



department of Conservation and Recreation

FORT WARREN, GEORGES ISLAND

CURRICULUM PACKET

Liberty or Treason? The Case of Josiah H. Gordon
Grades 8-12

2005 edition



photo credit: George Price

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Introduction and menu of options	p. 2
Trip tips	p. 4
Brief history of Fort Warren and Georges Island	p. 5
Tour of Fort Warren (map/description)	p. 7
Curriculum Unit: Liberty or Treason: The Case of Josiah H. Gordon (Grades 8-12)	p. 14



department of Conservation and Recreation

Fort Warren, Georges Island
Tours and School Programs

Dear Teachers:

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, Division of Urban Parks and Recreation, offers school programs **by reservation** in May, June, and September. Please call **Harbor Express at 617-222-6999**, Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m.-4 p.m. (?) to make arrangements for transportation and reservations. Programs are free of charge, but **permits are required for groups of 25 or more and cost \$3.00.**

Transportation: Public ferry service to Georges Island will begin on May 14. Ask about ferry service when making your reservation.

Curriculum Packets: A curriculum packet is posted on-line at [] or available by mail. The packet contains general information on planning your trip to Georges Island, a menu of program options, pre-visit material on the history of Fort Warren and Georges Island, a map and description of Fort Warren, and a curriculum unit containing pre-visit educational materials or a classroom activity, a learning activity on Georges Island, and post-visit materials, including classroom activities, suggestions for research projects, and bibliographies.

The following options are available:

Self-guided tour: Using maps, brochures, and other material in the curriculum packet, you may choose a self-guided tour of Fort Warren and Georges Island.

Tours by DCR park rangers or volunteers from the Friends of the Boston Harbor Islands:

1. General Interest Tour of Fort Warren: Overview of the history and legends of Fort Warren from the Civil War through World War II. Topics include the fort's design and construction, its role in harbor defense, and especially its role as a prison for Confederate soldiers, sailors, and political prisoners during the Civil War.

Duration: 45 minutes to 1 hour

Maximum size: 50

Grades: 3-12 (adapted to grade level and appropriate Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Frameworks)

2. Fort Warren during the Civil War: A tour focusing on Fort Warren's Civil War history. Topics include the fort's role as a harbor fortification, Union Army training camp, and prison for Confederate soldiers, sailors, and political prisoners.

Duration: 45 minutes to 1 hour

Maximum size: 50

Grades: 3-12 (adapted to grade level and appropriate Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Frameworks)

Special School Programs:

1. Rebels Amongst the Ranks: A special program focusing on Fort's Warren's Civil War role as a harbor fortification, training camp for the Union Army, and Confederate prisoner of war camp. In addition to a tour of Fort Warren that focuses on its Civil War history, students will participate in a learning activity using primary sources to explore the experience of a variety of individuals connected to Fort Warren during this time period.

Duration: 45 minutes to 1 hour for the tour/45minutes to 1 hour for the learning exercise

Maximum Size: 50

Grades: 5-8 (adapted to grade level and appropriate Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Frameworks)

2. Liberty or Treason? The Case of Josiah H. Gordon: Students will learn about the Civil War history of Fort Warren and study the case history of Josiah H. Gordon, a Maryland politician imprisoned at the fort. Through Gordon's letters and other primary sources, students will learn about a prisoner's daily life at Fort Warren and examine the issue of violations of civil liberties during wartime. The curriculum unit includes historical information on the Civil War and Fort Warren, biographical information on Josiah H. Gordon, pre-visit classroom activities, an on-site activity to accompany your field trip to Georges Island, and a post-visit classroom activity.

Duration: one or two 45-minute pre-visit classroom periods; 120 minutes for a field trip and on-site activity on Georges Island; one or two 45-minute post-visit classroom activities.

Maximum size: 50

Grades: 8-12 (adapted to grade level and appropriate Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Frameworks)

3. On the Ocean's Edge: This program focuses on the harbor environment. Through a series of hands-on activities students will learn about the geologic formation of the harbor and the physical forces that shape it. Students will discuss the importance of the harbor as an "edge community" and explore the intertidal zone for signs of a wide variety of marine life. Students will "learn who dirtied the water" and how changes at the Deer Island Sewage Treatment facility are affecting water quality. Program availability is low-tide dependent.

Grades: 3-5

Duration 30-45 minutes

Maximum size: 30

Grades 3-5 (adapted to grade level and appropriate Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Frameworks)



Trip Tips

- ✓ **Transportation:** For information on ferry schedules, and departure points, please consult www.bostonislands.com (click on “Trip Planning” and “Getting There.”).
- ✓ **What to wear:** The temperature on the harbor and on Georges Island can be several degrees cooler than on the mainland. A tour of Fort Warren also involves considerable walking and many opportunities to get dirty. Students should wear rugged clothing, comfortable walking shoes or boots, and bring along a sweater or jacket. *Island advice: Dress in layers!*
- ✓ **Availability of food:** There is a snack bar on the island (located on one side of the Administration Building), or you may bring lunch or snacks. Consult Georges Island map for location of picnic areas. Please carry all trash off of Georges Island.
- ✓ **Restrooms:** Consult Georges Island map for location of restrooms.
- ✓ **What to bring:** Flashlight (for exploring dark corridors of Fort Warren), camera, pencil or pen, and other supplies for projects, sunscreen. *Remember: You will be on an island; if you forgot to bring something from home, you will have to do without it.*
- ✓ **Safety First:** While efforts are continuously being made to eliminate hazards for visitors to Fort Warren, there are still some dangerous areas. Students should be warned about going beyond fences and danger signs and to stay away from steep drops.
- ✓ **Group Supervision:** A ratio of 1 teacher or chaperone per 10 students is required and the teacher(s) or chaperone(s) must accompany the students while they explore the fort. Teachers and chaperones are responsible for their students. Emergency facilities such as first aid, police, and radio contact with the mainland are available at the Administration Building.
- ✓ **If you need assistance:** DCR Rangers and volunteers from the Friends of the Boston Harbor Islands are available to answer questions and provide any other assistance.



photo credit: Ken Mallory

Brief History of Georges Island and Fort Warren By Jayne E. Triber

Today, the history of Georges Island focuses primarily on Fort Warren and its role during the Civil War. Yet, the real history of Georges Island began approximately one hundred thousand years ago when moving glaciers formed smooth-sloped hills or **drumlins** made up of glacial debris or **till** (clay containing pebbles, cobbles, and boulders). About 15,000 years ago, the climate warmed and the glaciers receded. Sea levels rose, isolating several drumlins that became Boston Harbor islands, including Georges Island. This process created a unique geological formation: the only drumlin field or **swarm** in the United States that intersects a coastline.

For thousands of years, Native Americans visited the Boston Harbor Islands from early spring to late autumn, making full use of the islands' natural resources. They fished in Boston Harbor and farmed and hunted on the Boston Harbor Islands. Today, their descendants regard the islands as an important part of their cultural heritage.

In the 17th century, English and European immigrants arrived to Boston discovered that fishing and trade would be the key to economic success. The protection of the shipping trade and of Boston, itself, required the building of lighthouses and fortifications on several of the Boston Harbor Islands.

Georges Island was originally known as Pemberton's Island, named for its first owner, James Pemberton. Pemberton began living on the island in 1628, two years before the great Puritan migration began. Early in the eighteenth century, the island was renamed Georges Island for Captain John George, a prominent Boston merchant and town official. Georges Island was probably used for farming and grazing animals in this period.

During the Revolutionary War, John Adams was one of several political and military leaders who recognized the military importance of Georges Island, which guarded the Narrows, the main shipping channel into Boston. Although the British Army had evacuated Boston in March 1776, British ships remained at Nantasket, posing a threat of reinvasion. In 1778, our French allies built temporary earthworks (raised embankments of dirt for mounting guns and defending a position) on Georges Island to protect their fleet and defend Boston from possible British attack.

In 1825, the City of Boston bought Georges Island and turned it over to the United States Government. From 1825-1832, the federal government constructed a seawall around the island to control erosion. In 1834, Colonel Sylvanus Thayer of the United States Army

Corps of Engineers, and former superintendent of West Point, began supervising the construction of Fort Warren, named for Dr. Joseph Warren, the Revolutionary War patriot killed at the Battle of Bunker Hill.

Built with granite from Quincy and Cape Ann, Fort Warren was largely finished by 1858, but when the Civil War broke out in April 1861, there was still construction debris on the parade ground and no guns were mounted. Governor John Andrew and the Massachusetts Legislature played a critical role in organizing heavy artillery companies to garrison Fort Warren during the Civil War.

During the Civil War, Fort Warren served as Boston's main line of defense against invasion by the Confederate Navy, as a recruiting and training camp for Union soldiers, and, most importantly, as a Confederate prisoner-of-war camp for military and political prisoners.

In the early months of the Civil War, Fort Warren's prisoners included the mayor of Baltimore, the governor of Kentucky, and several members of the Maryland Legislature. In November 1861, the Confederate diplomats James Murray Mason and John Slidell were removed from a British ship by the Union Navy and held at Fort Warren until January 1862. The highest-ranking prisoner was Alexander H. Stephens, Vice-President of the Confederacy, who was imprisoned there from May to October 1865.

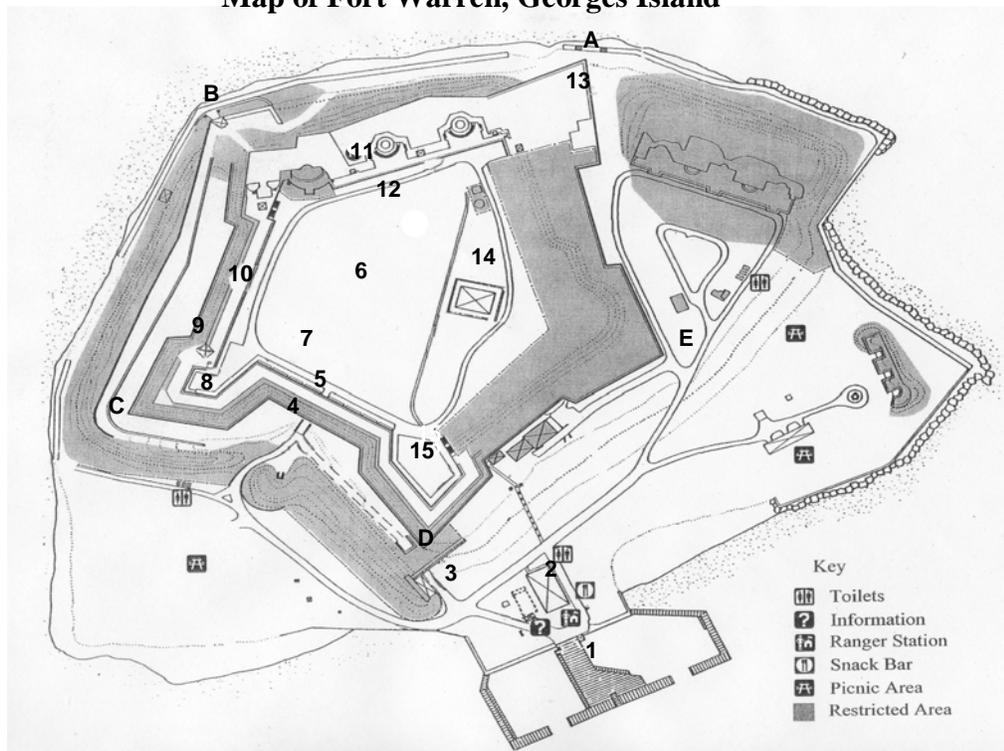
Although prisoners complained about overcrowding and poor food, Fort Warren's living conditions were far superior to Confederate prisoner-of-war camps. Under the command of Colonel Justin Dimick and his successors, Fort Warren recorded only 12 deaths among the more than 1000 prisoners confined there during the Civil War.

The development of longer-range artillery and new weapons after the Civil War resulted in new construction and military uses for Fort Warren. Updated gun batteries were installed in the 1890s. When the Spanish-American War broke out in 1898, Boston Harbor was mined and Fort Warren returned to active military service. In the years before World War I, a mine storage building (now the Administration Building) and an observation tower (reached by the granite stairway at Bastion C) were built, and Fort Warren served as a mine command center during the war. Just before World War II, an archway was added extending from the Guard House to a concrete structure that served as a mine control center during the war.

Fort Warren was decommissioned in 1946 and designated a National Historic Site in 1958. Georges Island has been owned and operated by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts since 1958. In 1970, it became one of seventeen islands managed by the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) and the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) as part of Boston Harbor Islands State Park. In 2003, MDC and DEM merged to form the Department of Conservation and Recreation. Since 1996, Georges Island has also been part of Boston Harbor Islands national park, a partnership of national, state, and local representatives.

See Bibliography at end of Curriculum Packet.

Map of Fort Warren, Georges Island



* Bastions labeled A through E

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pier/Wharf 2. Mine Storage Building 3. Guardhouse 4. Ditch, Coverface, Demilune 5. Bridge and Sallyport 6. Parade Ground 7. Front III Casemates (Historic Quarters) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Bakery 9. Observation Tower/Fire Control Station 10. Front II Terreplein 11. Front I Terreplein 12. Front I Casemates (Enlisted Men) 13. Bastion A 14. Powder Magazine 15. Old Hospital |
|--|---|

A Tour of Fort Warren

Fort Warren design and construction: Fort Warren was built between the 1830s and 1850s, during the “Third System” of American fortification construction. From 1816-1866, United States Army engineers worked to create a permanent, integrated harbor defense system. During this period, Colonel Sylvanus Thayer designed Fort Independence on Castle Island, Fort Warren on Georges Island, and Fort Winthrop on Governors Island (now Logan Airport).

