

“No Jews Are To Be Permitted”:**Understanding the Context of General Orders No. 11**

In 1862, Major General Ulysses S. Grant was commanding the Army of the Tennessee. As his troops marched deeper into the South, the price of cotton soared to three times its prewar value.¹ The prospect of such immediate fortune attracted to the Cotton Belt thousands of profiteers and speculators, some of them Jews. Instead of suppressing the burgeoning black market by targeting speculators, Grant’s infamous General Orders No. 11 expelled from the district all Jews, whether or not they were involved in profiteering. This discriminatory order, the forced removal of innocent Jewish citizens from their homes, was perhaps the most blatantly anti-Jewish regulation issued in the history of the United States. As is well known, General Orders No. 11 was countermanded by General-in-Chief of the Army Henry W. Halleck and President Lincoln -- and Grant seems to have later been embarrassed by what he had done. General Orders No. 11 should be understood not merely as the singular anti-Semitic act that it was, but also as a reflection of the broader anti-Jewish sentiment in the United States, and its army, at the time.

General Orders No. 11

By mid-December 1862, Grant was justifiably tired of the speculators engaging in a black market in cotton. However, his solution, General Orders No. 11, is notable because it was not aimed at speculators, but rather at all Jews in the Mississippi Valley:

- I. The Jews, as a class, violating every regulation of trade established by the Treasury Department, and also Department orders, are hereby expelled from the Department.
- II. Within twenty-four hours from the receipt of this order by Post Commanders, they will see that all of this class of people are furnished with passes and required to leave, and any

¹ Schuckers, J.W. *The Life and Public Services of Salmon Portland Chase: United States Senator and Governor of Ohio, Secretary of the Treasury and Chief-Justice of the United States* (New York: D. Appleton, 1874), p.322

one returning after such notification, will be arrested and held in confinement until an opportunity occurs of sending them out as prisoners unless furnished with permits from these Head Quarters.

- III. No permits will be given these people to visit Head Quarters for the purpose of making personal application for trade permits.²

Jews in Holly Springs and Oxford, Mississippi, as well as in Paducah, Kentucky, were ordered to leave immediately. In total, thirty men and their families rushed up the Ohio River from Paducah to Cincinnati by riverboat. All of the Jews of Paducah were removed by December 29, 1862. Contemporary testimonies state that those removed included some of “the most respectable Union citizens of the city, had at not time been engaged in trade within the active lines of General Grant. . .”³ Among the Jews removed from the area were two who had served in the Union Army.⁴ The fleeing Jews “locked up their homes and shops...almost abandoning a baby in the pandemonium. Only two sick women were allowed to stay behind.”⁵ Jews in Holly Springs were denied rail transportation and were forced to walk approximately 45 miles to Memphis, Tennessee.⁶ Five Jews from Paducah -- Daniel Wolff, Marcus Wolff, Alexander Wolff, Cesar Kaskel and Julius Kaskel -- sent a telegram to President Lincoln at the White House, requesting his “immediate attention to this enormous outrage on all law and humanity.”⁷ When Lincoln did not respond, Cesar Kaskel wrote letters to Jewish community leaders and to publishers of Jewish and daily newspapers. These letters were instrumental in provoking protests in Washington; Cesar Kaskel later traveled there to advocate for the revocation of the order.

The order was controversial from the start. When Grant’s chief of staff, John A. Rawlins, raised objections as the order was being copied and distributed, Grant replied: “Well, they can

² Lebowich, Joseph. “GENERAL ULYSSES S. GRANT AND THE JEWS.” *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, no. 17, 1909, pp. 71–79.

³ Speech by Senator Powell, Jan. 9, 1863, *Congressional Globe*, 37th Congress, 3rd Session, Pt. I, pp. 245-6; *New York Times*, Jan. 3, 1863.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Ash, Stephen V. “Civil War Exodus: The Jews and Grant's General Orders No. 11.” *The Historian*, vol. 44, no. 4, 1982, p. 514.

