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General Ulysses S. Grant: From the American Civil War Battles to the White House

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Abstract

This article examines General Ulysses S. Grant's political and military legacy, in his progression from being a Union general during the American Civil War to the President of the United States. As a war leader with decisive battlefield records, Grant emerged as a national hero whose success on the battlefield propelled him to the White House. As the eighteenth U.S. president (1869–1877), Grant had the challenging task of reconstructing a fragmented nation during the Reconstruction era. The article explores how Grant's military experience influenced his political values, especially his dedication to upholding the Union and protecting the rights of emancipated African Americans. It also addresses the significant challenges he faced in office as well, such as corruption scandals that plagued his administration and damaged public trust. By analysing key moments from both his military campaigns and presidency, the study offers a more balanced understanding of Grant as a war-tested leader motivated by moral conviction, and rooted in political complexity. From his speeches, letters, and contemporary records, Grant emerges not only as a man of action but also as a pivotal figure in America's transformation during the post-war 19th century. This article employs a mixed- research approach drawing on New historicism, and Psychobiography as interpretive frameworks.

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Introduction

From 1861 to 1865, the United States of America was plagued by racism and division that have finally led to American civil war. Known as a remarkable period of the history, American civil war is an extremely dangerous period marked by repetitive attacks leading to a high rate of death and casualties. For four good years, the States of the North that are basically respected for their economic growth and industrialization become radical enemies of the Southern States that keep on using slaves to maintain their agricultural revolution. Though those of the North mean no harm, it is undeniable that the abolition stance of slavery promoted in the North America does not please the States of the South. This vision of the new elected -president, Abraham Lincoln seems unbearable to the White Americans in South. For them, considering slaves equal to white Americans is abnormal and very risky for the development of the United States. As expression of their radical refusal to free slaves, the States of the South formed a confederation gathering American States that share the same social and economic vision against the new elected president's attempt to free slaves.

The birth of this confederation is a palpable evidence showing that America was no more united but controversial. Despite Lincoln's effort to convince the Confederates, the only way out of that mess was: the civil war. During this bloodiest first modern war, General Ulysses Grant played a decisive role in the union's army victory. Lately elected president of the America, he plays a great role in the reconstruction of the United States, improving the living conditions of African American slaves. His determination and devotion during the civil war are worth being depicted in a research paper. Although considerable literature exists on General Grant, few works examine both his military and political legacies within the same study.

This paper does not focus on an in-depth appraisal of the civil war rather it puts a specific stress on General Ulysses Grant's contribution during the civil war. His life is full of great achievements that are worth sharing since it could serve as a compass to the Civil War Community, war colleges managers and military professionals. In addition, this study also aims at pinpointing how Grant's military leadership has been determinant during the civil war.

A mixed-research method has been adopted with particular reference to previous research works as primary sources. Thanks to his memoirs,

autobiographical works, and e-books, a wide range of data related to Ulysses Grant's life have been collected and processed in order to enhance the scientific relevance of this paper. This piece of scholarship draws on two literary theories: New Historicism and Psychobiography as interpretive frameworks.

New Historicism emerges as the literary theory that focuses on an in-depth appreciation of research works dealing with history. It studies every work within the context (Mehdi 5). As this research work covers the period of the 18th century, this theory appears as the appropriate for a relevant analysis and interpretation of our collected data. Defined as a method of interpreting texts uses biographical data of an author gained through biographies, personal letters, lectures, and other sources to construct the author's personality with all its idiosyncrasies, internal and external conflicts, and neuroses (Charles 325). Psychobiography which combines biographical research with psychoanalysis, has helped us to penetrate Grant's life for uncovering his inborn forces and faculties that shape his specific personality and leadership. This piece of scholarship is subdivided into three main parts. The first part deals with literature review and Grant's management of slavery. The second part underscores Grant's contribution to the U.S. civil war while the third part depicts General Ulysses Grant's transition from the battlefields to the White House.