Fort Warren is a typical “Third System” fort: a five-sided masonry structure with multi-tiered gun emplacements (guns on more than one level). The fort has five **bastions** (labeled “A” through “E”), arrow-shaped projecting parts of a fort between the fort’s four **fronts**, or sides. The bastions increased firepower along the walls to clear the area of invaders. Guns were also mounted in **casemates**, interior rooms within the fort’s walls, and fired through openings called **embrasures**. Guns were also mounted on the **terreplein**, or roof level, on top of the casemates. Here, the guns were mounted on the **rampart**, a broad embankment raised as a fortification. Above the rampart is a **parapet**, a protective wall of earth (or sometimes stone) that protected soldiers and artillery from enemy fire. Additional defensive features will be discussed below.

Fort Warren was in active military use during the Spanish-American War (1898), World War I (1917-1918), and World War II (1941-1945). Over the years, Fort Warren was modernized to incorporate new developments in weapons and warfare.

1. Pier/Wharf:

The original wharf was made of stone and provided a fixed landing for the island’s main pier. The present central finger is a close copy of what Fort Warren had when it was an active military installation. **Note:** A **wharf** is a fixed platform roughly parallel to and alongside navigable waters where ships are loaded and unloaded. A **pier** is a raised walkway over water that extends perpendicular to shore and is used as a landing place. A **wharf** also has buildings on it for businesses related to the sea and trade.

2. Mine Storage Building:

The brick building facing the pier (now an Administration Building, housing the Ranger Station and Snack Bar) was built in 1906 to store and service mines that protected Boston Harbor during World War I and World War II.

3. Guardhouse:

The guardhouse was Fort Warren’s security office. Soldiers on guard duty spent four hours in the guardhouse after two hours on the ramparts. Major Parker of the First Battalion, Massachusetts Infantry, described the harsh conditions during the winter of 1861-62: “Such duty on a bleak island, exposed to the terrible cold and storms of a New England winter, was no pastime.” The guardhouse also served as a jail for soldiers who broke military rules. A concrete arch added just before World War II extended from the guardhouse to a concrete structure that served as a mine control casemate.

4. Ditch, Coverface, and Demilune:

After passing through the arch, you will see a dry **ditch** (unlike a moat, which is filled with water) formed by the walls of the fort on one side and a large mound of dirt called a **coverface** on the other side. The dirt of the coverface would absorb direct artillery fire, protecting the fort's masonry walls.

On the shore side of the coverface, at the foot of the bridge leading into the fort, is the **demilune**, a curved, granite defensive structure shaped like a half-moon ("Demilune" is French for half-moon.). If you enter the fort by the guardhouse, the demilune is on your left, and is covered by earth, but there is an entrance at the top of the ramp which allows you to go down into the fortification of the demilune. If you enter the fort through the picnic area, you can see the complete structure of the demilune. Note how the demilune's curved shape would give its guns control of this side of Georges Island.

In October 1863, Private Sawyer, a deserter from a Maine regiment, was imprisoned in one of the demilune's casemates. He managed to chisel the edges of the musketry **loopholes** (narrow angled windows in the granite walls to allow soldiers to be protected while firing muskets), squeeze through the opening, and escape. Sawyer swam to a nearby schooner, but he was later recaptured.

5. Bridge and Sallyport:

To the right of the demilune is a **bridge**, which crosses from the coverface to the opening in the fort wall, which is called a **sallyport**. Soldiers would "sally forth" or rush through the sallyport in order to attack an enemy force. Today's bridge is a replacement, but it is similar to the original. Fort Warren was supposed to have a **drawbridge**, a bridge that could be raised in case of enemy attack, but it was never built. However, if you look up on either side of the sallyport, you can see some of the hardware that would have raised and lowered the bridge. Inside the sallyport, there are grooves in the floor that gave men and horses traction so that they would not slip on the granite. There is also a pair of columns on either side at the middle of the sallyport. These were supposed to have been guides for the **portcullis**, a gate that can be lowered into place, but the portcullis was never installed.

6. Parade Ground:

As you enter through the sallyport, you will see an open grassy area in the center of the fort. The **parade ground** was used for a variety of activities, including daily muster (roll-call and military inspection), drilling, dress parades, and recreational activities, including baseball and football.

The Story of "John Brown's Body": At the beginning of the Civil War, the Second Battalion of Infantry, known as the Tiger Battalion, arrived at Fort Warren. The soldiers were ordered to clean up piles of dirt and rubbish on the parade ground. As they worked, they passed the time by singing popular songs, including the hymn, "Say, Brothers, Will You Meet Us?" Soon, they began writing new words to the melody.

One of soldiers in the battalion was Private John Brown, who had the same name as the famous abolitionist who had led a raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, in an attempt to start a slave uprising. The abolitionist John Brown was executed for his crime in 1859. Private Brown's fellow soldiers teased him, telling him he couldn't be John Brown, because John Brown's body was mouldering (decaying or rotting) in the grave. Soldiers at Fort Warren began singing "John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave (repeated 3 times)....His soul goes marching on!"

When the 12th Massachusetts Regiment arrived at Fort Warren, their Brigade Band learned the catchy tune and played it during a dress parade on the parade ground. All the regiments that trained at Fort Warren carried the tune with them when they left Fort Warren. George Kimball of the 12th Massachusetts Regiment remembered the song's popularity: "It spread from regiment to regiment like wildfire."

The author Julia Ward Howe was quite familiar with the song. In her *Reminiscences, 1819-1899*, she recalled returning from a review of troops in Washington with her minister, the Reverend James Freeman Clarke, and several friends. On the return trip, they sang popular army songs, ending with "John Brown's Body." Reverend Clarke turned to Mrs. Howe, and asked, "Why do you not write some good words for that stirring tune?" When Mrs. Howe woke up early the next morning, she "scrawled the verses almost without looking at the paper." The new song was "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

7. Front III Casemates (Historic Quarters):

Turning left after you enter the sallyport, you will find a complex of rooms that were used both as quarters for Fort Warren's officers from the 1860s to the 1890s and as quarters for Confederate political prisoners during the Civil War.

In November 1861, the Confederate diplomats James Murray Mason and John Slidell were removed from a British ship by the Union Navy and imprisoned at Fort Warren. Great Britain protested that Mason and Slidell's removal from a neutral vessel on the high seas was a violation of international law. Fearing that an angry British government might decide to support the Confederate states, Secretary of State William Seward ordered the release of Mason and Slidell on January 1, 1862.

At the end of the Civil War, two high-ranking political prisoners were held at Fort Warren: John Reagan, Postmaster General of the Confederate States of America, and Alexander H. Stephens, Vice-President of the Confederate States. On May 28, 1865, Stephens described the initial impact of his confinement:

The horrors of imprisonment, close confinement, no one to see or talk to, with the reflection of being cut off for I know not how long and perhaps forever—from communication with dear ones at home, are beyond description. Words utterly fail to express the soul's anguish.

By the end of July, Stephens was released from close confinement and allowed to walk the grounds during the day, talk to his fellow prisoners and Union officers and soldiers, and to receive visitors. He was released from Fort Warren on October 13, 1865.

8. Bakery:

The entrance to the bakery is located in the **Bastion C** courtyard. From the 1860s to 1900, this room and others in Bastion C were used for food storage, preparation, and serving. During the Civil War, officers and gentlemen at Fort Warren—both Union and Confederate—ate better than enlisted men. Enlisted men—both Union soldiers and Confederate prisoners—received fresh beef with potatoes three times a week, salt beef, pork, or ham three times a week, and baked beans on Sunday. They were also entitled to coffee and tea and twenty-two ounces of bread a day. Confederate officers and political prisoners often formed a private **mess** (a group of people, usually in the military, who eat their meals together), using their money to purchase better food than the enlisted men ate. Josiah Gordon, a member of the Maryland Legislature who was imprisoned at Fort Warren in March 1862, described a dinner of “a leg of mutton mildly roasted and boiled ham with stewed chicken after a dish of tomato soup.” The menu also included mashed potatoes, stewed carrots, stewed parsnips, green peas, and dried apples, with “rice boiled in milk and sweetened” for dessert. He finished the meal with “a good cup of coffee.”

9. Observation Tower/Fire Control Station:

As you leave the bakery, walk across the Bastion C courtyard and climb the stairs leading to the **Observation Tower**. In the years after the Civil War, the increasing range of naval guns and the mining of harbors to prevent enemy invasion required the use of observation towers to track enemy vessels and coordinate the firing of Fort Warren’s guns. The Observation Tower was built around 1900 and was used during World War I and World War II. Note that the Observation Tower is built of brick, not the fort’s original granite. The use of brick and concrete is a clue to later additions to Fort Warren’s original construction.

Harbor View:

From the Observation Tower, look around and see how many Boston Harbor Islands you can identify. Look straight ahead to see the **Brewster Islands**, including **Little Brewster Island**, the home of **Boston Light**, the oldest manned light station in the country (since 1716). Watch for its flash! Turn ninety degrees to your right and see **Peddocks Island**, a large island made up of five drumlins (hills shaped by glaciers). Peddocks Island also has a fort, **Fort Andrews** (1904). Turn ninety degrees again and you can see **Rainsford Island**, once the site of hospitals, poorhouses, and a boys’ school. Can you make out **Long Island** (behind Rainsford Island)? On your way here, you passed by a lighthouse on Long Island and saw the brick buildings of Long Island Hospital (now closed). Turning once again, you can see **Gallops Island** and **Lovells Island**, separated by the Narrows, once the main shipping channel into Boston Harbor. Over the years, Gallops Island was the site of a restaurant, a Civil War camp, and a United States Public Health Hospital. Lovells Island is the home of **Fort Standish** (1900).

10. Front II Terreplein:

As you leave the Observation Tower and walk to your right, you will be on the **terreplein** or roof level of Front II. Although there are no guns mounted, you can imagine the size of the massive Rodman cannons in use during the Civil War by looking at the stone platforms and the traverse arches, which allowed the guns to move from side to side while tracking the movement of enemy ships.

Harbor Defense:

The fort's location guarding the Narrows, as well as the Presidents Roads channel to the north and the Nantasket Roads channel to the south, made Fort Warren Boston's main line of defense against enemy invasion during the Civil War. Imagine an enemy ship passing below and you can understand why guns were placed where they were.

11. Front I Terreplein: Continue walking to the right to the Front I Terreplein, between Bastions B and A. Here, you can see how Fort Warren was modernized after the Civil War. In 1885, Secretary of War William Endicott organized a board of Army and Navy officers and civilians to recommend a new system of harbor defenses and weapons. In the 1890s, massive Endicott system concrete gun batteries were installed on Fort Warren's Front I Terreplein and outside the walls of the fort. Proceeding from left to right, you will see Battery Plunkett, Battery Jack Adams (at Bastion B), and Battery Stevenson. The batteries were named for Civil War officers or heroes from Massachusetts. **Go down the staircase to return to the lower level of the fort.**

12. Front I Casemates (Enlisted Men): These casemates were divided in half. The outer rooms had two cannons commanding the shipping channel into Boston Harbor. Note the stone traverse arches in the floors. The inner rooms were living quarters for enlisted men (both Union soldiers and Confederate prisoners) during the Civil War. Both Union and Confederate soldiers found their quarter to be reasonably comfortable. J. H. Tomb, Chief Engineer in the Confederate Navy, described sleeping on bunks "being of pine boards three in a row, one above the other." The prisoners also had "a supply of straw (for a mattress) and one blanket."

13. Bastion A:

Bastion A once had the same double room layout as the Front I casemates and an open courtyard like Bastion D (across the parade ground). In the 1870s, the courtyard was covered to provide for new terreplein gun emplacements. This allowed for new rooms inside so soldiers could train indoors and provided a bombproof storage **magazine** (a place to store gunpowder or other explosive material). During World War II (1941-1945), Bastion A held a recreation hall, movie theater, and storage space.

14. Powder Magazine:

This large powder magazine, completed in 1863, was designed for limited access storage. Smaller magazines were located around the fort, closer to the guns. Originally the walls and ceiling were covered with climate-controlling wood.

The powder magazine plays a part in Fort Warren's most famous legend: **the Lady in Black**. Melanie Lanier was the young wife of a Confederate prisoner at Fort Warren. She

came north to help her husband escape from Fort Warren. Carrying a pistol and dressed in men's clothing, Mrs. Lanier managed to land on Georges Island and slip by the guards. She reached a ditch under the Corridor of Dungeons (also known as the **scarp gallery**, on the fort's outer wall at Bastion E, a large, granite-walled section with openings in the wall for artillery or musketry fire). The Confederate prisoners were to dig a tunnel from their cells to the parade ground, but they went off course and struck the granite wall of the powder magazine. The noise alerted the guards, and Mrs. Lanier was caught in the Corridor of Dungeons. She tried to shoot Colonel Dimick, commander of Fort Warren, but her pistol exploded and killed her husband. She was sentenced to death by hanging and asked that she be hanged in women's clothing. She was executed wearing a black robe that had been worn by one of the Union soldiers in a play. Since then, many people claim that they have seen the ghost of the Lady in Black.

