to the Boston Common Council and had served once on the governor's staff. Maj. Joseph M. Bell, a Boston lawyer who also received his rank from Butler, served as provost judge. Interestingly, these political appointees, despite having no military credentials, served very well in New Orleans.⁴⁹ Like Butler, they may not have known much about military service, but they knew how to run a big, multiethnic city like New Orleans because they had performed similar tasks in Boston.

Even while governing New Orleans, Butler never remained very far from Lowell or his Middlesex district. Typically, Butler received many letters from Massachusetts political correspondents seeking patronage jobs. C. H. Blanchard of Lowell, for instance, wrote Butler on June 17, 1862, asking for “a position in your Department in Conformity to the rank I formerly held under you.” Extending his Lowell patronage network to Louisiana gave him the advantage of ensconcing trusted new allies under his command who also would be of service once Butler returned to his home town. You “will confer on me a favor, that will lay me under great obligations,” Blanchard assured him. Other correspondents may have been less direct, but their meaning seems equally clear. A. C. Palmer wrote from Charlestown, Massachusetts, asking for his son to be transferred from an artillery battery to a clerkship on Butler’s staff. He accompanied this request with a reminder of their past relationship: “Knowing the long acquaintance which has existed between yourself and my family you would not take it amis[s] at my asking you to give him a situation as one of your Clerk[s].”⁵⁰ Reading Butler’s New Orleans correspondence, one cannot help but be struck by the consistent political pattern of his career.

Butler would have alienated support in the city if he had hired only his carpetbag friends. Thus, he took care to employ hundreds of local men to clean the city and repair the levees, projects that helped to reduce the annual yellow

fever outbreak that always had taken such a heavy toll on the city. He intended that such hires would bolster pro-Union support. All of the men hired had to take an oath of allegiance to the U.S. government; the city's police also took the oath of allegiance, and men lost their positions if they refused. Furthermore, work always existed for white men of military age. At least 5,200 whites from Louisiana joined the U.S. Army after April 1862. Soldiering was, in essence, government work in a city with a moribund economy. Many of these recruits, Butler noted, were German and French immigrants.⁵¹

As had been the case before the war in Massachusetts, Butler treated African Americans in Louisiana with an odd mixture of prejudice, political opportunism, and egalitarianism. The resulting policies could be downright contradictory. In June and July 1862, Butler stopped efforts by African Americans and some of his subordinates to enlist companies of black troops. While Butler's reluctance to include New Orleans's black volunteers in his command exposed both the racial limits to his egalitarianism and the lack of support for such a course in Washington at the time, he also displayed a willingness to change. Only a few weeks later, with emancipation gaining supporters and faced with possible Confederate attacks, he reversed himself and permitted free African Americans to form separate Union regiments with black officers.⁵² These were among the first black units recruited for the U.S. during the war. Interestingly, these actions did not provoke any noticeable reaction among Unionist whites in the state, which may indicate that they, like Butler, possessed more egalitarianism than historians previously have understood. After the war, as Massachusetts governor, Butler did not hesitate to appoint blacks to the bench. Such willingness to grow and adapt also may help explain why he made the transition to Radical Republicanism so easily during the war.

Butler aided his new allies through a variety of means. He assessed a special tax on all city residents who had voluntarily contributed to the city's Confederate defense fund, then used the proceeds to help feed the poor. He also helped the Catholic Sisters of Charity to repair buildings damaged during the war and gave food to Catholic orphanages. These humanitarian acts proved sound politics in a city where many of the Union-leaning immigrants belonged to the Catholic faith.⁵³ Additionally, his campaign against yellow fever proved especially helpful to the working classes and the poor who had to remain in the city during deadly outbreaks, while the rich left the city.