I. Literature Review

1.1 Relevance of the Selected Works

There is a sea of literature addressing General Ulysses Grant's contribution to the American civil war. Unlike the previous scholars, my study is specific in so far as it focuses both on Grant's military career and his presidency. According to many scholars, Ulysses Grant has never dreamed of becoming a soldier, but his acceptance to join the army is due to his father's pressure (Blenheim 1). Once in United States military Academy, Grant develops some skills that allow him to be distinguished as one of the loyal students. After his graduation, Grant has served under *General Zachary Taylor and General Winfield Scott* during Mexican-American war where he has developed his practical experiences of the war. This period of decisive attack opposing Mexican army to American military forces seems to be one of the learning centers for Grant before being appointed lieutenant and then Captain in 1847 (Blenheim 1).

In the battlefield, Grant is referred to as the hero and the more courageous leader whose boldness and steadiness usually motivate other soldiers not to give up. Before being appointed lieutenant and then captain in 1847, Grant has been assigned to the *4th Infantry Regiment stationed at Jefferson Barracks, St Louis* where he got acquainted with a lady, Julia Dent whom he later married. Grant fell in love with Julia and could not help sending letters to her during the Mexican war. His marriage to Julia in 1848 appears extremely surprising because many people thought that the war and the distance would be an obstacle to their union (Shields 9).

Robert Shields in his book entitled: *Ulysses S. Grant: The Architect of Victory in the U.S Civil War*, offers us a biographical sketch of Grant's life. We did learn a lot about Grant's odyssey. In fact, we sifted Grant's life through from his father's cabin to the American civil war battlefields. It is revealed in the book that General Grant possessed a sharp military intellect based on common sense and that his understanding of national strategy and the operational art is worthy of study by all military professionals (Shields1). Shields' piece of scholarship will certainly inform my own. Robert Grandchamp, in his article: "The Leadership of Ulysses S. Grant: A General Who Will Fight", he shed more light on Grant's life and his leadership style. Robert paper will benefit both the civil war community and the military professionals. Besides, his article is full of lessons on the types of leadership, initiative, teamwork, planning, patriotism (Robert 2). Robert's paper will help us to effectively address my article chapter entitled critical analysis of Grant's leadership.

Eric Foner's article entitled "Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877" (Foner 4)) shifts the focus from Lincoln to the broader implications of the Civil War on American society. Foner posits that the Reconstruction era was a critical period that laid the groundwork for future presidential policies and civil rights advancements. His work emphasizes the role of African Americans in shaping the political landscape, suggesting that their agency was often overlooked in traditional narratives of presidential history.

McGee on his part, finds several reasons to clarify some shady points. For him, Lincoln's political vision is not to end up slavery as many people think. He reveals that Lincoln's priority was the union (McGee 2). From this viewpoint, it is obvious that Grant is not bodily an antislavery. McGee seems

to be in contradiction with Anthony and Morgan who think that Grant's motivation is due to his willingness to free slaves but to protect the union (Anthony and Morgan 3).

Further expanding on the implications of the Civil War, Doris Kearns Goodwin's "Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln" (Goodwin 3) explores the collaborative nature of Lincoln's leadership. Goodwin's analysis highlights how Lincoln's ability to incorporate diverse viewpoints within his cabinet not only helped him navigate the Civil War but also set a precedent for future presidents. This perspective aligns with the notion that the Civil War was not merely a backdrop for presidential history but a catalyst for evolving leadership styles.

The transition from the Civil War to the White House is also examined through the lens of political realignment. Richard Hofstadter's "The American Political Tradition", discusses how the war precipitated a shift in political ideologies, particularly in the context of the Republican Party. Hofstadter argues that the Civil War catalyzed a transformation in American political thought, leading to a more centralized federal government and a new understanding of presidential power (Hofstadter 7).

Somewhere else, scholar like Bruce Catton in an article entitled: "The Civil War" provides a narrative history that contextualizes the political developments of the era. Catton's work emphasizes the significance of military leadership and its influence on presidential authority, suggesting that the experiences of wartime leaders shaped the expectations of future presidents. (Carton 6)

Investigating the real causes of the US civil war is one of the most interesting angles of the study that has been the main focus of many scholars. Each of them tries to explore the possible causes that might be the sources of this war. While some scholars think that the real cause of the US civil war is related to Union's attempt to free slaves, other researchers think otherwise. For some, the issue of slavery is not the ultimate cause of the war. That is why, a close analysis of scholar's point of view appears highly important before tackling the causes of the civil war.