15. Old Hospital:

Located in Bastion D, this large room served as a hospital ward from the Civil War until 1906. Living conditions at Fort Warren were better than what existed at most Civil War prisons, and only 12 prisoners died out of more than 1000 prisoners confined there during the Civil War.

A union soldier named Litchfield described conditions in the hospital on October 3, 1864: "The room occupied by the men who have measles is filled with rebels awaiting exchange [The Union and Confederacy exchanged or traded prisoners.]. There's three of the rebs in the ward, they all say they are in consumption [tuberculosis] and I should not think strange if two of them were."

When a new hospital was built outside the fort's walls, the old hospital became the fort's library. By the 1940s, the room became a post exchange [store], selling a variety of items for soldiers stationed at Fort Warren.

Sources: Metropolitan District Commission, *Georges Island Study Guides*, 1983, 1993, *Historic Curriculum Packet, Self-Guided Tour Brochure*; Minor H. McLain, "The Military Prison at Fort Warren," *Civil War History* VIII (1962), pp. 136-151; Jay Schmidt, *Fort Warren: New England's Most Historic Civil War Site* (Amherst, N.H., 2003); Edward Rowe Snow, *The Islands of Boston Harbor* (1935, 1971; updated edition, Beverly, MA, 2002); Jayne E. Triber, "Defending the City, Defending the Nation: The Military History of the Boston Harbor Islands," unpublished paper, 2003).

Boston Harbor Islands Curriculum Unit Guide¹

Program Title: *Liberty or Treason? The Case of Josiah H. Gordon*

Subject Areas: History, Social Studies

Unit for Grades: Grades 8-12

Length of Unit: Three-Four Classes (Including field visit to Georges Island)

Developed By: Chris Benedetto
Boston Harbor Islands National Park Area
408 Atlantic Avenue, Suite 228
Boston, MA 02110
617-223-8666

Date Entered: March 2004

Narrative Introduction:

The goal of this education unit is to enhance students understanding and appreciation of the history of Fort Warren, a National Historic Landmark located on Georges Island in the Boston Harbor Islands national park area. While the island was actively utilized for harbor defense through the Second World War, Fort Warren is most significant because it housed military and political prisoners during the Civil War from 1861 through 1865. In three activities conducted in the classroom and on Georges Island, students will interact with a series of primary sources, and learn about the life and times of Josiah Gordon, a Maryland politician who was imprisoned within the imposing granite walls of Fort Warren. Like countless other Americans during this turbulent period of our nation's history, Mr. Gordon faithfully corresponded with his wife Kate and their children, who were living in Cumberland, Maryland. While no photographs of Gordon have been located at this point, many of the letters have been preserved in the Clements Library at the University of Michigan, and they reveal both the intense personal turmoil and political crisis caused by the Civil War. The following essay will familiarize you with pertinent historical information and program guidelines to help make the program enjoyable and successful for you and your students.

Curriculum Guide Sections

- 1. Connections to Massachusetts Frameworks and Program Goals**
- 2. Introductory Essay for Educators & Fort Warren Orientation**
- 3. Pre-Visit Activity**
- 4. Field Activity**
- 5. Post-Visit Activity**

¹ The views and conclusions contained in this document are those of the author and should not be interpreted as representing the opinions or policies of the Boston Harbor Islands Partnership or its members.

Connections to the Massachusetts History and Social Science Frameworks
The Civil War and Reconstruction, 1860-1877 (Page 74-75)

*USI.35 Summarize the critical developments leading up to the Civil War.
 (The election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860)*

USI.36 On a map of North America, identify Union and Confederate States at the outbreak of the war.

USI.37 Analyze Abraham Lincoln’s presidency...and the political obstacles he encountered.

*USI.39 Provide examples of the various effects of the Civil War.
 (The increased role of the Federal government)*

Concepts and Skills, Grades 8-12

1. Interpret and construct timelines that show events and eras in various parts of the world are related to one another.
2. Show connections...between particular historical events and ideas and larger social, economic, and political trends and developments.
3. Distinguish between short-term and long-term cause and effect relationships.
4. Define and use correctly the following words and terms: *Magna Carta*, *parliament*, *habeas corpus*, and *absolutism*.

What is the theme/topic this study will investigate?

The most recent edition of the Massachusetts History and Social Science Frameworks asks the perpetual question, “How can we avoid making all of this into nothing more than just...a parade of facts, smothering the desire to learn? We believe the answer is to focus upon the fateful drama of the historical struggle for democracy.” Josiah Gordon’s life and times provides us with an unparalleled way to study the fate of liberty and democracy during America’s bloodiest and most divisive conflict. Students should debate whether the preservation of Federal authority and public safety during the Civil War was achieved at the expense of sacred civil liberties established in the Constitution. Educators can also encourage discussion about the subject of civil rights during other turbulent eras of American history, including the imprisonment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, the Palmer raids during the Red Scare, and most recently the Patriot Act enacted during the War on Terrorism.

What are the three essential questions that should guide the students’ inquiry?

1. Why were Josiah Gordon and his fellow politicians arrested and imprisoned in Fort Warren by the United States government during the Civil War?
2. What was it like to be a political prisoner at Fort Warren?
3. Was Mr. Gordon’s arrest and imprisonment justified or not, considering the democratic principles established in the Constitution and Bill of Rights?

The Learning Goals

Habits of Mind Goals: The primary goals of this program are twofold: to bring a local site of major historical importance to the attention of students and teachers, and demonstrate that our history is not a jumble of facts and dates, but a struggle over vital ideas and issues. Students should think about how they might feel if they were singled out or arrested for their beliefs about a certain issue. At its best, this curriculum unit will make history come alive for the students, by helping them understand where history comes from: not textbooks and the internet, but from letters, diaries, and other primary sources.

Skill Goals: Students should be able to differentiate between a primary source and a secondary source. Secondly, they should be able to place particular events in relation to Josiah Gordon and the outbreak of the Civil War in chronological sequence and be able to demonstrate an understanding of their causes and effects. In addition, students should be able to define the legal term “habeas corpus,” and identify the various architectural components of Fort Warren.

Content Goals: On a basic level, students should understand why Southerners were imprisoned at Fort Warren by the Lincoln administration, learn what daily life was like for prisoners at Fort Warren, and also gain insight into the effects of the Civil War on the lives of ordinary people. On a higher level, Josiah Gordon’s story should also raise philosophical questions in the minds of students, specifically, should the rights of an individual or a minority group be infringed for the benefit of the entire society?

Introductory Essay for Educators

The World of Josiah Gordon

Josiah H. Gordon was born near the town of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, on May 6, 1816. As a young man, he relocated across state lines to Cumberland, Maryland, began the practice of law, and became a partner in the firm of McKaig & McKaig around 1845. In 1849, he married Catherine Umbaugh, who bore him twelve children. After achieving success in the legal profession, Gordon had his first taste of politics when he was elected as the Federal Attorney for Alleghany County, Maryland, in 1851. In 1859, he was elected as the Democratic Party Representative of Alleghany County in the Maryland House of Delegates.¹ Two years later, at the age of forty-five, Gordon became embroiled in the most serious political crisis in our nation's history.

During the years that Josiah Gordon began a career in law and then achieved prominence in the Democratic Party, the sectional conflict that bitterly divided Maryland and the entire nation was taking shape. At the heart of this discord within American politics and society was the explosive subject of African-American slavery. Beginning in the eighteenth century and continuing through the first half of the nineteenth century, a series of political compromises concerning slavery were brokered in an attempt to appease both Whigs and Democrats. The first of these measures was the Northwest Ordinance. Devised in 1787, this measure allowed for the expansion of slavery south of the Ohio River, but outlawed the "peculiar institution" in the future states of Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin.² Then in 1803, the United States acquired vast tracts of land from France in the Louisiana Purchase, triggering decades of debate over the future of new territories, as free or slave states. Nearly two decades later, the Compromise of 1820 admitted Missouri to the Union as a slave state and established Maine as a free state, in an attempt to balance political power within Congress.

"A House Divided"

By the early nineteenth century, slavery had arguably become the backbone of the national economy. Southern plantation owners depended on slave labor to produce the cash crop cotton, which in turn fueled the Industrial Revolution and the construction of textile mills throughout the North. However, antagonism between Northerners and Southerners, and Whigs and Democrats, only intensified during the 1830s and 1840s. To many Americans, the existence of slavery in a supposedly "free" society was unforgivable moral outrage. As the ranks of the American Anti-Slavery Society and other abolitionist organizations swelled across the North, the issue reared its ugly head once again in national politics. In response to this perceived threat to their way of life, many Southerners defended slavery as an integral part of the nation's economic prosperity (especially textile production) and a moral benefit to American society. Tensions ran so high in 1836, in fact, that the House of Representatives passed a "gag rule" forbidding any discussion concerning the subject.³ However, attempts to silence the heated debate over the politics and morality of slavery only seemed to add fuel to the fire.

What many Northerners feared most was that slavery and its ill effects might expand across the entire nation, symbolized by the prevalent phrase "Slave Power." These fears were realized in February 1845, when Texas was admitted to the Union as a slave state, although it was still claimed by Mexico as a province. The Mexican War

followed from 1846 to 1848, resulting in the annexation of the New Mexico, Utah and California Territories by the victorious United States in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The potential expansion of slavery into these new lands at once resurfaced as a hotly debated topic. In 1848, Wisconsin joined the Union as a free state, and soon after the Compromise of 1850 established California as a free state, and dictated that the issue of slavery in the Utah and New Mexico Territories was to be decided by popular sovereignty (by popular vote). These measures were recognized as victories for Whigs and “Free Soilers” so Southern Democrats did not hesitate to push for their own political triumph. They were rewarded with the controversial Fugitive Slave Act, which denied escaped slaves legal rights and allowed them to be returned to bondage if they were recaptured in the North. Although the Compromise of 1850 was thought at the time to be a permanent solution to the slavery issue, that assumption was soon to prove misguided.

While the debate over slavery raged on, thousands of Americans emigrated into the West, pouring into the unorganized territories of Kansas and Nebraska. In 1854, these vast lands became the epicenter of the slavery debate when Senator Stephen Douglas of Illinois proposed a bill to establish a much-needed government for the Nebraska Territory. However, Douglas stipulated that the question of slavery be put in the hands of the settlers themselves instead of Federal authorities, a concept known as “popular sovereignty.” To the surprise of many Northerners, the Kansas-Nebraska Act quickly passed into law on May 30, 1854. Although this legislation was originally calculated to lessen or perhaps even end the sectional conflict over the expansion of slavery, it only fueled the growing tension between North and South.

The Rise of Abraham Lincoln

As Josiah Gordon became involved in the Democratic Party during the 1850s, dramatic changes were underway on the American political scene. The response throughout the North against the Kansas-Nebraska Act was so strong that an amalgamation of antislavery Whigs, Democrats, and Free Soilers formed a new party, known as the Republicans. In 1858, Abraham Lincoln, another lawyer-turned politician, ran as the Republican candidate against Stephen Douglas (Democrat) to represent Illinois in the Senate. While Lincoln lost the election, his eloquence and attractiveness as a candidate did not go unnoticed amongst his fellow Republicans. In February 1860, Lincoln went on tour and spoke in New York City and throughout New England. In a speech at the Cooper’s Union on February 27, 1860, he referred to slavery “as an evil not to be extended, but to be tolerated and protected only because of and so far as its actual presence among us makes that...a necessity.”⁴ As a result, when Lincoln won the Republican nomination in May 1860, many Southerners believed that the expansion of slavery and its very existence might be threatened if Lincoln were to become president. The *Atlanta Confederacy* expressed these sentiments in bold, unmistakable terms: “Let the consequences be what they may—whether the Potomac is crimsoned in human gore, and Pennsylvania Avenue is paved ten fathoms in depth with mangled bodies, or whether the last vestige of liberty is swept from the American continent, the South will never submit to such humiliation and degradation as the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln.”⁵

In this context, it is not difficult to understand why the election of Abraham Lincoln to the Executive Office in November 1860 sent a shock wave through the nation. The fact that he did not even appear on the ballot in ten slave states, and won less than

40% of the popular vote was certainly an ominous sign. Lincoln was elected only because he captured all of the populous Free states except one, winning 180 electoral votes. Threatened by Lincoln's antislavery beliefs, a group of South Carolina delegates unanimously voted to secede from the United States on December 20, 1860, causing a fateful chain reaction. Within a few months, Florida, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Texas, and Louisiana followed suit, and by February they had formed the Confederate States of America. After hostilities between the Federals and Confederates formally commenced with the bombardment of Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina, on April 12, 1861, Tennessee, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Virginia also joined the Confederacy.

Maryland & the Secession Crisis

In early 1861, Maryland was a microcosm of the virulent sectionalism that had virtually split the nation in two. In the northwestern counties of the state, much of the local population were predominantly working class white farmers, and remained loyal to the Union.⁶ But in the southeastern counties and on Eastern Shore, where plantation owners had long depended on slavery to produce tobacco and rice, support for secession was growing.⁷ These divisions became evident during the 1860 election, when Lincoln received only 2, 294 votes in Maryland compared to 42, 497 for John Breckinridge, the pro-slavery candidate.⁸

Once the war began, there was great apprehension in the Lincoln administration that neighboring Maryland might secede. Due to its geographical location, Maryland was particularly crucial to the Union cause. The railroad lines that connected Washington with other northern cities ran through Baltimore and Annapolis, and if Maryland seceded, the nation's capital would be virtually isolated and surrounded by hostile forces. Following the onset of war in April 1861, the relationship between many Marylanders and the United States government quickly deteriorated. On April 15, the President released a proclamation in which he asked for 75,000 volunteers to preserve the Union, which many Southerners interpreted as an act of aggression. Only a few days later, on April 19, the 6th Massachusetts Regiment was marching through Baltimore to switch rail lines on their way to Washington, when they were attacked by an armed mob of Confederate sympathizers. In the bloody aftermath, four Union soldiers and twelve civilians lay dead, ironically on the eighty-sixth anniversary of the clash between British soldiers and Massachusetts minutemen that ignited the American Revolution. Later that night Secessionists in Baltimore also burnt down several railroad bridges that allowed Union troops access into the city.⁹ An attempt to withdraw from the Union by Confederate sympathizers in Maryland, especially in the state legislature, appeared to be imminent.