Butler's well-honed sense of politics as street theater served him well during his military career. An early glimpse of Butler in his new role as a major general comes from another politician-turned-soldier, Carl Schurz, who remembered Butler's "performances":

General Butler thoroughly enjoyed his position of power, which, of course, was new to him, and . . . he keenly appreciated its theatrical possibilities. . . . While we were conversing, officers entered from time to time to make reports or to ask for orders. Nothing could have been more striking than the air of authority with which the General received them, and the tone of curt peremptoriness peculiar to the military commander on the stage, with which he expressed his satisfaction, or discontent, and with which he gave his instructions. And, after every such scene, he looked around with a sort of triumphant gaze, as if to assure himself that the bystanders were duly impressed.⁵⁴

This is hardly complimentary, but Schurz's description conveys Butler's sense that he must perform his authority and impress his subordinates.

Butler had made effective use of provocative grand threats during his early days in Lowell, and he continued the practice in the Civil War. On at least three occasions during the very early months of the war, Butler imitated his political hero Andrew Jackson by threatening to hang people who supported secession. He targeted Massachusetts men who would not fight for the Union, the commissioners sent by the southern states before Fort Sumter to negotiate peace, and a wealthy Baltimorean, Ross Winans, who had supported Maryland secession.⁵⁵ While in command in Maryland at the outset of the war, he gave orders to shoot any member of the crew of the U.S.S. *Constitution* if he refused to help secure the ship from rebels in Annapolis harbor.⁵⁶ Publicly threatening to kill people he saw as traitors struck Butler as an effective way to restore order.

When he took charge in New Orleans, Butler possessed broad powers to issue such orders. In order to rule New Orleans, he believed that he must prove to cautious Unionists that the Federal government controlled the streets. After a year of intimidation and imprisonment by Confederate authorities, New Orleans Unionists remained reluctant to declare their political sympathies. Capt. Richard Elliott, a Lowell native under Butler's command, observed that "there are many good Union men here. But they do not dare as yet to come boldly and avow their true sentiments[;] fear has carried much of the secession in New Orleans."⁵⁷ Only a week after assuming command, Butler advised Secretary of War Edwin Stanton that he would have to exercise firm control immediately. "It will become necessary for me to use the utmost severity in breaking up the various rebel recruiting associations here," he wrote, "which overawe the Union men and give expression to the feelings of the mob, by assassination and murder, and usurp the functions of government when a government was here pretended to. I propose to make some brilliant



"But *Io Bacche!* Victory comes at last—
Our doughty chief in New Orleans is cast;
The donkey stole the lion's skin and brayed,
And Farragut our Cyclop's fortune made."

The signs and flags in the background of this detailed drawing read, "B. F. B. & Co." The sign at the upper right reads, "This property confiscated by order M. G. B. F. B." (Military Governor Benjamin F. Butler).

"Bombastus, Conqueror of New Orleans." From James Fairfax McLaughlin, The American Cyclops, The Hero of New Orleans, and Spoiler of Silver Spoons (Baltimore, 1868). Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

examples."⁵⁸ His first was William Mumford, whom he executed for hauling down a U.S. flag and ripping it to shreds. But the process of establishing the Union's presence in the city did not end there. He imprisoned men and women of high social and political standing and on one occasion ordered his artillery into the streets to clear out a disloyal mob.⁵⁹ Reminiscent of Napoleon's use of artillery to bring order to Paris, Butler's threat to fire into an urban mob established clear limits for the rebel population.

Butler thrived on confrontational theatrics, and his business manager in Massachusetts, Richard Fay, speculated that "you must be having great fun governing New Orleans. I can imagine nothing better than the sulky disgust of the authorities, and the sharp, short, and decisive struggle with the Mayor." Fay knew Butler well, and the relish with which he imagined Butler taking on city authorities gives us a sense of how his boss had been looking forward to this particular fight. Nor could Sarah Butler, who accompanied her husband during the first weeks of occupation, resist a good scuffle. Within days of

arriving, she described a public ceremony: “The band was stationed on the piazza, and they played with fiery energy all the national airs from Yankee Doodle to the Star Spangled Banner. We could not foresee what would be the result of this, but it was time the Federal power should be established and mob law suppressed. I was excited in view of all these things but felt no fear. My spirit rises when men assail.” This and other more strenuous measures, coupled with the empowerment of the immigrant working classes, made Butler the object of widespread white rage. Confederate authorities, accustomed to performing their own rituals of supremacy, masculinity, and honor, found Butler’s tactics especially galling.⁶⁰