⁶ Bertram Wallace Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1951), p.123

⁷ Sarna, Jonathan D. *When General Grant expelled the Jews* 1st ed. New York:nNextbook : Schocken, c.2012. From the Library of Congress.

countermand this from Washington if they like, but we will issue it anyhow.”⁸ And indeed, the order was countermanded within weeks. On January 3, 1863, after Cesar Kaskel met with Lincoln, the President sent a note to General Halleck, directing him to telegraph instructions to cancel the order. When Jewish delegations from Louisville and Cincinnati arrived in Washington later in the week, President Lincoln “reiterated how astonished he had been to learn of the order and...added that he felt no prejudice against Jews himself and would not tolerate it in others.”⁹ On January 4, Halleck instructed Grant to recall the Order. Grant's office transmitted the order of recall on January 6, stating that it was “by Direction of General-in-Chief of the Army, at Washington.”¹⁰ On January 5 Halleck sent another note to Grant emphasizing that General Orders No. 11 had applied to all Jews rather than just speculators and profiteers and expressing disapproval of discrimination against Jews as a class. To be clear, Halleck added that the President had no “object[ion] to your expelling traders and Jew pedlars, which I suppose was the object of your order.”¹¹

Grant never truly repudiated the order. In all of his writings, including his *Personal Memoirs*, published posthumously in 1885, Grant failed to provide a substantive explanation or defense. When Grant was running for president in 1868, he offered a half-hearted statement distancing himself from the order a letter to former Congressman Issac N. Morris of Illinois:

At the time of its publication, I was incensed by a reprimand received from Washington for permitting acts which Jews within my lines were engaged in. There were many others within my lines equally bad with the worst of them, but the difference was that the Jews could pass with impunity from one army to the other....*The order was issued and sent without any reflection* and without thinking of the Jews as a sect or race to themselves, but simply as persons who had successfully (I say successfully instead of persistently

⁸ James H. Wilson, *The Life of John A. Rawlins* (New York, 1916) p. 96

⁹ Ash, Stephen V. “Civil War Exodus: The Jews and Grant's General Orders No. 11.” *The Historian*, vol. 44, no. 4, 1982, pp. 505–523.

¹⁰ Bertram Wallace Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1951), p. 125

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 126

because there were plenty of others within my lines who envied their success) violated an order, which greatly inured to the help of the rebels. I have no prejudice against sect or race, but want each individual to be judged by his own merit. Order No. 11 does not sustain this statement, I admit, but then I do not sustain that order. *It never would have been issued if it had not been telegraphed the moment it was penned, and without reflection.*¹²

This explanation is less than convincing. In fact, Grant had considered an exclusionary order directed at the Jews for more than a month before issuing General Orders No. 11. For example, in a November 9, 1862 telegram, Grant instructed Major-General Hurlbut to “refuse all permits to come south of Jackson” and that “the Israelites especially should be kept out.”¹³

Although Grant’s order was overruled by higher authorities, its issuance was not an isolated expression of anti-Jewish prejudice, nor was such prejudice unique to Grant. General Orders No. 11 can only be understood as a culmination of the anti-Semitism in Grant’s army, shaped by a wider antipathy in the country, rather than exceptional bigotry on Grant’s part. To understand the order itself, it is necessary to delve into its origins.

Speculation in Cotton and the Union Army

For the Union Army, cotton was an unfortunate necessity, required for tents and uniforms. President Abraham Lincoln had previously pursued the act of 13th of July, 1861, which forbade trade with the Confederate states and required that any “goods... coming from those States into other parts of the United States” had received “the special license and permission of the President, through the Secretary of the Treasury.”¹⁴ But trade needed to be

¹² Gen. Grant’s Jew Order: Why It Was Issued- A Statement of the Circumstances of the Case. *From the Israelite* (1868, November 30). *The New York Times*.

¹³ Bertram Wallace Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1951), p.143

¹⁴ Schuckers, J.W. *The Life and Public Services of Salmon Portland Chase: United States Senator and Governor of Ohio, Secretary of the Treasury and Chief-Justice of the United States* (New York: D. Appleton, 1874), p. 324

revived as soon as the Union Army recovered territory, and the demand for cotton was most urgent. As Secretary Salmon P. Chase believed the “best thing to be done, as it seems to me, is to establish the power of the Government, in cooperation with the people of Kentucky and Western Virginia, within those limits, and let commerce follow the flag.”¹⁵ Lincoln and Chase resolved to allow limited trade in the parts of the Confederacy then occupied by Union troops, including Missouri, Kentucky and Western Virginia, through the implementation of the acts of the 4th of March, the 20th of May, and the 28th of August. On March 4 1862, Chase issued general regulations for internal commerce. These regulations required purchasers of cotton to obtain Treasury-issued permits. Instead of granting the government a monopoly of the cotton trade, private individuals were licensed to follow the armies, deal in cotton, and move cotton out and up the Mississippi River.