In Robert W. McGee's recent publication, he sheds light on some major factors that blatantly show that there are many other reasons behind this war. According to McGee who prefers to be neutral in his studies, asserting that slavery is the ultimate cause of the U.S civil war is arguable. That

is why, he has decided to seek AI assistance in order to clarify some shady points (McGee 2). In his studies, McGee reveals that Abraham Lincoln's ultimate goal was not to stop slavery. He quotes a part of the president speech where he made this declaration: "If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that" (McGee 9).

Though this assertion is truly made by Abraham Lincoln, analyzing the context of the speech is also important in order to better understand his message. Evidence shows that this speech is made in the heart of the war, not before the war. Thus, anyone could understand that Lincoln's declaration is influenced by the citizens' pressure. At this junction of the war, it is obvious that Lincoln's priority is to save the union. Indeed, it is impossible to save the union without sharing the Confederates' viewpoints.

Contrary to President Lincoln, General Ulysses Grant insists in his *Memoirs* that the ultimate cause of the war is related to slavery (Grant 26-27). Anthony and Morgan give detailed- explanation in their recent publication:

It should be noted that, while leading the Union forces to victory, General Grant "made sure that the enslaved men, women, and children who escaped to Union lines were protected and cared for" following Lincoln's enactment of the Emancipation Proclamation. In his *Memoirs*, Grant stated clearly his belief that slavery was wrong, and that slavery was the main cause of the American Civil War. (Anthony and Morgan 3)

From the above extract, one could understand that slavery is among the main causes of the civil war even if there are other causes. Among other causes revealed by Robert McGee in his study, one could retain the unbalanced force between the states' Rights and the federal rights, economic interests, cultural values, the election of Abraham Lincoln at the head of the union, the battle of Fort Sumter and the emancipation proclamation.

1.2 Critical Appreciation of Selected Works

As mentioned above, this research paper is not the first work dealing with Ulysses Grant's leadership. Contrary to previous scholarships, this research work shed light on Grant's leadership. Unlike Shields' analysis that focuses on Grant's biography, this research goes further, revealing how clausewitzian

strategy helps Grant to win the war. Robert Grandchamp in his article: “The Leadership of Ulysses Grant: Who Will Fight,” he depicts the fundamentals of Grant’s Leadership. Though, this article is useful for the Civil War Community, military professionals, war schools Managers; it tells us less the drawbacks of some Grant’s awkward decisions at the heart of the war. Better, the overpraising of Grant’s breakthrough on the battlefields has overshadowed some of his military strategies’ limits.

Blenheim’s article: “Ulysses Grant--Some Lessons in Leadership”, projects us a film of Grant’s military training and some key war he fought. He has failed to tell us Grant’s soldiers’ death toll because of some of his awkward decisions and the environmental impact of those bloodiest wars. Anthony Kenneth and Morgan Katherine, citing Grant’s Memoirs in a book entitled: *Ulysses Grant Manumits William Jones: An Example of America’ Entanglement with Slavery*, highlight how General Grant protects, shelters, and cares for the enslaved people during the American civil war. Their analysis is so limited in so far as, Anthony and Morgan have failed to tell us the Negroes’ great contribution to that war.

1.3 Ulysses Grant and Slavery

The United States of America are commonly known for their entrenchment in slavery. Their historical involvement in the transatlantic slave trade is one of the major factors that facilitates the country’s development. Aware of the physical power of African American slave and their contribution to the economic development of the states, Whites Americans do not want to stop this practice. The majority of Americans believe that slaves are human creatures but they do not consider them equal to white Americans; consequently, they do not think that they can have the same rights. This feeling brings slaves masters to use them as farming machines that do not deserve to relax or have a rest. Worse, slaves were subjected to severe exploitation and abuse.

In front of such unfair treatments, the States of the North have succeeded in improving the living conditions of slaves and then engaged in a perpetual seek of freedom in their behalf. But the radical refusal of the Confederates makes it more complicated. Ulysses Grant who has been appointed as the General is also against slavery from the birth. His willingness to eradicate slavery is what surely lead him to make this huge sacrifice,

accepting to face all odds in the battlefield.