Perhaps nothing proved more provocative to the pro-Confederate element of the city than Butler’s famous “woman order.” Several weeks into the occupation, a number of elite, white women began publicly insulting Union officers, usually through silent gestures of disdain. Sometimes, however, they would spit on them or empty the contents of their chamberpots on the officers as they walked on sidewalks below their windows. Butler responded to these outrages with General Order No. 28, which declared that “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.”⁶¹ Confederates understood the order to mean that federal officers could sexually molest or even attack rebel women. They denounced Butler as a “Beast,” a sobriquet that soon replaced their earlier, milder name (after a song at the time) of “Picayune Butler,” and Jefferson Davis put a price on the head of his former political advocate.

This incident deserves a more careful analysis than it has customarily received. Even Butler’s supporters ignored his stated defense of his order, preferring the simple argument that his provocative tactic stopped the women’s insults. For most of the North at the time, such reasoning proved sufficient. But Butler’s rationale for his order was more complex than the utilitarian explanation of his supporters or the lewd implications drawn by his enemies. When he received a hostile note from an old college friend who thought that the “woman order” had crossed the line of good taste, Butler asked:

How do you “regard and treat” a low woman and her remarks as she passes you in the street? Pass her by, do you not? You are not bound to notice her acts or remarks. Some of your New York editors seem to think that they must hold dalliance with such a person, and therefore take offence at my order. Rightly, if that construction were the correct one. After that order, every man of my command was bound in honor not to notice

any of the acts of these women. They were no longer insulted. . . . What has been the result? Since that order, no man or woman has insulted a soldier of mine in New Orleans.⁶²

Butler's reasoning is deeply rooted in the class politics of women's lives and New Orleans's Unionist-Confederate tensions. Butler did not threaten anyone with sexual attack; he did not even suggest that the women should be arrested as prostitutes. As he noted, the last thing he intended was for women to be dragged through the streets and put in prison where they would become martyrs for the Confederacy. Instead, he threatened them with loss of status.

Poor women in nineteenth-century American and European cities sometimes turned to prostitution when denied more respectable forms of labor. Butler's controversial order threatened to turn rebel ladies into working-class women. The resulting loss of status not only diminished the elite's social standing, but dropped them into a class of women who had expressed loyalty to the United States. Thus, the "woman order" did more than merely insult monogamous or virginal rebel women, provocative enough in the nineteenth-century South. It also jeopardized two forms of self-identity for rich, Confederate women by threatening to associate them with the city's poor and with those who had turned their backs on the slaveholder's republic. No wonder the order worked. As in Lowell when he promised to torch the city, Butler again threatened to destroy all that the wealthy classes valued.

Benjamin Butler delivered a speech in January 1865 after he returned home to Lowell from his final command. Recalling his service in New Orleans and Baltimore, Butler paused briefly to draw connections between Lowell and his wartime experiences. Alluding to his famous patronage practices, Butler confessed that it "has come to be somewhat a reproach to me that I gather round me all Lowell men whenever I can, and wherever I may be. It is quite true. I know them thoroughly. I know their good qualities; I know their capabilities, and I am willing always that our work shall be examined."⁶³ Butler had surrounded himself with men from Lowell, the Middlesex district, and eastern Massachusetts, re-creating his familiar Democratic party patronage networks. But he brought with him from Lowell more than just men; he also brought sympathy for the plight of the working class and for oppressed Catholics and immigrants.