The Lincoln-Chase policy assumed that civilians and military personnel would behave. But the cotton trade was exceptionally lucrative, enticing many people, including even members of the military, to become involved in the illegal traffic. One War Department agent reported from Memphis that “every colonel, captain, or quartermaster is in secret partnership with some operator in cotton.”¹⁶ Army officers in Tusculum, Alabama seized \$2,000,000 worth of cotton and “pocketed the proceeds.”¹⁷ The anti-fraud provisions of executive proclamations and departmental orders proved ineffective, as cotton was obtained through fraudulent permits, as well as smuggling.

A Chicago Tribune correspondent described the corruption at Grant’s supply base in Holly Springs, Mississippi in December 1862: “If ever a community were insane, or afflicted with a disgusting moral malady, it is the crowds of speculators and vagrants which have congregated at Holly Springs to deal in cotton -- they have ‘cotton’ on the brain -- every one of

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 321

¹⁶ Dana, Charles A. *Recollections of the Civil War: With the leaders at Washington and in the field in the Sixties* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1898), p.18

¹⁷ Bertram Wallace Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1951), p. 122. (referring to Coulter, *op. cit.*, pp. 391-2)

them.”¹⁸ Generals Grant and Sherman, among others, attempted to crack down on the illicit trade. Grant was also concerned that traders travelling across the lines might carry military intelligence to the enemy, or supply gold to the Confederates. As Grant later wrote to Chase, “any trade...with the rebellious States is weakening us to at least 33 per cent. of our force. No matter what the restrictions thrown around trade, if any whatever is allowed, it will be made the means of supplying to the enemy what they want.”¹⁹ Sherman bluntly stated that the order permitting the cotton trade “is worse to us than defeat.”²⁰

The Evolution from Speculator to Jew

The cotton speculators operating in the Mississippi Valley comprised all sorts of people, including but not limited to Jewish merchants. Grant, however, solely blamed the Jews for profiteering in the cotton trade. The Jews embodied in Grant’s eyes the worst characteristics of all the speculators, so much so that the terms Jew and trader became synonymous. Grant’s anti-Jewish harangues are exemplified by his correspondence with General Webster, on November 10, 1862 at La Grange, Tennessee:

Give orders to all the conductors on the road that no Jews are to be permitted to travel on the railroad southward from any point. They may go north and be encouraged in it; but they are such an intolerable nuisance that the department must be purged of them.”²¹

The Order as a Reflection Of Public and Military Anti-Semitism

¹⁸ Futrell, “Federal Trade,” 460; *Chicago Tribune*, 18 December 1862

¹⁹ Schuckers, J.W. *The Life and Public Services of Salmon Portland Chase: United States Senator and Governor of Ohio, Secretary of the Treasury and Chief-Justice of the United States* (New York: D. Appleton, 1874), p. 321

²⁰ Parks, Joseph H. “A Confederate Trade Center under Federal Occupation: Memphis, 1862 to 1865.” *The Journal of Southern History*, Aug., 1941, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Aug., 1941), p. 313

²¹ Lebowich, Joseph. “GENERAL ULYSSES S. GRANT AND THE JEWS.” *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, no. 17, 1909, p. 71

Though the Jewish population in the United States was relatively small in 1860, comprising 150,000 to 200,000 people²² (barely ½ of 1% of the 31.4 million Americans)²³, anti-Semitic beliefs were widespread. One frequency tally shows that public anti-Semitism in periodicals through graphic images of Jews peaked in 1861 and 1864.²⁴ Clearly, the economic



SHODDY PATRIOTISM.

RECRUITING SERGEANT—Come, Moses, rub up your patriotism, and join the Union forces.

JEW—Mine cot, no! I have as mooch as I can do to supply de army mit coot uniforms, upon vich I makes noting at all, s'elp me got!

and social tensions brought on by war fostered an especially potent strain of bigotry. Anti-Semitism was fostered by Protestant nativists who resented the influx of immigrant Jews from central Europe, seeking economic opportunity and better living conditions. These anti-Semites labeled the Jews with ancient economic and political stereotypes, such as “avaricious” or “politically subversive.” In the North, newspaper correspondents reported to readers the abominable activities of the “pork-hating descendants of Abraham” and the “oleaginous children of Israel.”²⁵ In 1861, periodicals such as

Vanity Fair or *the New York Illustrated News* attributed all subversion and inappropriate conduct to Jews, branding them as injurious to the Union’s cause. Cartoons such as “Shoddy Patriotism”²⁶, published by the humor periodical *Phunny Phellow*, were prevalent and reinforced the

²² Bertram Wallace Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1951), p. 1

²³ U.S. Census Bureau, 1864. *Population of the United States in 1860; compiled from the original returns of the eighth census under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior by Joseph C.G. Kennedy.*