First and foremost, Grant grew up in an antislavery family. According to Anthony and Morgan, Grant's relatives are supporters of a Whig party abolitionist (Anthony and Morgan 2). Even his father Jesse is an active supporter of this movement that aims at freeing slaves. Another major reason that leads Grant to be a radical abolitionist is the fact of being married to Dent family. This family that represents his second family because of his wife Julia Dent is a Slave-owning family (Anthony and Morgan 2). According to Anthony and Morgan, the Dent "lived with up to 18 enslaved African-Americans, mostly women and children with a few men who worked in the fields" (Anthony and Morgan 2). After their marriage, Grant has spent five years from 1854- 1859 with his wife and his two children in St Louis where his family in-law lives too.

Grant's interaction with African American slaves when his father in-law went to the city allows him to feel their pain. His role of slaves' supervisor Whenever his father in-law travels is not deeply described in this article. Anthony and Morgan's work might be fantastically rich if they could mention how Grant feel while working with those slaves. Therefore, evidence shows that Grant also tries to follow the same routine as those slaves. This shows indirectly his commitment to promote justice and equity. Another proof of his commitment to promote equity and justice in America is related to his decision to free his slaves William Jones on march 29, 1859, few moments before the commencement of the civil war (Grant 347). This decision shows that Grant is a real abolitionist.

Finally, the role of public memory and historical interpretation in shaping presidential legacies is addressed by historians like Gary W. Gallagher. In "The Confederate War" (Gallagher 9), Gallagher explores how the memory of the Civil War has been constructed and reconstructed over time, influencing perceptions of presidential leadership. This perspective is crucial for understanding how the Civil War continues to inform contemporary political discourse and presidential expectations.

II. Ulysses Grant's Contribution in US Civil War

2.1 Grant's Military Strategy

From United States Military Academy to his appointment as General of the union army in 1864, Grant has learned more about military strategies. His

passion for reading is also a great skill that helps him to diversify his knowledge about war. Out of the different notions taught in the military academy, it is worth mentioning that Grant experience of the war is acquired during the Mexican-American war and his understanding of Clausewitzian strategy.

Before his appointment in 1864, the union army has been ruled based on the Jominian theory. This theory used by General Halleck in 1862 is not the best strategy according to many scholars. Even Grant does not think that this theory is the appropriate to be used in such occasion. Grant's military strategy was derived from Clausewitzian strategy. His deep assessment of this strategy is with no doubt the driving code that allows him and his troop to win the civil war.

According to Carl Von Clausewitz, war may be defined as "an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will" (Clausewitz 75). From this definition, one could clearly tackle the essence of Grant's military strategy based on brutal assaults. From this definition, it is blatant that war is not a field of game, but a place where the only challenge is to oblige the Confederates to abide by the union rules. Without this strategy, the success of the union would be difficult because until 1863, the Union's army has almost lost the battle.

Before General Ulysses Grant, Henry Halleck has been appointed as the General in chief from July 1862 till 1864. Praised for his successful front in the western theater, Halleck's attachment to the Jominian strategy is one of the main causes of his failure at the head of the union army (Dahl 12). As a good observer, Grant has learned from his predecessors' errors. Grant was decisive with a boisterous Victory due to his offensively brutal strategy. His control over the seventeen army commanders is another key element that facilitates his victory.

Aware of the Jominian strategy's weaknesses, Grant applied Clausewitzian strategy. His understanding of this strategy matches with President Lincoln's political vision (Shields iii). His efficient application of this strategy makes him the architect of union's victory. Moreover, Grant's personal courage in battlefield at Belmont, Fort Donelson, and Shiloh are some of his great achievements that make him a respected soldier but this exposure to fire makes him the hero of the union victory during the US civil war (Shields 16).

2.2 Clausewitzian strategy used by Grant during the civil war

Developed by Clausewitz, the Clausewitzian strategy used by Grant during the war is the pillar of their Victory. According to Clausewitz, the most important quality that any great commander should develop is his strong mind to act in front of the unknown (Dahl 18). Although he recognizes the importance of intellect and courage, he put a specific stress on the ability to rise above adversity and persist on a course of action is the most powerful tool to win. Grant displayed a relentless execution of own plans in a number of campaigns and battles, from the Battle of Shiloh to the bloody Overland campaign (Dahl 19). For General Sherman, Grant's persistence is due to the damage caused by the Confederate army and adds that Grant doesn't care what would happen later.