Butler showed a mastery of the theatrical elements of street politics in Lowell and keenly understood how to exploit the elite's fears of the working classes. He had received his political education in antebellum Lowell, and effectively employed the lessons he learned there throughout his career. Never

afraid of a showdown and always willing to strike up alliances with the poorest members of white society, Butler alarmed the elite of New Orleans with the specter of class warfare. The white race, he knew, did not possess the unity that slaveholding Confederates presumed. When he arrived in New Orleans in 1862, Butler recognized the world he had entered and he played its cultural and street politics as he done before and with similar success. Elites of both cities hated him, just as the working classes of Lowell and New Orleans found in him an ally. One is hard pressed to imagine a better-prepared candidate for the job of rallying the white working class of Civil War New Orleans to the United States than Benjamin F. Butler. His confrontational style angered many, even the European consuls who remained in the city. His worsening reputation for corruption ultimately lead to his removal, but Butler's ability to capture the allegiance of poor whites—already alienated from the Confederacy—enabled the United States to solidify its military and political hold over the Confederacy's largest city.

NOTES

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1. Dr. L. S. Thompson, *The Story of Mattie J. Jackson; Her Parentage—Experiences of Eighteen Years in Slavery—Incidents during the War—Her Escape from Slavery* (Lawrence, Mass., 1866), 14–15.
2. Thomas Dublin, *Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826–1860* (New York, 1979), 134.
3. Hans L. Trefousse, *Butler: The South Called Him Beast* (New York, 1957), 17–24.
4. Benjamin F. Butler, *Butler's Book: A Review of his Legal, Political and Military Career* (Boston, 1892), 89. For Butler's early years in Lowell, see Arthur L. Eno, Jr., *Cotton Was King: A History of Lowell, Massachusetts* (Lowell, 1976), 168–171.
5. Box 258, Benjamin F. Butler papers, Library of Congress. (Hereafter, Butler papers, LC.)
6. Butler, *Butler's Book*, 89, 91.
7. Trefousse, *Butler*, 30.
8. For northern Democrats, see Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, 1983); Joel H. Silbey, *A Respectable Minority: The Democratic Party in the Civil War Era, 1860–1868* (New York, 1977); and Joel H. Silbey, “There are Other Questions Beside That of Slavery Merely: The Democratic Party and Antislavery Politics,” in *Crusaders and Compromisers: Essays on the Relationship of the Antislavery Struggle to the Antebellum Party System*, ed. Alan M. Kraut (Westport, Conn., 1983), 143–175.

Bruce Collins, "The Ideology of the Antebellum Northern Democrats," *Journal of American Studies* 11(1977):103–121; Roy Franklin Nichols, *The Disruption of American Democracy* (New York, 1948); Jonathan H. Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery & the Politics of Free Soil, 1824–1854* (Chapel Hill, 2004). The support of some religious and ethnic groups for the Democratic party is documented in Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton, 1961); and Ronald P. Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties, Michigan, 1827–1861* (Princeton, 1971). The commitment of Jacksonians to democracy and equality are discussed in John Ashworth, "Agrarians" and "Aristocrats": *Party Political Ideology in the United States, 1837–1846* (New York, 1983), 7–51; and Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788–1850* (New York, 1984), 174–175, 326–335. For politics and family ideology, see Norma Basch, "Marriage, Morals, and Politics in the Election of 1828," *Journal of American History* 80(1993):890–918; and Michael D. Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes: Gender and American Antislavery Politics* (Chapel Hill, 2003), 97–114.

Urban labor politics in both the Democratic party and the Workingmen's parties are best explored in Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*; Edward Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians: The Radical Leaders of the Early Labor Movement* (Albany, N.Y., 1967); Walter E. Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class: A Study of the New York Workingmen's Movement, 1829–1837* (Stanford, 1960); and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston, 1945).