²⁴ BUNKER, GARY L., and JOHN APPEL. ““Shoddy,” Anti-Semitism and the Civil War.” *American Jewish History*, vol. 82, no. 1/4, 1994, pp. 43–71

²⁵ Ash, Stephen V. “Civil War Exodus: The Jews and Grant’s General Orders No. 11.” *The Historian*, vol. 44, no. 4, 1982, pp. 505–523. (Referring to Sherman to his wife, 31 July 1862, in Howe, éd., *Home Letters of General Sherman*, 229–30; Grant to Stephen A. Hurl but, 9 November 1862, in Simon, éd., *Papers of Grant*, 6:283; W. P. Mellen to Chase, 27 May 1862, *Press Copies of Letters Sent*, vol. 30, *Records of the General Agent, Miscellaneous Records of Civil War Special Agencies*, U.S. Treasury Department, Record Group 366, National Archives; *New York Times*, 25, 26 December 1862.)

²⁶ *Phunny Phellow*, November 1861, from BUNKER, GARY L., and JOHN APPEL. ““Shoddy,” Anti-Semitism and the Civil War.”

stereotype of the Jews as mercenary and selfish. Then, at the outset of the Civil War, Jews were made the “natural scapegoat.”²⁷

The anti-Semitism that infused the media also infiltrated the Union Army. Jews were excluded from chaplaincy until July 17, 1862, only after the Jewish community had protested and petitioned against this discrimination for a year. Some of the most prominent members of the military had “imbibed prejudicial conceptions of the Jews.”²⁸ Major General Butler of Massachusetts reportedly discriminated against the Jews at Fortress Monroe, arresting and confining them to prison without a trial or a hearing, under the prejudice that all Jews were “agents and most effective supporters [of the Confederacy].”²⁹ He was quoted by *The Jewish Record of New York* as saying “he could suck the blood of every Jew, and he will detain every Jew as long as he can.”³⁰ General Sherman also denounced the Jews, associating them with smuggling activities. He proclaimed that “the country will swarm with dishonest Jews who will smuggle powder, pistoles, percussion-caps, &c., in spite of all the guards of precautions we can give.”³¹ The fact was, that Jews were neither the most numerous or most reprobate of the traders following the army. But Jews, mostly immigrants, were easily identifiable due to their accents, surnames and mannerisms. Moreover, when “the army happened to arrest a trader or smuggler who was Jewish, his religion was noted in the record, though no other religion was.”³² So when Grant received reports of violations by speculators, the role of the Jews was emphasized. Grant was predisposed to believe such allegations and was ultimately convinced that the Jews were the main, indeed the sole, perpetrators.

²⁷ Bertram Wallace Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War* (Philadelphia Jewish Publication Society of America, 1951), p. 155

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 164

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 165 (referring to Parton pp. 317-19)

³⁰ *Ibid.* p.166 (Referring to *JR, IV*, No. 14, p. 2, July 18, 1864)

³¹ Parks, Joseph H. “A Confederate Trade Center under Federal Occupation: Memphis, 1862 to 1865.” *The Journal of Southern History*, Aug., 1941, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Aug., 1941), p. 296 (Referring to Sherman to Salmon Chase, August 11 1862, 30)

³² Mark E. Neely, Jr., *The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties* (New York, Oxford, 1991), pp. 107-108

Conclusion

General Orders No. 11 is an unusual document in that it banished an entire group of people based on their religion and ethnicity. It was so extreme that it was overruled, and President Lincoln immediately disavowed it, even if its author, General Grant, did not. Nevertheless, the order should not be seen as a singular aberration, or Grant as unique in holding anti-Semitic stereotypes. Rather, it should be seen as a product of its times -- not only the rampant black market in cotton that gave rise to it, but also the pervasive anti-Semitism in the military and much of American society at the time.

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Appendix (Main Primary Source)

General Orders,

No. 11

HDQRS. THIRTEENTH A. C., Dept. Of the Tennessee
Holly Springs, Mississippi. December 17, 1862.

- I. The Jews, as a class, violating every regulation of trade established by the Treasury Department, and also Department orders, are hereby expelled from the Department.
- II. Within twenty-four hours from the receipt of this order by Post Commanders, they will see that all of this class of people are furnished with passes and required to leave, and any one returning after such a notification, will be arrested and held in confinement until an opportunity occurs of sending them out as prisoners unless furnished with permits from these Head Quarters.
- III. No permits will be given these people to visit Head Quarters for the purpose of making personal application for trade permits.

By Order of Maj. Genl. U.S. Grant