Habeas Corpus & the Lincoln Administration

The secession of Maryland was a catastrophe that had to be avoided at all costs. Federal authorities felt they had to do anything to prevent it, including suspending the writ of habeas corpus and other civil liberties.¹⁰ Article I, Section Nine of the Constitution states that "the privilege of the Writ of Habeas Corpus shall not be suspended, unless in Cases of Rebellion or Invasion the public safety may require it." In Latin, the term *habeas corpus* translates literally into "you have the body." In lay terms, this means that a

judge must summon a defendant to determine if the criminal charges against him are lawful and sufficient to conduct a trial. If the charges and evidence are proven to be inadmissible in court, then a person must be set free. Suspending this “privilege” meant that a person could be arrested and imprisoned for an indefinite amount of time by Federal authorities without a hearing or fair trial.

Almost over night, Maryland became the focal point of heated debate over the interpretation of this legal concept when Federal authorities arrested John Merryman, a Maryland citizen who commanded a secessionist military company. When Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Roger Taney, a Democrat, issued a writ of habeas corpus, Union officers refused to release Merryman under Lincoln’s orders. Taney then wrote to the President that “the people of the United States are no longer living under a government of laws,” and the President disregarded his ruling.¹¹ Lincoln’s decision was to be an omen of things to come.

On April 25, 1861, President Lincoln was at the White House mulling over how to deal with potential threat of secession in Maryland, only a day before the Maryland Legislature, including Josiah Gordon, was due to convene in Annapolis, a hotbed of secessionist activity. Although he had authorized the detention of John Merryman, the President finally determined he could not justify placing the entire Maryland Legislature under arrest because it would violate their constitutional rights, and fortuitously the House of Delegates voted fifty-three to twelve that they did not have the power or constitutional right to pass an act of secession (Josiah Gordon, by the way was in the minority).¹² However, on April 27 the President authorized General Winfield Scott, Commander of the Army, to suspend the writ of habeas corpus along the railroad line between Annapolis and Washington to protect it from Confederate saboteurs. In addition, Scott was required to “watch and await” the actions of the Maryland Legislature, and respond accordingly if they acted against the United States.¹³

Josiah Gordon & the Maryland Legislature

Through the summer of 1861, while the Union Army recovered from losses suffered at Bull Run, the Lincoln administration was convinced that the threat of secession in Maryland had not diminished, but in fact was probable. Their suspicions were fueled by a number of controversial declarations that passed through the Maryland Legislature, including one that demanded the “immediate recognition of the independence of the Confederate States,” supported by fifty delegates including Josiah Gordon.¹⁴ While the President had earlier viewed interfering with the Maryland government as an ineffective measure, it appears that he had begun to change his mind. During a speech to a special session of Congress on July 4, 1861, he warned that in “the border States...there are those who favor a policy which they call ‘armed neutrality’...that is an arming of those states to prevent Union forces passing one way...or the other over their soil. This would be disunion completed. It recognizes...no obligation to the Union...and...it is...treason in effect.”¹⁵ The President made it clear that if the secessionists acted desperately, his own government would respond simply for the cause of self-preservation.

Confederate sympathizers and Federal officials in Maryland appeared to be on an inevitable path to conflict. On August 5, 1861, the Maryland House of Delegates convened in Frederick and adopted a controversial document that became known as the

Wallis Resolutions, named in honor of the delegate who authored it. Supported by Josiah Gordon and forty-two other delegates, the resolution accused the President and his officers of being in “utter defiance of law and constitution, and in criminal violation of the plainest and dearest rights to which American citizens are born. Resolved...we appeal...to the whole people of the country to take warning...and come to the rescue of the free institutions of the Republic.”¹⁶ To Federal officials, these provocative words were compelling evidence that secession might be their next move, and they were determined to prevent the members of the Maryland House of Delegates from meeting again in Frederick on September 17, 1861. Intriguingly, according to Mr. Gordon’s account, he was initially arrested by Union soldiers on August 30 and was held for a few days until he took an oath of allegiance to the United States and was released. Gordon now knew he was under the watchful and unforgiving eye of Lincoln’s generals.

Prisoners of War

On September 11, Simon Cameron, the acting Secretary of War, ordered Major General Nathaniel Banks to thwart the ratification of an act of secession, and arrest any members of the Maryland Legislature.¹⁷ This order, which implicitly allowed the suspension of habeas corpus, was carried out to the letter. By the morning of September 20, 1861, Federal soldiers had arrested over twenty members of the Maryland Legislature, including Josiah Gordon. To justify their actions, one Federal document charged that Gordon and his colleagues were all “known or suspected to be disloyal in their relations to the Government.”¹⁸

During the first nine months of the war, over 800 civilians were imprisoned and held without trial by Union soldiers, many of them from Border States. With the number of prisoners steadily growing, the Lincoln administration had to find places to put them. While Mr. Gordon and his fellow Marylanders were initially sent to Fort Lafayette in New York in September 1861, plans were already underway to move them to the vacant Fort Warren in Boston Harbor. Named in honor of Joseph Warren, a Revolutionary War hero who died at the Battle of Bunker Hill, construction on the massive granite fortification began some thirty years before the outbreak of the war.¹⁹

In January 1861, Colonel Joseph Totten, an Army Engineer who had played a major role in the design of Fort Warren, wrote to the Secretary of War that “this strong work is essentially ready for its garrison and for nearly the whole of its armament.”²⁰ However, when war broke out a few months later, Governor of Massachusetts John Andrew discovered that Fort Warren was wholly unprepared to defend the city. When the first regiments of troops arrived on Georges Island in late April, one soldier recalled, “we found the great fortress in a wretched state, very much as its builders had left it, with huge piles of brick and stone incumbering the parade grounds and filling many of its casemates.”²¹ During the weeks, soldiers were put to work to make Fort Warren inhabitable not only for soldiers but for prisoners as well.

In a letter to Governor Andrew in September 1861, Federal officials notified him that they were planning on using Fort Warren to house prisoners and asked whether he could supply soldiers to guard them. The governor complied with this request, and Colonel Justin Dimick, an 1814 graduate of West Point and veteran of the Mexican War, was assigned to command the fort in October.²² On November 1, nearly 800 Confederate soldiers and civilian prisoners, including Josiah Gordon, arrived at Georges Island on

board the steam ship *State of Maine*. While Dimick expressed concern over his ability to secure the high number of prisoners, under his supervision the conditions were quite decent. In November 1861, he wrote to his superiors that the “prisoners of war have been well-quartered from the day they landed; very soon bunks were put up in their rooms and they think that everything has been done for their comfort. I have never heard a complaint from anyone of them.”²³ To his credit, only thirteen prisoners perished on Georges Island over the course of the entire war, largely a result of the humane policies of Colonel Dimick.

Liberty or Treason?

While many of the prisoners at Fort Warren were paroled in late 1861 and early 1862, Gordon was not to gain his freedom so easily. One Federal communication from November 1861 avowed that Gordon was “a dangerous man.”²⁴ Fort Warren would be Gordon's home for the next six months and he constantly suffered from anxiety concerning his fate and separation from his family. He wrote vividly that “there is scarcely a night that I do not dream of home and I...face the deepest disappointment when I wake up and find the delightful sensation of home...disappear leaving only the walls...to remind me of the distance...between me and those whom I most love.”²⁵ Gordon's letters are also important because they provide glimpses of important historical events. In November 1861, two high profile prisoners, James Mason and John Slidell, arrived at the fort. They had traveled on board the *Trent*, a British ship, as Confederate diplomats on their way to Europe when they were captured by Union sailors and incarcerated in Boston. Known as the “Trent Affair,” this incident caused an uproar in Great Britain, who threatened to retaliate with a military invasion from Canada. As Gordon indicates, however, the diplomats were released from Federal custody to avoid further controversy in January 1862.

Josiah Gordon's letters also reveal that life as a political prisoner at Fort Warren was not always unpleasant. For the prisoner's New Year's Eve celebration at the close calamitous 1861, Gordon fondly told his wife “the punch was prepared in good order...and as it was all drunk up very soon I think that was the best compliment to the mutton. But my dear you must not think we are indulging too much for a pitcher of punch to go very far among forty or fifty persons. It serves as only a remembrance of the season.”²⁶ It is also clear that Federal suspicions of his Confederate sympathies were by and large true. He was by no means reluctant to express his political opinions. In reference to the Lincoln administration, Gordon wrote that “no government ever did or ever can exist on principles of constitutional liberty after the masses have become totally corrupt as to surrender their rights to a usurper at his mere request.”²⁷

Executive Order No. 2

Regardless of his political convictions, the fact remains that the constitutional rights of Josiah Gordon and hundreds of other civilians were undeniably violated during the first year of the war, by imprisoning them at length without trial. In early 1862, however, significant changes within the Lincoln administration would have an impact the fate of political or “state” prisoners as they were called. In January 1862, Lincoln replaced Secretary of War Simon Cameron with Edwin Stanton, who in February issued Executive Order No. 2. This order created a special commission to examine the cases of

political prisoners and determine if they should be released from Federal custody.²⁸ In April, Gordon sent a passionate letter to Stanton directly, detailing the injustices he had suffered, and making a convincing legal argument in his own favor.²⁹ It proved to be quite persuasive.

On April 27, 1862, Gordon wrote “it is three weeks today since my letter was sent to the Sec. of War to the present I have had no reply. I presume he had referred it to Dix...as they are coming here as the papers tell to examine...our cases.”³⁰ Events proceeded as he predicted, and on May 7, 1862, General John Dix and Edwards Pierrepont, the primary commissioners, ordered Colonel Dimick to release Josiah Gordon.³¹ His exact whereabouts for the remainder of the Civil War are unknown, but after the war, Gordon remained prominent in Maryland politics, becoming President of the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal in 1869. In 1880, Gordon had a law firm with his son, and in 1883 he began serving as an Associate Judge of the Circuit Court of Alleghany County until his death in 1887 at the age of seventy-one.³² Today, Josiah Gordon’s home in Cumberland, Maryland, has been restored and serves as the home of the Alleghany County Historical Society.³³

Notes

1. James W Thomas, *History of Alleghany County, Maryland*, (L.R. Titworth & Company, 1923) p. 301. Also see Albert L. Feldstein, *Gone But Not Forgotten: A Biographical Graveside Tribute to Historic Alleghany County Figures...* (Cumberland, Maryland: Commercial Printing Press; 1988) p. 8.
2. Catherine, Drinker Bowen, *Miracle at Philadelphia: The Story of the Constitutional Convention* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1986) p. 174.
3. Richard H. Sewall, *A House Divided: Sectionalism & Civil War, 1848-1865* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1993) p. 20.
4. Andrew DelBanco, Ed., *The Portable Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993) p. 176.
5. Richard H. Sewall, *A House Divided: Sectionalism and the Civil War, 1848-1865* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. Press, 1993) p. 76.
6. It is interesting to note that Josiah Gordon was a Southern Democratic with, as we shall see, secessionist sentiments, he represented Alleghany County, in the northwest section of Maryland.
7. David H. Donald, *Liberty and Union* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1978) pp. 92-94.
8. Michael Morgan, “The Beast at His Best,” *Civil War Times Illustrated* (February 2004), 24-31.
9. Morgan, 26.
10. Mark E. Neely, *The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties* (New York: Oxford U. Press, 1991) 4.
11. David H. Donald, *Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995) p. 299.
12. *Journal of the Proceedings of the Maryland House of Delegates, In Extra Session*, (Volume 430, pp. 21-22). These legislative records are available online at <http://www.mdarchives.state.md.us/>
13. *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1899) Series 1, Volume II, pp. 601-602. The entire series of volumes is now available on the Internet in a searchable format at <http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/moa/index.html>.
14. *Journal of the Proceedings of the Maryland House of Delegates, In Extra Session, 1861* (Volume 430, 108).
15. Donald E. Fehrenbacher Ed., *Abraham Lincoln: Speeches and Writings, 1859-1865* (New York: Viking Press, 1989) pp. 251-252.