9. Trefousse, *Butler*, 19; Robert S. Holzman, *Stormy Ben Butler* (New York, 1954), 11. Trefousse also discusses Butler's work suing corporations for unpaid wages. See Trefousse, *Butler*, 25.
10. Charlestown speech, Oct. 10, 1859, box 258, Butler papers, LC.
11. Letter accepting 1858 Eighth Congressional District nomination, Oct. 15, 1858, box 258, Butler papers, LC. See also Butler's similar letter accepting the Democratic nomination for governor, Sept. 26, 1859, box 258, Butler papers, LC.
12. Quotation from Butler, Charlestown speech, Oct. 10, 1859, box 258, Butler papers, LC. See also Butler's comment that the Republican party had two parts, "one of which believes that the intelligent naturalized citizen, whether English, German, Irish, Pole or Hungarian, is not fit to bear arms in the militia; and the other that the full blooded Negro is eminently fit." Butler's gubernatorial nomination acceptance letter, Sept. 26, 1859, box 258, Butler papers, LC.
13. For more on the Free Soil and Democratic party coalition, see David Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York, 1961), 182–204; Richard H. Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837–1860* (New York, 1976), 218–223, 249, 251; and Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery*, 103–122.
14. Box 173, Butler papers, LC. On Free Will Baptists, see Louis Filler, *The Crusade Against Slavery, 1830–1860* (New York, 1960), 125; John W. Quist, *Restless Visionaries: The Social Roots of Antebellum Reform in Alabama and Michigan* (Baton Rouge, 1998), 12, 262, 293, 444–445.

15. Undated newspaper clipping of Senate speech, Feb. 18, 1859, box 258, Butler papers, LC.
16. In an 1863 speech, Butler considered the reasons for England's aid to the Confederacy: "I think the heart of her people beats responsive to ours—[applause]—but I know her government and aristocracy hate us with a hate which passeth all understanding. [applause] I say, let us see if we have given any cause for this." He found two historical motives for the English aristocracy's dislike of the United States. First, Butler noted the arrival of the U.S.S. *Macedonian* in 1847 with food for "the poor that England was starving." Second, he thought that the English elite might resent the arrival of the *George Griswold* of New York with food "to feed the starving poor of Lancashire." Benjamin F. Butler, *Character and Results of the War. How to Prosecute and How to End It* (New York, 1863), in box 180, Butler papers, LC.
17. Butler, *Butler's Book*, 113–114, 124–126. On the destruction of the convent see, Nancy Lusignan Schultz, *Fire & Roses: The Burning of the Charlestown Convent, 1834* (Boston, 2000).
18. Butler state senate speech, Feb. 18, 1859, box 258, Butler papers, LC.
19. [unidentified] to Butler, Nov. 2, 1853, Benjamin F. Butler, *Miscellaneous Papers, 1835–1858*, microfilm, Library of Congress, 1959.
20. Butler state senate speech, 1859, box 258, Butler papers, LC.
21. Benjamin F. Butler, *The Candidature for the Presidency in Eight Years of Stephen A. Douglas: His Selfishness, and the Duplicity in Principle of his Followers* (Lowell, Mass., 1860), in box 180, Butler papers, LC. Joseph Hiss, a Massachusetts Know Nothing legislator, had conducted inspections of the state's convents, but he was disgraced when reports circulated that he had used state funds to rent a hotel room for his mistress while on his tour. John R. Mulkern, "Scandal Behind the Convent Walls: The Know-Nothing Nunnery Committee of 1855," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 11(1983):22–34, 1859, Butler Papers, LC.
22. *Lowell Advertiser*, Nov. 4, 1851. Butler had earlier shared a podium with fellow Democrat Robert Rantoul, where they were scheduled to "address the people on the increase of hours of labor in the Mills, in this city." *Lowell Advertiser*, Nov. 4, 1851. For Butler on the coalition, see Butler, *Butler's Book*, 94–97.
23. *Lowell American*, Nov. 19, 1851.
24. Butler, *Butler's Book*, 99, 101.
25. Butler, *Butler's Book*, 103. Butler also used this rhetoric in his correspondence during the crisis. Replying to a letter of encouragement, he wrote: "Yet do not despair we will beat them handsomely next Monday although as you say no means will be left untried to defeat us. Yet the people are with us and the free heart beats freer and the firm hand holds firmer when we think of our wrongs determined to show the State that we are our own masters. The charm is broken. men [sic] can no longer be led up to the polls like sheep to the slaughter." Butler to "Dear Sir," Nov. 18, 1851, in Butler, *Miscellaneous Papers*, LC.
26. *Lowell Advertiser*, Nov. 22, 1851. See also, David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, 1991), 65–92.