His priority to pay back and oblige them to do the union will: "But I tell you where he beats me, and he beats the world. He doesn't care a damn for what the enemy does out of his sight, but it scares me like hell" (Harry 344-345). From this extract, one could understand that Grant was not afraid, he is mentally and physically strong to overcome the friction of the war. Therefore, his rejection of the Jominian principles allows him to take decisive actions. According to Dahl, Grant and Lincoln have a clear understanding of the conflict. This understanding is the engine that enable him to develop his "insight into a military strategy of aggressive attack against the Confederate armies and "political attrition" of the Southern will to continue the fight" (Dahl 20). Grant's communication skill also helps to achieve the goal. In the middle of the war when people want peace restoration, he made a speech to clarify his point of view. While listening to his speech, anyone could see how confident and brutal was he. Grant believes that only violence could solve the problem, not submission. His speech puts the Confederate army in puzzle because they were quite sure that Grant might abandon and do their will.

This ensures that Grant was ready to destroy them regardless the consequences: I do not know any way to put down this rebellion and restore the authority of the Government except by fighting, and fighting means that men must be killed. If the people of this country expect that the war can be conducted to a successful issue in any other way than by fighting, they must get somebody other than myself to command the army (Dahl 20 and Brook 355).

2.3 Grant's Military expertise

Even if Grant's presidential leadership has been scandalous, his military expertise is not arguable. During his military career, Grant has never lost a battle. His dynamism shaped by an in-depth understanding of the concept of war and fueled by his techniques and his ability to face enemies make him the hero of US civil war. The following table shows the different battles in which Grant fought.

Table1: Major Battles led by General Grant (1861-1863)

Wars	Moment	Ending
Battle of Belmont, Missouri	November 7, 1861	Won
Battle of Fort Henry, Tennessee	February 6, 1862	Won
Battle of Fort Donelson, Tennessee	February 11-16, 1862	Won
Battle of Shilo, Tennessee	April 6-7, 1862	Won
Campaign and siege of Vicksburg, Mississippi	December 1862 - July 4, 1863	Won
Chattanooga Campaign, Tennessee	October to November 1863	Won

Source: *Grant's personal memoir* (Grant 90)

From the above table, one could notice that Grant won 100% of before the end of US civil war. His forces were on the brink of losing Chattanooga Campaign when he arrived. His men were dying of hunger. But thanks to his dynamism, a special mean of food transport has been found and this facilitates the victory. From the beginning up to the end of the war, Grant has been a role model for all his battalion. Apart from the above victory, it is worth mentioning that the most important phase of the US civil war is related to Petersburg surrounding. This step may be considered as a decisive and ruthless campaign phase. Grant's brutality led to Richmond failure and General Lee's surrender.

III. From Battlefield to the White House

3.1 Grant's Great Actions as President

After the US civil war, Ulysses Grant's boisterous victory has been celebrated and he is then considered as the hero and the architect of the Confederate

army's defeat. Tangible evidence of his courage is directly underlined in the title of the Colonel Lieutenant Robert G. Shields military work entitled *Ulysses Grant: The Architect of the Victory in the U.S Civil War*. Then American news serves as a mean of exploring not only the military strategy used by Grant but also to acknowledge his marvelous skills during the war. Few years after the end of the civil war, Grant has been elected President in 1868. On the same page with the ex-president, Grant does a great job to assure slave freedom and their accession to the right of vote. The following extract shows his summary of his great actions as President:

Grant became President during the midst of the Reconstruction era, and attempted to foster reconciliation between the North and South. Grant supported amnesty for Confederate leaders' civil rights for former slaves. He pushed for ratification of the 15th Amendment, allowing black men the right to vote. Grant asked Congress for legislation, the Ku Klux Klan Act to enforce strict penalties against terrorist organizations and suppress the Ku Klux Klan. Also, during his Presidency, Grant signed legislation creating the Weather Bureau, Department of Justice and America's first national park, Yellowstone National Park. (Blenheim 2)

The trajectory from the American Civil War to the presidency has been a focal point of scholarly inquiry, reflecting the complex interplay of political, social, and economic factors that shaped the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Thus, this extract outlines an overview of the Grant's key areas of focus during his presidency. He focuses on the reconstruction that facilitates the adoption of the 15th Amendment. The aim of this amendment is to honour slaves through the right of vote and to fight against racial discrimination in public places. But the remaining question to know whether Grant succeeded in addressing racial discrimination puzzle during his Presidency. Racial discrimination did survive a hundred -year after Grant's political term. Nevertheless, Grant's willingness to assure an economic development through the reconstruction of high infrastructures destroyed during the civil war is crucially important to be underlined.