16. *Journal of the Proceedings of the Maryland House of Delegates, In Extra Session, 1861* (Volume 430, 366).
17. *Official Records*, Series I, Volume V, p. 193.
18. *Official Records*, Series I, Volume V, pp. 194-195.
19. Emanuel Raymond Lewis, *Seacoast Fortifications of the United States: An Introductory History* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1979) pp. 37, 90.
20. *Official Records*, Series III, Volume I, p. 47.
21. George Kimball, "Origin of the John Brown Song," *The New England Magazine* (December 1889) p. 371.
22. Lonnie Speer, *Portals to Hell: Military Prisons of the Civil War* (Stackpole Books, 1997) p. 42.
23. *Official Records*, Series II, Volume II, p. 142.
24. *Official Records*, Series II, Volume I, p. 713.
25. Josiah Gordon to Robert H. Gordon, January 12 1862, *Josiah H. Gordon Papers* (M-2886.3), William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan Ann Arbor.
26. Josiah Gordon to Catherine Gordon, January 1 1862, *Josiah H. Gordon Papers* (M-2886.3), William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan Ann Arbor.
27. Josiah Gordon to Catherine Gordon, January 7 1862, *Josiah H. Gordon Papers* (M-2886.3), William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan Ann Arbor.
28. *Official Records*, Series II, Volume II, p. 249.
29. Josiah Gordon to Kate Gordon, April 27 1862, *Josiah H. Gordon Papers* (M-2886.3), William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan Ann Arbor.
30. *Official Records*, Series II, Volume I, pp. 744-747.
31. *Official Records*, Series II, Volume I, p. 748.
32. *The Maryland Directory* (1880), and James W Thomas, *History of Alleghany County, Maryland*, (L.R. Titsworth & Company, 1923) p. 301.
33. A virtual tour of the house is on-line at <http://historyhouse.allconet.org/>

Fort Warren Orientation

Following the War of 1812 with Great Britain, the United States government was trying to determine how best to protect its coastal cities from a future naval invasion. To solve this problem, a group of military officers devised the Third System of fortifications and supervised the construction of a series of forts on the Eastern Seaboard from 1817 until 1870. Today, Fort Warren stands as an excellent surviving example of Third System design. But considering there are many islands in Boston Harbor, why was Georges Island chosen over the other islands to be the site of such a monumental structure? To answer this question, we have to take a crash course in geology. The islands of Boston Harbor were formed as drumlins or hills some 20,000 years ago underneath the massive glacial ice sheet. When the last Ice Age came to a close, the rising waters of the Atlantic Ocean slowly surrounded the hills about 5,000 years ago. As a result of these enormous geologic processes, Georges Island happened to sit at the crossroads of two naturally deep channels or valleys in what became Boston Harbor. When Boston became one of the most prosperous ports in North America during the Colonial period, these channels became strategically important to both commerce and harbor defense. Fort Warren was designed and built during the nineteenth century to command the main entrances to Boston Harbor, known as Nantasket Roads and the Narrows.

Colonel Sylvanus Thayer, a graduate of West Point and officer in the Corps of Engineers, supervised the construction of Fort Warren beginning in 1834. Granite was quarried locally in Quincy and Cape Ann, and the rough blocks were shipped across the harbor and chiseled by hand on the island. Like most forts built during the antebellum period, Fort Warren is pentagonal (five-sided) and has five points or bastions with walls up to eight feet thick. In December 1861, one newspaper rated Fort Warren as “the most formidable work of defense in the United States.”² The design of the fort, novel for the 19th century, allowed for multiple tiers of 32 pounder guns and 10-inch Rodman cannon to maximize firepower by using protected masonry enclosures known as *casemates*. Some defensive features of Fort Warren, however, had been in use since the medieval period, including *loopholes*, small angled slits cut in the granite that protected an armed soldier but gave them a wide firing range. On top of the casemates is a flat area called the *ramparts* or *terreplein*, on which sat the second tier of powerful Rodman guns that were removed long ago. Above that is the *parapet*, an earthwork designed to protect artilleryists from enemy fire. Additional defensive features of Fort Warren include the guardhouse, which served as the fort’s primary checkpoint, the *coverface*, a large mound of earth outside the fort’s walls designed to absorb enemy fire. Perhaps the most noticeable feature of the fort is the *demi-lune*, a granite structure shaped like a half-circle that was designed to defend the main entrance.

The *sallyport* served as the main entrance to the fort, and was protected by a drawbridge and a massive portcullis³ gate that unfortunately is no longer in place. The inner set of heavy oak doors date to the 19th century. The date “1850,” which can be read above the entrance to the sallyport, refers to the completion of that particular section, but

² *Harper’s Weekly: Journal of Civilization*, December 7 1861.

³ An iron or steel grate suspended to block passage in a fort or castle.

construction of the fort was still going on ten years later.⁴ It is worth noting that Josiah Gordon's room as a prisoner has not been precisely identified, but it was probably located to the left of the sallyport in the section known as the "historic quarters," which was also home to Mason and Slidell and other political prisoners. In addition to hundreds of Confederate prisoners, the fort was also home to a sizeable garrison of around 400 federal troops.⁵ A steady supply of foodstuffs was an absolute necessity, and the *bakery* at Fort Warren turned out fresh bread and hardtack, in addition to the beef, salt pork, potatoes, carrots, peas, and beans that were common staples of the meals at the fort during the Civil War. The enclosed five-acre *parade ground* was used as a training area for soldiers and inspections full of pomp and circumstance. The granite building on the parade ground was completed during the Civil War and served as a *powder magazine*, designed explicitly to safeguard the huge stores of gunpowder and ammunition, protected by a granite wall and brick lining.⁶

While most of the fort is constructed primarily of granite and brick, there are also a number of deteriorating concrete bunkers and gun batteries that date from the first half of the twentieth century. These structures illustrate significant changes in both harbor defense strategy and military technology that occurred during the post-Civil War period. Although Fort Warren was never tested in combat, it served the state and the nation admirably as an active military post from the Civil War through World War II.

Terms

Bastion: Each point of the star-shaped design of Fort Warren is called a bastion.

Coverface: Large man-made mounds of earth that were built to protect the fort from enemy fire.

Casemate: Large stone and brick enclosure that protected cannon and allowed for maximum range and protection from enemy fire. Casemates also provided space for soldier's quarters and supplies.

Demi-Lune: A defensive granite structure shaped like a half-moon located outside the fort's main walls to provide extra defense.

Loopholes: Narrow angled windows in the granite walls of the fort designed to give soldiers with muskets inside an advantage.

Magazine: A building specifically designed to store gunpowder and ammunition and protect it from accidental explosion

Parapet: A protective earthwork on the outside edge of the terreplein.

Parade Ground: Open grassy area in the center of the fort that was used for drilling and dress parades by soldiers.

Ramparts: Area on top of the casemates and location of the second tier of cannons at Fort Warren.

Sallyport: The entrance to the fort that was guarded by a drawbridge and portcullis gate.

⁴According to an issue of *Harper's Weekly* from December 7, 1861, work on Fort Warren began in 1833 and "continued until 1858, when operations were suspended by a failure of Congress to make the necessary appropriations."

⁵*Official Records*, Series III, Volume I, p. 627.

⁶ Another powder magazine at the fort is adjacent to the bakery, and is lined with wood.

Pre-Visit Activity: “A House Divided”: Maryland and the Secession Crisis
Suggested Length: 1-2 45 minute class periods

In the first activity students will read together a script/timeline combining various historical documents that will guide them chronologically through the Secession Crisis of 1860-61, the outbreak of the Civil War, and the decision by Federal officials to arrest members of the Maryland Legislature in September 1861. Teachers can assign specific roles or quotes to students, or they can pick a name out of a hat to add a little excitement. The success of this activity depends on the students’ enthusiasm and their ability to understand cause and effect and make connections between events with your help. Remind the students that all the quotes in this activity come from primary sources, so in a sense they will be recreating events as they actually happened. This point may serve as a perfect time to discuss and make sure students understand the difference between primary and secondary sources. Most importantly, before students study what life was like at Fort Warren, they need to understand the concept of *habeas corpus*, why Maryland was particularly crucial to the Union Cause, and why Josiah Gordon was arrested. Using a map during this activity to identify the proximity of important locations may be helpful for students. Gordon’s first letter from Fort Warren will help segue your class into preparing for their trip to Fort Warren. At the end of this activity, students should complete the post-activity question sheet to make sure they grasp the most important concepts.

Pre-Visit Activity

“A House Divided”

An Interactive Timeline of the Secession Crisis and the Coming of the Civil War

Josiah H. Gordon was born near Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, in 1816, and moved to Cumberland, Maryland, as a young man. Like Abraham Lincoln, he was a successful lawyer and an aspiring politician. But in 1860 Lincoln and Gordon found themselves in the middle of an extraordinary crisis that would nearly destroy their country and change their lives forever. This timeline is designed to introduce you to the world of Josiah Gordon and how and why he became a prisoner at Fort Warren on Georges Island during the Civil War.

1834: Construction begins on Georges Island in Boston Harbor to build Fort Warren, named in honor of Dr. Joseph Warren who died at the Battle of Bunker Hill in 1775.

1859: After practicing law in Cumberland, Maryland, beginning during the 1840s, Josiah Gordon was elected as the representative of Alleghany County to the Maryland House of Delegates in Annapolis in the eastern section of that state.

November 6, 1860: Abraham Lincoln is elected President of the United States, even though he did not even appear on the ballot in ten slave states.

November 1860: The *Atlanta Confederacy* newspaper makes a bold declaration about their reaction to Lincoln’s victory:

Let the consequences be what they may—whether the Potomac is crimsoned in human gore, and Pennsylvania Avenue is paved ten fathoms in depth with mangled bodies, or whether the last vestige of liberty is swept from the American continent, the South will never submit to such humiliation and degradation as the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln.⁷

December 20, 1860: On this date, delegates met in Charleston, South Carolina, to decide whether their state should withdraw from the Union. They voted unanimously to pass an Ordinance of Secession, also passed by ten other states in the following months, to form the Confederate States of America:

We, the people of the State of South Carolina, in convention assembled, do declare and ordain...that the ordinance adopted by us...in the year of our lord [1788] whereby the Constitution of the United States was ratified...are hereby repealed; and that the union now subsisting between South Carolina and other States, under the name of the “United States of America,” is hereby dissolved.⁸

⁷ Richard H. Sewell, *A House Divided: Sectionalism and the Civil War, 1848-1865* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. Press, 1993) p. 76.

⁸ Various historical documents from South Carolina history are online at <http://www.sciway.net/hist/documents.html>.

March 4, 1861: Under very stressful conditions, on this day Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated as the 16th President of a nation that was being torn apart. In his first speech to Americans, he asked them to reconsider their actions:

In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you. You can have no conflict, without being the aggressors. I am loth to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and every patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land, will yet swell to the chorus of Union when again touched...by the better angels of our nature.⁹

March 11, 1861: Lincoln's plea for reconciliation was ignored and on this day, the Constitution of the Confederate States of America was ratified by eight states. These were Mississippi, Alabama, North and South Carolina, Louisiana, Florida, Texas, and Georgia, although Virginia, Tennessee, and Arkansas would join later. The following passage is the preamble of that controversial document:

We, the people of the Confederate states, each State acting in its sovereign and independent character, in order to form a permanent federal government, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity...do ordain and establish this Constitution for the Confederate States of America.¹⁰

April 13, 1861: The spark that ignited the bloody war between the United States and the Confederate States began over the possession of Fort Sumter, located in the harbor of Charleston, South Carolina. On the night of April 12th, the Confederates began attacking the fort, and in the following note, Confederate commander Pierre Gustav Beauregard informs the Confederate President Jefferson Davis that the Federal commander, Major Robert Anderson, is ready to surrender:

**President Jeff. Davis, Montgomery, Alabama:
Quarters in Sumter all burned down. White flag up. Have sent a boat to receive surrender.**¹¹

⁹ Andrew DelBanco, Ed. *The Portable Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Penguin Books, 199, p. 204.

¹⁰ Both the full texts of the United States and Confederate Constitutions are online at <http://www.usconstitution.net/>.

¹¹ *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1899) Series I, Volume I, p. 309.

April 15, 1861: Responding to what was viewed as an aggressive act against the United States, President Lincoln called upon loyal citizens to preserve the Union in the following proclamation:

Now, therefore, I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States...hereby do call forth, the militia of several States of the Union, to the...number of 75,000, in order...to cause the laws to be duly executed. I appeal to all the loyal citizens to favor, facilitate, and aid this effort to maintain the honor, the integrity, and the existence of our National Union, and the perpetuity of popular government, and to redress wrongs already long enough endured.¹²

April 19, 1861: Maryland was crucial to the Union cause because important railroads that connected Washington to the North went through that state. Only four days after the President's call for troops, the 6th Massachusetts Regiment was marching through Baltimore on their way to Washington when they were attacked by an armed mob of Confederate sympathizers. In the bloody aftermath, four Union soldiers and twelve civilians lay dead, and other Marylanders burnt down several railroad bridges that allowed Union troops transport through the city. In a letter to the President, the Mayor of Baltimore, George William Brown, could not guarantee the loyalty of the residents of his city:

Sir...The authorities of this city did their best today to protect both strangers and citizens...but in vain; and but for the great efforts a fearful slaughter would have occurred. Under these circumstances it is my solemn duty to inform you that it is not possible for more soldiers to pass through Baltimore unless they fight their way every step. If they should attempt it the responsibility for the blood shed will not rest upon me.¹³

April 25, 1861: Worried about the security of Washington, President Lincoln ordered Lieutenant-General Winfield Scott to make sure the Maryland Legislature did not pass an act of secession as other state governments had done:

My Dear Sir: The Maryland Legislature assembles tomorrow...and, not improbably will take action to arm the people of that State against the United States. The question has been...considered by me, whether it would not be justifiable...for you...to arrest, or disperse members of that body. I think it would *not* be justifiable, nor efficient for the desired object. First they have a clearly legal right to assemble...Secondly we can not permanently prevent their action. If we arrest them, we can not long hold them as prisoners; and when liberated they will immediately re-assemble, and take their action. I therefore conclude that it is...left to the commanding General to watch and await their action, which if it shall be to arm their people against the United States, he is to adopt the most prompt and efficient means to counteract...and in the extremest necessity, the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus.¹⁴

¹² *Official Records*, Series III, Volume I, pp. 67-68.