27. Butler, *Butler's Book*, 104. For a version of this speech that differs in words though not in tone or message, see T. A. Bland, *Life of Benjamin F. Butler* (Boston, 1879), 21.
28. A Nov. 21, 1851, letter from Roland Parks of Springfield congratulated Butler “on your victory in Lowell—God bless her Spartan Band the fearless Champions of Freedom who dared to nail their colors to the mast and spurn the Bribe of State street Webster Whigs, and stand by their Principles regardless of consequences.” Butler, *Miscellaneous Papers*, LC.
- The Whig newspaper in Lowell despised Benjamin Butler, and while a personal feud between Butler and the editor no doubt exacerbated the hostilities, policy differences also guaranteed that Butler would be the favorite target of Whig editorials. Five days before the special election, the *Lowell Daily Journal and Courier* described Butler this way: “This notorious demagogue and political scoundrel, having swallowed three or four extra glasses of liquor, spread himself at whole length in the City Hall last night. Nature herself has set her seal upon him, by giving him a face which, like a wrecker’s light, warns all whom it may concern, to be on the look-out while in its vicinity. A man is not to be ridiculed merely for being homely—but when his homeliness is a faithful exponent of the ugliness of his heart, the matter may with propriety be alluded to.—In the present instance, the uncouth figure of the demagogue, as he swung about, is said to have borne a striking resemblance to that of a Bornese ape, and with a speech very much like the chatterings of that hairy and feeble imitation of humanity.” *Lowell Daily Journal and Courier*, Nov. 19, 1851.
29. Trefousse, *Butler*, 25. The furor over Butler’s courtroom antics in *Commonwealth vs. Theresa Tobin* unfold over several documents in Butler, *Miscellaneous Papers*, starting with the warrant dated Sept. 10, 1847. See also Trefousse, *Butler*, 26; Holzman, *Stormy*, 14–18.
30. Trefousse, *Butler*, 24. For Sarah as Ophelia, see clipping from the *Indianapolis Sentinel*, May 26, 1890, in box 192, Butler papers, LC.
31. Quoted in Holzman, *Stormy*, 43. For women in the parlors of power, see Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville, Va., 2001).
32. For Butler’s patronage alliance with Fisher Hildreth, see Trefousse, *Butler*, 31, 41, 46–47, 260 (n. 27). For patronage in antebellum politics, see Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, *Rude Republic: Americans and their Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, 2000), especially 37–46, 115, 117. In Butler’s case, see the many letters from a supplicant named Hamilton [full name not given] to Butler included in Butler, *Miscellaneous Papers*, LC.
33. Letter dated July. 13, 1862, box 13, Butler papers, LC.
34. Benjamin F. Butler, *Private and Official Correspondence of Gen. Benjamin F. Butler during the Period of the Civil War*: vol. 1, April 1860–June 1862 (Norwood, Mass., 1917), 460, 462. Moore was a wealthy sugar planter from Rapides Parish. John M. Sacher, *A Perfect War of Politics: Parties, Politicians, and Democracy in Louisiana, 1824–1861* (Baton Rouge, 2003), 273, 277.

