

"The Mystery of the Rebel Campaign in Virginia," New York (NY) *Herald*, June 29, 1861
<https://stampedes.dickinson.edu/document/new-york-ny-herald-mystery-rebel-campaign-virginia-june-29-1861>

The Mystery of the Rebel Campaign in Virginia—Mr. Seward's Programme.

According to the ordinary rules and tactics of modern warfare, it is difficult to explain the combinations and movements of the rebel forces in Virginia. With the bulk of their army at Manassas Junction, it is still believed that they are watching an opportunity for a dash into Washington; from their numerous batteries, erected and in course of erection in the neighborhood of Fortress Monroe, it is supposed they contemplate the investment and the seizure of that all-important stronghold; while, from their abandonment of Harper's Ferry, and the distribution of the troops of Johnston, Jackson and Wise among the valleys and mountains of Western Virginia, one would conclude that they also contemplate the expulsion of the Union armies from, and the subjugation of the loyal Union citizens in, that quarter of the State.

But while the weakness of Johnston is confessed in his abandonment of Harper's Ferry, his destruction of the Potomac bridges thereabouts, and of all the canal boats, ferry boats and railway locomotives within his reach shows that not only has he abandoned the idea of crossing the river to descend upon Washington in the rear, but that he expects to be pursued in his retreat, and is more anxious to retard the advances of the federal troops by which he is threatened than to meet them in battle. So with Beauregard at the Manassas Junction. He is careful to keep behind his intrenchments, and while apparently menacing the lines of our army in front, he is probably preparing to fall back in the direction of Richmond. The rebel forces in the rear of Fortress Monroe, and across the James river, towards Norfolk, present the most stubborn front of resistance, and along this line, from the seaboard up the York river and up the James to Richmond, they will evidently dispute with desperation the advances of our troops at every available point. And so, along the whole line of the lower Potomac, we perceive in the activity of the guerrilla detachments of the rebels a desperate determination to prevent, if possible, the occupation of their "sacred soil" in that direction by the United States forces.

This distinction between the warlike activity and unmistakeable fighting disposition of the rebel troops along the lower Potomac, and round about Norfolk and Fortress Monroe, on the one hand, and the flight of Johnston from Harper's Ferry on the other hand, will afford us the key to a solution of the mystery of the whole rebel campaign in Virginia. It no longer embraces the seizure of Washington—it does not comprehend the subjugation of Western Virginia; but the great and paramount object of the "Confederates," in all their combinations and movements, is to keep this war, if they can, outside the populous slaveholding section of Southeastern Virginia. Between the Manassas Junction southwestwardly, via Lynchburg, to the North Carolina boundary, on the one side, and the Potomac river, Chesapeake bay and the Atlantic seaboard on the other side, perhaps not less than four hundred thousand of the half a million of slaves of Virginia are concentrated. At any point on the Potomac below Mount Vernon this populous slaveholding region is invaded; but from General Butler's position near the mouth of the James river, an advance on his part of twenty miles up the stream, or to the right or the left, would probably soon create a stampede towards his camp of thousands of fugitive slaves.

The fact, in this connection, that the escape of slaves to General Butler's camp has been stopped, is very suggestive. We may safely infer that these trench-digging African volunteers have been cut off by an extraordinary system of vigilance on the part of the rebel troops, and that this fearful necessity of standing guard over the surrounding slave population has suggested to the rebel leaders in Virginia an extraordinary danger, which was not provided for in their original programme. Hence their new defensive system of operations. He who has startled a lark from its nest of young ones in the grass will remember how the old bird, with a broken wing apparently, endeavored to draw him off in some other direction. Such are the movements of Johnston, Jackson and Wise in Western Virginia. They are intended to draw off our troops from the nest of the rebel leaders at Richmond. We suspect, too, that the occupation of Richmond

Slave Stampedes on the Southern Borderlands

National Park Service Network to Freedom / House Divided Project at Dickinson College

by the Union army is not so much feared from the consequences in a mere military view as from an apprehended general demoralization and loss of the slave population of the State.

Nor can this war be continued more than six months longer without hazarding the demoralization of the slaves of all the revolted States. The only safety of these States is submission to the Union as soon as possible. Should General Scott fail to obey the orders of Field Marshal Greeley, and thus fail to be in Richmond by the 20th of July, let Jeff. Davis, his Cabinet and his *Corps Legislatif* offer the submission of the "Confederate States," upon the grand condition of using our Northern and Southern armies in the field for the occupation and annexation of all the British, Spanish and Mexican provinces, islands and States on this North American continent, and we may expect a compromise. Why not? Did not our present Secretary of State, Mr. Seward, in his great campaign speech at St. Paul last autumn, foreshadow the absorption into our glorious Union of every foot of land on this continent? He did.

Why, then, should we not propose this compromise to the administration, as a member of which Mr. Seward now stands at the head of our foreign affairs? The absorption of British and Spanish North America is his programme, proclaimed last fall as the grand ultimatum of Mr. Lincoln's election, and the time has come to bring it to a fulfilment. Let it be fulfilled in a generous way, and there will be room enough for the North and the South—abolitionists, fire eaters, negroes and all—to get on without another civil war of any account for a hundred years to come. Our scheme rightfully belongs to Mr. Seward. Let him come to the rescue.

Slave Stampedes on the Southern Borderlands