¹³ *Official Records*, Series II, Volume I, p. 564.

¹⁴ DelBanco, pp. 206-207.

April 27, 1861: Article I, Section Nine of the Constitution states that “the privilege of the Writ of Habeas Corpus shall not be suspended, unless in Cases of Rebellion or Invasion the public safety may require it.” In Latin, the term *habeas corpus* translates literally into “you have the body.” This means that a judge must summon a defendant to determine if the criminal charges against them are lawful and sufficient to conduct a trial. If the charges and evidence are proven to be inadmissible in court, then a person must be set free. Suspending this “privilege” meant that a person could be arrested and imprisoned for an indefinite amount of time by Federal authorities without a thorough examination of the circumstances. After the terrible violence in Baltimore, the Governor of Maryland convened a special session of the state legislature to deal with the crisis. On this day, members of the Maryland House of Delegates, including Josiah Gordon, gathered in Frederick, Maryland, to avoid Federal troops stationed in the eastern section of the state. The following passage is from the legislative records:

Ordered, by the House of Delegates of Maryland, that a special committee to consist of five persons, be appointed...to prepare and report an Act to provide for the call of a Sovereign Convention of the people of Maryland...and do what may be necessary for the honor and safety of the State of Maryland;Which was adopted, and Messrs. Scott, Dennis, Long, Goldsborough, and Gordon constituted said committee.¹⁵

April 29, 1861: While chaos was raging across the southern half of the nation, the Northern states were also working busily to prepare for war. In Massachusetts, Governor John Andrew was worried about the defense of the city against a possible attack by Confederate forces. On April 29th, the first troops were sent to occupy Fort Warren on Georges Island in Boston Harbor. One soldier, George Kimball, wrote the following description:

We found the great fortress in wretched state, very much as its builders had left it, with huge piles of earth, brick, and stone encumbering its broad parade ground...Immediately upon our arrival we went to work...to place it in proper condition.¹⁶

May 9, 1861: In another session of the Maryland House of Delegates, the anti-Federal feelings in Maryland were evident in a report written by the Committee on Federal Relations. Over fifty members accepted the following passage, including Josiah Gordon:

Whereas, in the judgement of the General Assembly of Maryland, the war now waged by the Government of the United States is unconstitutional in its origin, purposes and conduct...subversive of the free principles upon which the Federal Union was founded, and certain to result in the hopeless and

¹⁰ *Journal of the Proceedings of the Maryland House of Delegates, In Extra Session*, Volume 430, p. 9.

¹¹ George Kimball, “Origin of the John Brown Song,” *The New England Magazine* (December 1889) p. 371.

bloody overthrow of our existing institutions. Resolved that the State of Maryland desires the peaceful and immediate recognition of the independence of the Confederate States...entertaining the profound conviction that the willing return of the Southern people to their former relations is a thing beyond hope, and that the attempt to coerce them will only add slaughter and hate to impossibility.¹⁷

July 4, 1861: President Lincoln convened a special session of Congress to meet on the anniversary of American independence as a symbolic act. His message however was anything but symbolic, and revealed that he was determined to maintain and preserve the Union no matter what it took, including suspending civil liberties guaranteed in the Constitution. He said:

In this act, discarding all else, they have forced upon our country the distinct issue: “Immediate dissolution, or blood.” And this issue embraces more than the fate of these United States. It presents to the whole family of man, the question whether a constitutional republic or democracy...can, or cannot maintain its territorial integrity against its own domestic foes. To state the question more directly, are all the laws, *but one*, to go unexecuted, and the government itself go to pieces, lest one be violated? The provision of the Constitution that “the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus shall not be suspended unless when, in cases of rebellion or invasion, the public safety may require it” is equivalent to a provision...that...the public safety *does* require it.¹⁸

August 5, 1861: During the summer of 1861, Federal authorities placed most of Maryland under martial law, or military control, and arrested a number of people who were thought to be a threat to the Union. This pushed members of the Maryland Legislature, including Josiah Gordon, closer to siding with the Confederacy, as this report shows. The following passage, known as the Wallis Resolutions, was passed by a forty-three to seven vote in the Maryland House of Delegates:

And Whereas Charles Howard, William Gatchell, and John W. Davis...Police Commissioners, having been arrested by orders...of the army of the United States, and imprisoned...without oath, warrant...or lawful cause disclosed or trial had...at the arbitrary pleasure of the President of the United States and officers under him...in criminal violation of the plainest and dearest rights to which American were born; now therefore, it is resolved...that we appeal...to the whole country...to taking warning...and come to the rescue of the free institutions of the Republic...¹⁹

¹⁷ *Journal of the Proceedings of the Maryland House of Delegates, In Extra Session, Volume 430, pp. 107-108.*

¹⁸ DelBanco, pp. 213, 216.

¹⁹ *Journal of the Proceedings of the Maryland House of Delegates, In Extra Session, Volume 430, pp. 366.*

September 11, 1861: After the success of the resolution above, Union officials were convinced that the Maryland Legislature would attempt to pass an Ordinance of Secession at their next session on September 17th in Frederick, Maryland. Simon Cameron, Lincoln's Secretary of War, sent out the following note to General Nathaniel Banks, ordering him to prevent that from happening:

The passage of any act of secession by the legislature of Maryland must be prevented. If necessary, all or any part of the members must be arrested. Exercise your own judgement as to the time and manner, but do the work effectively.²⁰

September 20, 1861: General Banks carried out his orders to arrest Maryland politicians very effectively, as this letter to his superiors illustrates:

I have the honor to report, in obedience to the Secretary of War...that all the members of the Maryland Legislature assembled at Frederick...on the 17th known or suspected to be disloyal in their relations to the Government have been arrested. The names of the parties arrested and disposed of were as follows...William R. Miller, Thomas Clagget, Josiah H. Gordon, Alleghany County...²¹

September 1861: As the number of prisoners arrested by Federal soldiers grew, they had to find somewhere to put all of them. As Fort Warren was occupied only by a small number of Union soldiers, Thomas Scott of the War Department contacted John Andrew, the Governor of Massachusetts, about using fort as a prison in this letter:

Please inform this dept. whether you can furnish a volunteer company...in charge of an intelligent officer to take command at Fort Warren on Boston Harbor- the special object being to guard...prisoners that will be transferred from Fort Lafayette to Fort Warren.²²

September 27, 1861: After Josiah Gordon was arrested he was shipped up to New York, and Federal officials wanted to make sure they had imprisoned him and others with justifiable cause. A letter from Union officer Morris Copeland to General Banks describes his impressions of Mr. Gordon, which sealed his fate:

In reply to your inquiry, I will state the substance of the conversation between Mr. Gordon and myself. I expressed regret that any men should have been so foolish as to...hold the legislative session at that time. He said he should not pretend to disguise the fact he had always sympathized with the secessionists; that he was connected and interested with the South but that he did not mean to aid in passing any dangerous resolves at the...session of the Legislature.²³

²⁰ *Official Records*, Series I, Volume V, p. 193.

²¹ *Official Records*, Series I, Volume V, p. 196.

²² Massachusetts Archives, Executive Letters, Series 567X, Volume 10.

²³ *Official Records*, Series II, Volume I, pp. 692-693.

October 2, 1861: Thomas Hicks, the Governor of Maryland, also wrote a brief letter to General Banks about Josiah Gordon that did not help his case:

In regards to case of Mr. Gordon, member of House of Delegates...He is considered ultra by those who know better than I do. The effect produced by recent arrests made are marked for good. Mr. Gordon has made himself so obnoxious to the Union men of Cumberland (his home) that they refuse to let him return.²⁴

October 17, 1861: Plans were made to prepare Fort Warren to hold prisoners as soon as possible. The following message from Thomas Scott of the War Department to Governor Andrew decided the significance of the fort during the Civil War:

You are hereby authorized to raise a battalion of...infantry...to be stationed at the fort named above named as a garrison and guard...by the War Department. There will be no necessity for having a major sworn in as Brevet Colonel Dimick...will be ordered to command at Fort Warren.²⁵

November 1st, 1861: On this day, the first boatload of nearly 800 prisoners, including Josiah Gordon, arrived at Fort Warren. This is first of many letters he would write to his family in Maryland from Georges Island in Boston Harbor:

My dear wife,

I wrote to you on Monday informing you of my expected removal to this place and accordingly we started on board the steamer the *State of Maine*. This fort is a new one; the rooms well furnished and quite comfortable. We have not got all our furniture yet but from the cleverness of the officers I have no doubt we will be well taken care of. Our quarters are much more comfortable than they were at Fort Lafayette. Write at once and direct your letters to me in care of Col. Dimick Fort Warren Boston. My love and kisses to all the dear ones.

**Your ever devoted husband,
JH Gordon²⁶**

²⁴ *Official Records*, Series II, Volume I, p. 693.

²⁵ *Official Records*, Series II, Volume II, p. 53.

²⁶ Josiah Gordon to Kate Gordon, November 1 1862, *Josiah H. Gordon Papers* (M-2886.3), William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan Ann Arbor.

Pre-Visit Activity Review Work Sheet

Use what you learned in the timeline activity to answer these questions.

- 1. When did construction begin on Fort Warren in Boston Harbor and what island was it built on?**

- 2. How did the writer from the *Atlanta Confederacy* feel about the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860?**

- 3. What did the President tell Americans in his first address and did Southerners follow his advice?**

- 4. Why was President Lincoln so concerned about the actions of the Maryland Legislature in 1861, and why is the term *habeas corpus* important?**

- 5. According to the documents in the timeline, how did Josiah Gordon and other members of the Maryland House of Delegates feel towards the Federal Government?**

- 6. According to Federal authorities, why was Josiah Gordon arrested?**

- 7. What did people who knew Josiah Gordon say about him?**

- 8. What were Mr. Gordon's first impressions of Fort Warren?**

Field Activity: Life at Fort Warren (Field Trip)**Suggested Length: Approximately 120 Minutes (Time on island not including travel time)**

This activity is designed to help students learn why a fort was built on Georges Island, identify the different sections of Fort Warren, and use Josiah Gordon's letters to learn what life was like there during the Civil War. Before arriving on Georges Island, students can be divided into eight groups and each group will be assigned to identify a section of the fort and understand its significance in the overall design of Fort Warren, using the interpretive signs at the fort. Each group will also be asked to read a different letter written by Josiah Gordon to read and answer the accompanying questions. Once they arrive on the island, your class should check in with the ranger on duty or the volunteer who should be stationed at the gray booth next to the brick building. They should be able to provide you with extra maps of the fort and provide the group with a brief orientation, before the students conduct the necessary research to complete their assignments. As a wrap-up activity, the groups will come together in the parade ground. Each group will present their section of the fort and also read an excerpt from a Josiah Gordon letter they found particularly interesting. If there are time constraints, this wrap-up activity can be done in the classroom after the field trip to Georges Island. During each group presentation, the other students should maintain a list of each term they learn about, as well as jot down some general notes about the letters they heard.

At the end of their day at Georges Island, students should understand the design of Fort Warren and what life was like for a prisoner at Fort Warren. (The goal of this program is to engage students in learning instead of having them walk around on a guided tour.) But remind students that Fort Warren is a nationally significant historic site and should be treated with the proper care and respect so future generations may enjoy its grandeur and history. As at many other historic sites, visitors must observe safety regulations on the island and behave appropriately and maturely. If you are planning a trip to Fort Warren in the spring or fall, remember that Georges Island is about five miles from the city and often cooler in temperature, so an extra shirt or jacket and appropriate shoes or comfortable sneakers (not sandals or flip-flops) are strongly recommended.

On-Site Activity
Exploring Fort Warren
Group 1

Your group's first task is to find the *sallyport* at Fort Warren, answer the questions below, and be prepared to present your answers to the rest of the class.

1. Where is the *sallyport* located at Fort Warren?
2. What is the purpose of the *sallyport* and why is it important to the fort?

Your second task is to read an original letter written by Josiah Gordon at Fort Warren, and answer the questions that follow. Make sure you read the footnote at the bottom of the page that will provide some important information. Remember, pick a section of the letter your group finds interesting to read to the rest of your class and explain what you learned.

Fort Warren ~~Dec~~ Jan 1st 1862

My dear dear wife,

I wrote to you a letter last night giving an account of the manner in which we were spending New Years Eve in prison but as I had to close my letter and brew a pitcher of punch, I did not get through the performances of the evening. I will therefore try to close up the account of the old year while the new one is still young and the events of the old still fresh upon my memory.

Well the punch was prepared in good order and pronounced fine and as it was all drunk up very soon I think that was the best compliment to the mutton. Mr. Alvey proposed to make a pitcher and after drinking that I had to try my hand again. But my dear you must not think we are indulging too much for a pitcher of punch don't go very far among forty or fifty persons. It only serves to keep a remembrance of the season.