3.2 Critical Analysis of Grant's Presidency

From a celebrated war hero to a corrupt president, Grant's transition from the battlefield to the Whitehouse has astonished his admirers. As a matter of

a fact, Grant's leadership style in the White House has shown with no slightest doubt that, great military expertise does not make great political leader. For instance, after a few months in the White House, Grant's followers were surprised to see their president lack of political experience and the poor policies implemented by his administration. Worse, his presidency was marred by scandals. Thus, the promised land the 18th American President promised to his population remained at the dream level.

Unlike the other presidents, one could blatantly notice the prevalence of corruption within his administration, exemplified by scandals such as the Credit Mobilier and the Whiskey Ring. Grant overconfidence is considered as the source of this political failure because many scholars think that the real architects of Grant's political failure are his friends appointed in his administration. His lack of control stimulates the economic crisis including the Panic of 1873, which led to a severe economic depression. Grant's political incompetence is also viewed as source of the different problems within the Republican Party and the waning support to the Reconstruction policies.

3.3 Discussion

Throughout the war, General Ulysses Grant has been a role model and a war leader to follow. Grant is the hero and the architect of the union army victory among other Generals and Commanders. His determination and perseverance were the best weapons on the battlefields. His quick decision -making in moment of adversity when the conflict reaches the climax is the engine that fuel the union victory. Unlike to General Halleck who abide by the Jominian theory of the war, Grant makes the difference by applying the Clausewitzian strategy in his own way. Many Americans viewed Grant's elections as the 18th US president as an act of gratefulness. Nonetheless, Grant's passage on earth remains anchored in the US history.

Just as "a robe does not make a monk," a great general does not always make a good president. Ulysses S. Grant's political leadership ultimately disillusioned many Americans. One of his major weaknesses was his failure to effectively manage his associates after being elected president. His lack of political experience, combined with poorly implemented social and economic policies, undermined the cost-effectiveness of his administration. Moreover, Grant's inability to address the numerous scandals and widespread corruption

that plagued his presidency nearly pushed his government into chaos. His impulsive decision-making often prevented him from fully considering the consequences of his actions. Finally, Grant's excessive loyalty to friends and political allies who had supported his rise to power made him reluctant to remove unfit or corrupt individuals from office.

Conclusion

Analyzing the aftermath of the U.S civil war is good but focusing on General Grant's contribution to the union victory is more important. Born in Point Pleasant Ohio in 1822, General Ulysses grant comes from an antislavery family and gets married in a slave-owning family where he used to supervise slaves' works when his father in-law goes to the city. From an ordinary person to a General, it is worth mentioning that Grant has never dreamed of becoming a soldier. His acceptance to join the United States military Academy is due to his father's pressure. Grant has no choice but accept the option for furthering his studies there. By doing so, Grant could not picture that he was paving his way to become a nation hero.

Grant's perseverance and courage are one of the major elements developed in this piece of scholarship. Both Grant's military expertise and his leadership have been decisive to the victory of the union armies. Of Grant's amazing life, Frederick Douglass wrote a fitting epithet: "In him, the Negro found a protector, the Indian a friend, a vanquished foe a brother, an imperiled nation a savior" (Garry 2). Grant eight-year stay in the White House has been a nightmare for many Americans. President Grant lack of political experience and good leadership nearly prompted his administration to a chaos. Normally American Presidents continue enjoying life full of milk and honey after their political terms. That was not the case of president Grant. The political and economic chaos into which he put the USA, did not permit the American tax-payer to take care of the past-president Grant. President Grant was then obliged to write different papers and memoirs in order to survive. Another important aspect that remain unexplored are to carry out further researches on comparative studies between President Grant and other Generals turned-presidents like George Washington and Dwight Eisenhower.

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