35. All quotations from the Lowell speech from a clipping from an undated issue of the *Boston Journal*, in box 258, Butler papers, LC.
36. Armstead L. Robinson, *Bitter Fruit of Bondage: The Demise of Slavery and the Collapse of the Confederacy, 1861–1865* (Charlottesville, Va., 2005); and David Williams, *Rich Man's War: Class, Caste, and Confederate Defeat in the Lower Chattahoochee Valley* (Athens, Ga., 1998).
37. Quote from Leon Cyprian Soule, *The Know Nothing Party in New Orleans: A Reappraisal* (Baton Rouge, 1961), 3; Marius M. Carriere, Jr., "Anti-Catholicism, Nativism, and Louisiana Politics in the 1850s," *Louisiana History* 35(1994):451, 459, 472; Sacher, *A Perfect War of Politics*, 257, 259, 267–268, 277–278; Frank Towers, *The Urban South and the Coming of the Civil War* (Charlottesville, Va., 2004). See also a letter from a New Orleans Unionist to Butler, May 15, 1862, which complains that there is still "a 'Know Nothing' rebel Mayor and his police of cut throats." The writer urges Butler to get "clear of the present Know Nothing dynasty." Butler, *Private and Official Correspondence*, 1:485.
- There is an emerging consensus that Confederate political thought regarded democracy with suspicion, viewed immigrants as potential threats, and emphasized the importance of white supremacy and slavery. See George C. Rable, *The Confederate Republic: A Revolution Against Politics* (Chapel Hill, 1994), 48, 54–56, 62, 122–131; Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge, 1988), 32–39, 49, 59–71; James Martin, *Texas Divided: Loyalty and Dissent in the Lone Star State, 1852–1874* (Lexington, Ky., 1990), 107–122. John McCardell, *The Idea of a Southern Nation: Southern Nationalists and Southern Nationalism, 1830–1860* (New York, 1979), 49–90, highlights the importance of white supremacy and slavery to Southern nationalists. Ella Lonn explores anti-immigrant feeling in the Confederacy in *Foreigners in the Confederacy* (Chapel Hill, 1940), 417–438.
38. *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, Apr. 14, 1862.
39. *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion* (Washington, D. C., 1894–1922), ser. 2, 1:477. (Hereafter O. R. N.). Citizens also refused to help Confederate authorities evacuate supplies and machinery as the U.S. fleet approached New Orleans, often explaining that they would not work for Confederate money. John D. Winters, *The Civil War in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, 1963), 99.
40. O. R. N., ser. 2, 1:482–483, 553, 580, 771. Confederates often seized on the economic realities of working-class life to promote enlistment. They offered large bounties to enlistees, even in 1861, and recruited widely among city workers laid off from work because of the blockade or changing government spending priorities. Widespread unemployment and the class-based refusal of the Louisiana government to pass a proposed stay law that would have protected impoverished debtors from creditors forced some men into Confederate service. Winters, *Civil War in Louisiana*, 31–32, 74–75; Roger W. Shugg, *Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, 1939), 176. Winters claims that among the working class "in New Orleans patriotism was rarely the motive inducing these men to enlist" (32). For the

- impact of economic hard times on anti-Confederate behavior, see Michael B. Chesson, "Harlots or Heroines?: A New Look at the Richmond Bread Riot," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 92(1984):139, 154. For strikes in the Pennsylvania coal industry, see Grace Palladino, *Another Civil War: Labor, Capital, and the State in the Anthracite Regions of Pennsylvania, 1840–68* (Urbana, 1990).
41. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C., 1880–1901), ser. 1, 6:510 (Hereafter O.R.).
 42. Quotation from the fort commander, O.R., ser. 1, 6:531; second quotation, see William B. Robertson, "The Water-Battery at Fort Jackson," in Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, eds., *North to Antietam: Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (New York, 1956), 4:100. The fact that the one unit not to mutiny was "the St. Mary's Cannoneers, composed mostly of planters," highlights the importance of slaveholding status in determining the extent of loyalty whites felt to the Confederacy. O. R., ser. 1, 6:535.
 43. O. R., ser. 1, 6:561; Lovell and ammunition, see O. R., ser. 1, 6:564; Winters, *Civil War in Louisiana*, 84.
 44. O. R. N., ser. 2, 1:701; also reprinted in O. R., ser. 1, 6:656. The two garrisons that disbanded were at Ft. Livingston and Ft. Guion, O. R., ser. 1, 6:515. See also O. R. ser. 1, 6:567 and Lovell's letter to Governor Moore, May 12, 1862, regarding the en masse desertion of other state troops under the command of Gen. E. L. Tracy and Gen. B. Buisson. O. R., ser. 1, 15:733.
 45. For desertions, see Napier Bartlett, *Military Record of Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1875), pt. 2, 25; and Winters, *Civil War in Louisiana*, 97–98. Butler quotation in O. R., ser. 1, 15:424. Butler's statement is corroborated by E. L. Palfrey, who was a major in the adjutant general's office in New Orleans. Palfrey reported that "the majority of the militia and local defense troops remained in the city, and a large portion of the local defense force that went to Camp Moore returned to the city, being over age, and merely enlisted for duty in New Orleans." O.R., ser. 1, 6:620.
 46. *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, Feb. 12, 1862. For crowds, see Gerald M. Capers, *Occupied City: New Orleans Under the Federals, 1862–1865* (Lexington, Ky., 1965), 45; *New Orleans Bee*, May 1, 1862.
 47. Ernest Wench to Butler, May [nd], 1862; I. L. Nosits to Butler, May 19, 1862, both in box 12, Butler papers, LC.
 48. For food relief, see O. R. N., ser. 1, 18:371; and O. R., ser. 3, 2:724. Seventy-seven percent of the 2nd Louisiana Infantry (U.S.) were immigrants. For enlistment in the United States forces, see the excellent article by G. Howard Hunter, "The Politics of Resentment: Unionist Regiments and the New Orleans Immigrant Community, 1862–1864," *Louisiana History* 44(2003):185–210, especially 195. See also Richard Nelson Current, *Lincoln's Loyalists: Union Soldiers from the Confederacy* (New York, 1992), 89.
 49. Joy J. Jackson, "Keeping Law and Order in New Orleans Under General Butler, 1862," *Louisiana History* 34(1993):51–67.
 50. C. H. Blanchard to Butler, June 17, 1862, box 13, Butler papers, LC; A. C. Palmer