This morning about 9 o'clock we were all aroused by the announcement that a messenger had arrived from Washington for the purpose of delivering Mason & Slidell and their secretaries over to the British authorities.²⁷ And consequently they were

²⁷ On November 24, 1861, James Mason of Virginia and John Slidell of Louisiana arrived as political prisoners at Fort Warren. Both men had been sent to Europe as diplomats for the Confederate Government on the *Trent*, a British ship, when they were captured by Union sailors of the U.S.S *San Jacinto*. As a result, the British government created a political furor, threatening President Abraham Lincoln with war, and sent 8,000 troops on their way to Canada. In order to dispel this awkward and explosive situation, Lincoln had the two men released from their imprisonment in Boston Harbor in January of 1862, writing with a touch of humor "one war at a time."

ordered to pack up and go. And as they were quite willing to change their condition and take the protection of the British Lion rather than the American Eagle...

Of course, they were not slack in rendering obedience to the order.

The morning was cloudy and everything about the fort was somber here except the faces of those whose sympathies with the departing captives, and nothing but the bayonets of the garrison prevented the outburst of applause as they passed through the sally port on their way to the vessel that was to receive them. Prudence however is always commendable and it was properly observed on this occasion by all.

The day was passed very quietly in the usual way except so far as the excitement of the morning gave rise to discussion and speculations as to the effect to be produced by the surrender by those gentlemen on the foreign and domestic relations of the Government at Washington. And as is usually the case when grave matters of the kind are discussed there was quite a diversity of opinion among the discussants.

Love and a happy New Year to all...and believe me ever your devoted husband,
JH Gordon

Questions

1. How did Josiah Gordon and his friends spend New Year's Eve at Fort Warren? Does it surprise you?

2. According to Mr. Gordon's letter, what happened at Fort Warren on New Year's Day?

3. How did the Southern prisoners react to the release of Mason & Slidell?

On-Site Activity
Exploring Fort Warren
Group 2

Your group's first task is to find the *parade ground* at Fort Warren, answer the questions below, and be prepared to present the information to the rest of the group. Then go on to the next activity.

- 1. Where is the *parade ground* located at Fort Warren?**

- 2. What was the *parade ground* used for at the fort?**

Your second task is to read an original letter written by Josiah Gordon at Fort Warren, and answer the questions that follow. Make sure you read the footnote at the bottom of the page that will provide important information. Remember, pick a section of the letter your group finds interesting to read to the rest of your class and explain what you learned.

Fort Warren Jan 12th 1862

Master Robert H. Gordon,

My dear little son, it is several weeks since I last wrote to you and I fear you begin to fear slighted by my neglect, as you have not written to me as frequently of late as you did formerly. I observed too that your last letters were not so well written nor so well spelled as some of the previous ones, and my suggestions on that subject did not have the effect of correcting you as...thoroughly as that I hoped they would.

I presume though you were very much engaged during the holidays, with you shooting crackers and other play things, and I am therefore disposed to make some excuse for you, hoping you will have time to think of your Pa Pa occasionally now since those interesting amusements are over. I am sure you don't intend to neglect me and deprive me of the pleasure which I always derive from your letters, especially those in which you give me the home news describing your amusements with your playmates and with Charley and dear little Fannie.

There is nothing that interests me as much as home and my dear little children, and there is scarcely a night that I do not dream of home and I frequently face the deepest disappointment when I wake up and find the delightful sensation of home and all its pleasures disappear leaving only the walls and its surroundings to remind me of the distance that intervenes between me and those whom I most love.

On-Site Activity
Exploring Fort Warren
Group 3

Your first task is to find the *coverface* at Fort Warren, answer the questions below, and be prepared to present the information to the rest of the group. Then go on to the next activity.

1. Where is the *coverface* located at the fort?

2. What is the purpose of the *coverface*?

Your second task is to read an original letter written by Josiah Gordon at Fort Warren, and answer the questions that follow. Remember, pick a section of the letter your group finds interesting to read to the rest of your class and explain what you learned.

Fort Warren Jan. 26th 1862

My dear wife,

This has been another very dull and uninteresting day. Although the weather cleared up again last night and let the sun shine out this morning, but the wind only changed around to a different point of the compass, and continued its angry howl as fiercely as ever, round our close and safe retreat throughout the day causing some apprehension that the boat would be able to land, and that we would not get our mail.

In that respect, however, we were fortunate, for about 3 o'clock, we heard the familiar sound of the whistle and soon after our newspapers and letters were brought to our rooms and distributed.

I suppose the children have grown considerably since I saw them. Only to think my dear, it is five months this evening since I last saw you. It is hard to realize I have been cooped up so long, and yet time has passed away very rapidly to me notwithstanding our separation.

I was glad to receive the article copied by you from the St. Mary's paper, although I had seen it previously in the paper which is received here by Mr. Darant of St. Mary's who is one of our fellow prisoners. I was glad to see that one of her delegates in the Legislature had the manliness to "cry alone and spurn not" even with the terrors of Fort Warren hanging over his head.

We had the Episcopal service as usual today and a very excellent sermon. The balance of the day I have tried to put in as profitably as possible by reading a portion of the scriptures and a sermon. We are well supplied with good Sunday reading and I assure you the day is much more well spent then most persons could believe by the prisoners who are regarded by this punitive government as unfit associates for a loyal community.

Time will come though, when the wheat and the chaff will be separated, and honest integrity will find its reward and approval in the records of history. And when that time does come, the whelps who snarl and growl at the heels of honest men and try to slander and abuse them will be driven from all association with them and regarded as the real traitors to their country just as the Torys of the Revolution of '76 have been tabooed for their cowardly and unmanly adherence to the British Government of that day.

But my dear I must close again with a happy good night and may God watch over and keep you is the prayer of your devoted husband

JH Gordon

Questions

- 1. According to Gordon's letter, how did the prisoners at Fort Warren receive their mail and was it important to them?**
- 2. What did Mr. Gordon and his fellow prisoners do on Sundays?**
- 3. How does Gordon think the prisoners will be remembered in the future, as people during the 1800s remembered the American Revolution?**

On-Site Activity
Exploring Fort Warren
Group 4

Your group's task is to find the *demi-lune* at Fort Warren, answer the questions below and be prepared to share this information with the rest of the group. Then go on to the next activity.

- 1. Where is the *demi-lune* located at Fort Warren?**

- 2. What do the words *demi-lune* mean, and what was this building used for at Fort Warren?**

Your second task is to read an original letter written by Josiah Gordon at Fort Warren, and answer the questions that follow. Remember, pick a section of the letter your group finds interesting to read to the rest of your class and explain what you learned.

Fort Warren March 1st 1862

My dear dear wife,

The last of the last winter month is gone. And in some respects it has been a very long dreary winter, while in others it has passed away with the rapidity of a dream. When I think of home and the dear ones who are far from me time drags like an immense chain, its very weight wearing the flesh from bones and ready to crush me. But when I think of the matters and things passing around me, and the occupation of its hours and days here with my kind and agreeable companions and the little that I get done even when I try to accomplish something, it appears to pass away with great rapidity.

We generally wake about 7 in the morning when our servant comes into the room to make the fire. After the room gets warm enough we rise, dress and get ready for breakfast which is ready at ½ past eight. After breakfast we promenade in front of our quarters about an hour then retire to our rooms and read till twelve, when the boat arrives with our mail. We then read the news and letters and converse on them till dinner which is ready at 3. After dinner we read a while again then take exercise again till sundown at which time the drum beats retreat and we retire to our rooms for the night. About 7 o'clock we have a cup of tea in our rooms and our neighbors call in and enjoy the tea with us and then we talk for an hour or so. Then we write our letters and sometimes play a game of whist²⁹...till 11 o'clock, when we have to put our lights out and go to bed in

²⁹ A popular card game which uses a full deck and two teams of two players.

accordance with the regulations of the garrison. This is the routine to which I have been subjugated day after day and night after night for four long months. While at Fort Lafayette it was still worse for our quarters there were like a pig sty compared with those we have here.

You may well suppose from this that I get very tired sometimes of this life of passive endurance and I would be glad to escape from it, as I surely would but my spirits have never flagged nor have I at any time felt like giving way under annoyance. The only thing that has given me trouble has been the thought of the lonely and dependant condition with no one to protect you in the times of trial and danger. But when I get such letters as yours last full of hope and vigorous spirited determination it cheers me up and sends me on my way rejoicing.

But I confess I have so little confidence in the administration and so little hope that they will do anything that is either sensible or just that I hardly expect anything so desirable to ensue. I must again close with a good night and may God bless you is the prayer of your ever devoted husband,

JH Gordon

Questions

- 1. How does Mr. Gordon feel about the time he has spent at Fort Warren?**
- 2. What did you find surprising (or not) about Mr. Gordon's routine each day, considering he is living in a prison? Why do you think he was able to live like this as a prisoner?**
- 3. What is Mr. Gordon's opinion of the Lincoln administration?**

On Site Activity
Exploring Fort Warren
Group 5

Your task is to find the *bakery* at Fort Warren, and then answer the questions below and be prepared to share your answers with the rest of the group. Then go on to the next activity.

1. Where is the *bakery* located at Fort Warren?

2. What was the *bakery* used for at the fort and why was it so important? Do the ovens remind you of a pizza parlor?

Your second task is to read an original letter written by Josiah Gordon at Fort Warren, and answer the questions that follow. Make sure to read the footnotes at the bottom of the page that will provide some background information. Remember, pick a section of the letter your group finds interesting to read to the rest of your class and explain what you learned.

Fort Warren March 10th 1862

My dear wife,

I am disappointed again by the non receipt of a letter from you. Your last letter contained an account of the illness and reached me on Friday last and I have not had a line since whether he is better or not, and I am very anxious about him as you may well suppose.

But my dear I am getting so much accustomed to disappointments of one kind and another that I begin to bear them quite well. We have nothing new here that I would feel at liberty to communicate to you for fear my letter may be disturbed. I presume you have heard of the news of the naval cutter at the mouth of the James River and the news of the Merrimack.³⁰

³⁰ When the U.S. Navy abandoned a shipyard in Norfolk, Virginia, in April of 1861, they scuttled a ship called the "*Merrimack*" in an attempt to prevent it from falling into Confederate hands. However, the Confederates salvaged the hull of the ship and used it to build the first iron-clad of the Civil War, renamed the C.S.S. *Virginia*. On March 8, 1862, only a few days before Gordon wrote his letter, the *Virginia* sailed

On-Site Activity
Exploring Fort Warren
Group 6

Your assignment is to find the *guardhouse* at Fort Warren and then answer the questions below and be prepared to share your answers with the rest of the class. Then go on to the next activity.

- 1. Where is the *guardhouse* located at Fort Warren?**

- 2. What was the *guardhouse* used for and how does it show how Fort Warren was built?**

Your second task is to read an original letter written by Josiah Gordon at Fort Warren, and answer the questions that follow. Make sure you read the footnote at the bottom of the page that will provide important information. Remember, pick a section of the letter your group finds interesting to read to the rest of your class and explain what you learned.

Fort Warren March 13th '62

My dear dear wife,

The last letter which I received from you gave me a great deal of pleasure because it stated that you were well and that little Charlie was so much recovered he could write a letter to his Pa Pa. You can hardly imagine how uneasy I was while I was uncertain about his condition. He was almost constantly in my mind by day and in my dreams by night. I dreamed of him three times in one night, and I can give you no idea of my disappointment when I woke up and found that I was only dreaming.

I can fully understand your anxiety to see me, for I am sure that I want to see you quite as much. But my dear people cannot be governed by feelings in times like these. In times of sunshine and prosperity our feelings may be consulted and gratified, but avoid the clouds and darkness of stern and relentless adversity feelings must yield to reason and judgment.

It would be exceedingly gratifying for me to see you for a single hour if it could be done under circumstances that not be personally degrading but I know what it is and what it would be and how much pain would be inflicted by it and therefore I cannot consent for you to come here and see me.

A very sad case occurred with the wife of Major Granberry, one of the officers captured at Donelson.³² She is quite young, only nineteen and very delicate. She followed her husband through the campaign in Kentucky and Tennessee and when he was taken prisoner she came on to Boston expecting that he would be paroled and that she could be with him. On arriving there however he was refused a parole and sent to the fort where she was not permitted to visit him. Without friends or even an acquaintance in all the North to whom she could go to pour out her grief and receive a word of sympathy, she was left alone at a Public Hotel to do the best she could among strangers and enemies. Dr. Magill hearing of her case kindly invited her to go to Hagerstown and make her home with his family until her husband is exchanged. Mayor Brown also wrote to his friends in Boston and got them to call and pay attention to her, which they very kindly did and sent her under escort as far as Baltimore on her way to Hagerstown, where I hope she will find sympathy and kindness, which I know she must stand much in need of.

How wonderful it is to contemplate the whirlpool of distress and ruin into which everything is rushing and the nearness of our approach to some terrible catastrophe feared by all and comprehended by none. The dearest friends and relations have been separated by a gulf as wide as time itself and generations unborn will not see it closed or even bridged over. Some people are yet to be found foolish enough to believe that the raping and plunder, the disregard for law and personal safety, the gaping wounds and ghastly corpses, can all be forgotten and the outraged feelings and aching hearts may easily be soothed, and the instruments of all these wrongs brought together and united as firmly as ever. Sadly mistaken are they who have studied human nature and the history of our race to no better purpose. Time will show that all this waste of blood and tissue is in vain and that friends can no more be made by such means...

Mayor Brown has just read me a letter received from his wife today stating that Mrs. Granberry had arrived in Balt. On her way to H. and was staying at his house. Poor woman I feel so much for her. Her husband...is quite clever and is said to have behaved with great gallantry at Donelson.