- to Butler, Apr. 12, 1862, box 11, Butler papers, LC. See also H. Read to Butler, Apr. 14, 1862, as well as a follow up letter ten days later, asking for a sutler's pass to New Orleans, box 11, Butler papers, LC.
51. By September, Butler had recruited the 1st Louisiana Infantry Regiment, 1,000 in number, smaller units of cavalry, and another 1,500 who replaced losses in Northern regiments or awaited further organization. By the end of the war, 5,224 Louisiana whites enlisted in state units, not including whites who served in other states' units as replacements. O. R. ser. 1, 15:424, 556. For the ethnic composition of the recruits, see Butler, *Letters*, 494, and note 49 above.
52. See C. Peter Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen in Civil War Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, 1976); Noah Andre Trudeau, *Like Men of War: Black Troops in the Civil War, 1862–1865* (Boston, 1998), 23–45; Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867 Series II: The Black Military Experience* (Cambridge, 1982), 41–44.
53. Trefousse, *Butler*, 119–120.
54. Schurz quoted in Holzman, *Stormy*, 34.
55. Trefousse, *Butler*, 61, 63, 74; Butler, *Butler's Book*, 152, 155; Holzman, *Stormy*, 34–35.
56. Butler to "the Eighth Regiment," Aug. 2, 1869, in Butler, *Private and Official Correspondence*, 1:25.
57. Capt. Richard Elliott diary, May 14, 1862, Center for Lowell History, Lowell, Mass.
58. Butler to Edwin M. Stanton, May 8, 1862, in Butler, *Private and Official Correspondence*, 1:454–455.
59. On the hanging of Mumford, Trefousse wrote that Butler "had to demonstrate his power, and the execution served that purpose. No further disturbance occurred while he was in command." Trefousse, *Butler*, 108, 115.
60. Richard S. Fay to Butler, May 10, 1862, in Butler, *Private and Official Correspondence*, 1:465–466. Sarah Butler to Harriet Heard, May 2, 1862, Butler, *Private and Official Correspondence*, 1:439. For southern honor, see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York, 1982); Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore, 1987); Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton, 1996).
61. Butler, *Butler's Book*, 418. For other interpretations of the "woman order," see George Rable, "'Missing in Action': Women in the Confederacy," in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York, 1992):134–146 and Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825–1880* (Baltimore, 1990), 143–145.
62. Butler to O. C. Gardner, June 10, 1862, Butler, *Private and Official Correspondence*, 1:82–83.
63. "Major Gen. Butler at Home," Jan. 29, 1865, box 180, Butler papers, LC.