If I was permitted to do so I could fill the pages with the interesting details that I have heard from the prisoners who are here now. Some of them I know would amuse you very much too. I hope the dear children are all well now... You ask me to describe my appearance but I have put it off so late I must not commence now on so small a piece of paper for my beard has grown so large that it would take nearly a sheet of paper to describe that alone and as my weight is about the same as when you saw me. I will leave you to imagine the rest for the present, so good night and God bless you all is the prayer of your ever devoted husband,

JH Gordon

³² Fort Donelson was a Confederate outpost in Tennessee captured by Union troops commanded by U.S. Grant in February 1862.

On-Site Activity
Exploring Fort Warren
Group 7

Your group is assigned to find the *ramparts* at Fort Warren and then answer the questions below and be prepared to share your answers with the rest of the class. Then go on to the next activity.

- 1. Where are the *ramparts* located at Fort Warren?**

- 2. What were the *ramparts* used for and why was this important to the fort?**

Your second task is to read an original letter written by Josiah Gordon at Fort Warren, and answer the questions that follow. Make sure you read the footnotes at the bottom of the page that will provide you with some important information. Remember, pick a section of the letter your group finds interesting to read to the rest of your class and explain what you learned.

Fort Warren March 28th 1862

My dear wife,

I received your No. 22³³ on yesterday, and was quite glad to hear that you were well again but I would have been better satisfied if you had spoken more particularly about the dear little Fanny about whom you excited so much interest in my mind. Has she gotten entirely well again?

I received a nice letter today from Mr. Wilkes today informing me that he had sent a box to Mr. Wallis³⁴ and myself containing some Eastern Shore hams and some cans of spiced oysters and some other things...I was quite glad to hear from him...under such favorable circumstances as hams and oysters which will come in play very well with our increased family amounting to over sixty, since the Donelson³⁵ prisoners came.

There is nothing at all new here among the insiders and what war news may be stirring outside is not permitted to transpire or pass the lines of military occupation.

One thing though is certain. The powers in Washington are not very well satisfied with the character of recent operations in Arkansas, New Mexico, in Tennessee or in

³³ Mr. and Mrs. Gordon numbered each letter they wrote to each other.

³⁴ Sevearn T. Wallis was also a member of the Maryland House of Delegates, and was arrested for disloyalty.

³⁵ Fort Donelson was a Confederate fort in Tennessee captured by Union troops commanded by U.S. Grant in February 1862.

Virginia and North Carolina.³⁶ And it looks to me very much as if the anaconda would have to rest for some time before it will be able to make another spasmodic effort to tighten its coils around the rebellion.

I had a very comfortable walk around the ramparts yesterday and as the weather was fine and the atmosphere...balmy I enjoyed it very much and with a glass could see all the towns and cities along the coast of Massachusetts Bay for twenty miles in extent. It is quite refreshing to get a peep outside of the walls and embankments of our fort occasionally. We had another fine day gain today but as the wind blew considerably it became rather dusty for comfort out of doors and we had to beat a retreat into our quarters.

Kisses for all and may God bless you is the constant prayer of your husband,

JH Gordon

Questions

- 1. What did Mr. Gordon receive in the mail from friends in Maryland? Did this surprise you?**

- 2. Besides reading, what was Mr. Gordon allowed to do for exercise at Fort Warren?**

- 3. When you look at the Massachusetts coast from the ramparts of Fort Warren today, how do you think the view has changed or remained the same since Josiah Gordon saw it in 1862?**

³⁶ Some of the most vicious fighting of the Civil War occurred between Union and Confederate forces seeking to establish control over Missouri. On March 7-8, 1862, Union forces under General Samuel Curtis and a Confederate army commanded by Earl Van Dorn met just over the Missouri border at Pea Ridge, Arkansas. A two day battle ensued, reducing Southern supplies and ammunition to dangerously low levels. The battle ended in a Union victory when Union soldiers drove Confederates in confusion off the field and deep into Arkansas. Even further west, Union and Confederate forces clashed in New Mexico in a series of small battles during February and March of 1862. The Confederate army, made up of about 3,000 men from Texas, was initially effective when it captured Fort Fillmore and Fort Craig, two garrisons under the control of Federal officer Edward Canby. After the Confederates continued north into New Mexico Territory, they unexpectedly ran into a Union column heading south from Fort Union, revitalized by the arrival of 900 volunteers from Colorado. The very day Gordon wrote this letter, Union and Confederate soldiers fought in the desert landscape at Glorietta Pass, which resulted in Union victory and forced the remains of the Southern army to retreat into Texas.

On-Site Activity
Exploring Fort Warren
Group 8

Your task is to find the *powder magazine* at Fort Warren, answer the questions below, and be prepared to share your answers with the rest of the class. Then go on to the next activity.

1. Where is the *powder magazine* located at Fort Warren?

2. Why was the *powder magazine* at Fort Warren very important, but also very dangerous?

How is the *powder magazine* built in a special way to protect the contents inside?

Your second task is to read an original letter written by Josiah Gordon at Fort Warren, and answer the questions that follow. Make sure you read the footnotes at the bottom of the page that will provide you with some important information. Remember, pick a section of the letter your group finds interesting to read to the rest of your class and explain what you learned.

Fort Warren April 27th 1862

My dearest wife,

It is now eight months since I saw you and although autumn and winter have passed away there is still no end of this worrisome mode of existence.

It is three weeks today since my letter was sent to the Sec. of War and to the present I have had no reply. I presume though he has referred it to Dix though, as they are coming here as the papers tell as to examine...our cases.³⁷ When that examination will be made though no one has been able to tell and it appears they are taking their leisure...Genl. Dix has a multiplicity of business on hand just now that he will hardly be able to attend to all. I hope he will soon be able to devote a few days to prisoners at this fort.

I have just finished walking on the ramparts and enjoying a distant view of Boston and all the other towns situated along the shore, with the bay studded with islands and

³⁷ In 1862, U. S. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton appointed John A. Dix as the government commissioner to begin examining the cases of political prisoners.

covered with shipping of all sizes and every kind from the large three-masted ship to the skiff rowed by a single sailor. When I look back at all these things and think of the dear ones from whom I am separated...I can hardly realize it. But Providence has ordered it all for our benefit no doubt and I hope we will be able to improve the hard lessons and be made better by their fruits than we have heretofore been.

I hope you are all right and that you still have comfort with them...
Love and kisses to all. Your husband,
JH Gordon

Questions

- 1. According to the letter, how long had Mr. Gordon been away from his family and how did he feel about his life at Fort Warren?**
- 2. Who does Mr. Gordon send a letter to and what does he hope will happen?**
- 3. What does Mr. Gordon enjoy during his walk and how do you think the view of the harbor has changed since the Civil War?**
- 4. What does he say about Providence (the hand of God) and do you agree with him that we learn from our experiences and mistakes?**

Post –Visit Activity: Liberty or Treason? The Fate of Josiah H. Gordon
Suggested Length: 1-2 45 minute class periods (In Classroom)

After learning about the fate of liberty during the Civil War, in the final and culminating activity students will actively participate in the ultimate democratic act. They will be “appointed” to a Federal commission that was actually formed in 1862 to examine the cases of political prisoners during the Civil War. (The actual commission consisted of only one military officer and a civilian official, so we are stretching history a little here for the sake of learning.). Students should first receive the memo from Secretary of War Stanton below that explains their task, and it is possible that students can receive this sheet at the beginning of the program, but that is at the discretion of the educator. Students should also read the revealing letter written by Josiah Gordon to Stanton dated April 2, 1862 that follows.

To structure this activity, students can be divided into two groups: one acting as the prosecution and the other as the defense, and then present their cases in a trial or hearing, and will then vote on the case, and the teacher can provide the swing vote (if needed). Students should use the evidence presented in the timeline and Josiah Gordon’s letters and also examine relevant sections of the United States Constitution, including Article I, Section Nine, and Article III, Sections Two & Three. Various amendments to the Constitution, known as the Bill of Rights, are also crucial to understanding the Gordon case, including the First, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Amendments. The U.S. Constitution is available online at <http://www.usconstitution.net>.

After this mock hearing, teachers can reveal to the students what actually happened to Mr. Gordon, using original government documents and a letter he wrote to his wife after his release. As a wrap-up activity, students can discuss their reaction to the actual fate of Mr. Gordon during the Civil War and what they felt they learned from the program. If time allows, students can also be assigned to write individual essays, allowing them to express their personal opinions concerning the case of Josiah Gordon, and allowing the teachers to assess each student’s knowledge and skills.

Post-Visit Activity

War Department, *Washington, February 27, 1862.*

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Executive Order No. 2, proclaimed by President Lincoln, directs that a special commission be created to examine the cases of political prisoners remaining in military custody of the United States, and to determine whether in view of the public safety they should be discharged or remain prisoners during this rebellion.

You have been summoned by this Government to examine the case of Josiah H. Gordon, and judge whether he should remain imprisoned at Fort Warren in Boston Harbor, or be allowed to return to his home Cumberland, Maryland. Your duty will be to use what you have learned in the timeline, from your visit to Fort Warren, and read the letter written to me by Mr. Gordon included with this message. After you have gathered evidence to form an argument, your class will debate the issue and vote whether Mr. Gordon should regain his freedom or not. The President has faith that you are loyal to the Union and will perform this task fairly and justly. The fate of Mr. Gordon is now in your hands.

Respectfully,
Edwin M. Stanton,
Secretary of War.

Fort Warren, *April 2, 1862.*

Hon. Edwin M. Stanton, *Secretary of War.*

Sir: I am a citizen of Maryland, a State which still forms part of the United States...and over which the Constitution and laws of the Union have never failed to be promptly and effectively executed by civil authorities except so far as they have been interfered with and obstructed by the military power of the United States under the direction of the President. I was elected to the House of Delegates of my State from Alleghany County in 1859 for a term, which expired November last. While on my way to the seat of government of the State...I was arrested by two officers in the military service of the United States on the 30th day of August last without warrant or other authority except that which they claimed to exercise as lieutenants of the Third Regiment of Pennsylvania Volunteers...

I was taken by them to Washington City where my person and baggage were subjected to a most rigid search which lasted about two hours and...my clothing was stripped from my person and closely examined, and all my private papers and letters including those to my wife were read...and some of them have not been returned. Finding nothing upon my person...to justify my detention...I supposed that I would be released without delay. In that, however, I was disappointed. Instead of an honorable discharge...I was confined in one of the political prisons of that city for six days, closely guarded by armed soldiers and refused the privilege of changing my soiled clothes in which I had been traveling in for four days previously.

On the fifth day of my imprisonment I was informed that I could be released if I would take an oath binding myself...to support the Constitution and Government of the United States against all enemies whether domestic or foreign and that I would bear true...allegiance to the same, any ordinance, resolution or law of any State Convention or Legislature to the contrary notwithstanding. This I regarded as another attempt to degrade me...but as there was nothing in it that required me to do any act of violence of my duty to my country. I submitted to the wrong and thereby obtained my discharge supposing that I would not again be molested so as I kept the oath inviolate.

In this I was again disappointed...and I was again arrested on the 17th of September at Frederick and from that time I have been in close confinement as a political prisoner outside the limits of my State and the jurisdiction of the courts having cognizance of any charge that could have been made against me. I deem it unnecessary to detail to you the many...hardships and sufferings that I have borne...or those that have been inflicted upon a helpless family during this long imprisonment...and exposed them to outrages and insults of the most disgraceful character.

It is due to my own self-respect as well as the character for integrity and obedience to the laws of my country which I have endeavored to establish that I should insist on an unconditional discharge and submit to no terms which could warrant an unfavorable interpretation...against my character.

Hoping that you may agree with me on this view, I remain yours,
J.H. Gordon

Liberty or Treason? The Case of Mr. Josiah H. Gordon

Now that your class has worked so hard to come to a fair decision concerning the fate of Josiah Gordon, here are a few primary sources to show what actually happened to him.

**Office of the Commission
Relating to State Prisoners
*Boston, May 7, 1862***

Col. Justin Dimick, *Fort Warren, Boston:*

Colonel: The following persons have complied with the conditions required by the commission, you will please discharge them, J.H. Gordon. You will at the same time return...any property in your possession belonging to them.

After being released from Fort Warren, Josiah Gordon wrote the following letter to his wife:

Baltimore May 8th 1862

My dearest wife,

I arrived here in safety yesterday about twelve o'clock by the Northern Central Railway after a quiet ride by night through Pa. which closed by a very sad accident producing a collision of our train about a mile from the city with a freight train going out, resulting in killing a colored man who was on the platform of the front car and badly injuring two of the men connected with the train...The concussion of the entire train was very considerable but no other person was injured.

On arriving here I met a good many friends who were glad to see me and I have an engagement to go to the country...to remain till Monday. But I unexpectedly met some of my friends-prisoners of war from Fort Warren- on their way South to be exchanged, and was so much engaged in conversation that the time for the cars to leave had passed before I was aware of it. And I had to remain where I am quietly...and still undecided what I shall do for the future.

Your account of the conditions of things at Cumberland is quite gloomy, and I felt quite sad as I read your letter, and...I still feel sad when I think of the terrible condition of things which has left our beloved country to the mercy of a rabble horde, controlled only by their basest passions and worst appetites.

I hope you will write to me frequently and keep me advised of the progress of events in and about Cumberland.

How earnestly I do hope for the return of peace to our disturbed town so that I may be with you and enjoy my home again. Kiss the children for me, kind words to all my friends and believe me your ever devoted husband.

JH Gordon