

When Sherman Marched North from the Sea: Resistance on the Confederate Home Front

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Review

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Campbell, Jacqueline Glass *When Sherman Marched North from the Sea: Resistance on the Confederate Home Front*. University of North Carolina Press, \$27.50 ISBN 807828092

The second march:

Sherman, his army, and the Carolina's

When Sherman Marched North from the Sea represents a valuable addition to the growing scholarship regarding the interaction between the home front and the battle front in the Confederacy. Jacqueline Glass Campbell, an assistant professor of history at the University of Connecticut, has chosen to focus on the less-studied part of William Tecumseh Sherman's march across the South in the waning days of the Confederacy. Most scholarship and most myths have addressed Sherman's trek from Atlanta to Savannah. Campbell's work begins where these works terminate. She studies the interaction between Sherman's soldiers and southern civilians, both white and black, from the occupation of Savannah northward through South Carolina and into North Carolina. She has skillfully followed in the footsteps of such scholars as William Blair, whose *Virginia's Private War* serves as one of the finest models of examining the interaction among civilians, government officials, and the two armies, and Gary Gallagher, whose *The Confederate War* emphatically stresses that a lack of Confederate nationalism did not cause Confederate defeat and that white southerners' commitment to their cause was alive and well into early 1865. According to Campbell, who shares these scholars' views of the connection between home front and battle front and the resiliency of Confederate nationalism, a thorough analysis of this part of Sherman's march demonstrates that, contrary to popular perception, rather than crushing southern resistance, the presence of Sherman's soldiers actually stiffened southern resolve, particularly among the region's white women. Overall, this work offers fascinating new contributions to the fields of women's history, military history, and African

American history, as well to the burgeoning field of Civil War memory. At the same time Campbell addresses this diverse group of scholars, she attempts and succeeds in making her work readable for the non-expert by keeping much of her theoretical debate in her endnotes.

Sherman's soldiers not only invaded geographic areas but struck at psychological spaces, southern households, as well. Many of these households were comprised solely of white women, and Campbell's book offers a view of these Confederate women which challenges their image from both stereotypes and scholarship. In an effort to protect themselves, their possessions, and the Confederacy, these women resisted Union incursions verbally and sometimes physically. Campbell asserts that they had a strong grasp of the status of the war and of the condition of southern armies. As a partner to this argument and in contrast to the views of other historians, she contends that southern men and women may have seen the war in a similar manner. While southern women and men may have shared a common viewpoint, she posits a South and North sharply divided in terms of gender norms. If northern males inhabited (or at least idealized) a world of separate spheres where women lived a pure life in their homes, southern women still lived in a society where production and reproduction remained under the same roof. Thus, they often served more as deputy husbands who could be aggressive, rude, and independent and still be seen as ladies. Because of these differing world views, northern soldiers expressed surprise at the audacious conduct of many southern women. Expecting a docile female population, Sherman's soldiers often faced abrasive, and in their view unladylike, women who had not accepted defeat. In fact, contrary to popular view, these women did not withdraw their loyalty from the Confederate cause with the Union invasion, but instead they became more resistant as northern soldiers invaded their undefended homes.

If southern white women could find themselves vulnerable to the power of northern soldiers, Campbell explains that this put them in a position that their slaves had long experienced. In her study of the reaction of slaves to the northern army, Campbell adds a further brief to the growing body of literature demonstrating that the idea of Union soldiers as liberators is too simplistic. In many cases, soldiers ignored slaves' humanity, for while northern gender conventions helped reduce attacks on southern white women, these beliefs did not extend the same protection to southern African American women who were considered legitimate targets for lust. Additionally, many Union soldiers, including General Sherman, viewed freed slaves as an encumbrance to their

army, and they lacked the supplies as well as the desire to help them. Campbell explains how this treatment led many slaves to remain on their plantations, preferring the devil they knew to the unknown dangers of Union troops, and it also placed southern blacks and whites in a position of mutual dependence as both groups viewed northern soldiers as potential threats.

When Sherman Marched North from the Sea also contributes to the field of historical memory. It persuasively demonstrates that Sherman did not embark on a devastating total war, but he instead combined a mixture of severity and restraint in an effort to allow southerners peace with honor. Northern contemporaries excoriated his peace terms as too lenient to the defeated South, yet ironically, as part of Lost Cause mythology he has come to serve as the personification of the evils of the invading army. Campbell posits a twin irony: southern women, whose actual reactions ranged from submission to overt hostility, have come to be seen only as passive loyalists who were victims to Yankee depredations. Both of these ironies stem from complex gender notions rising in the war's aftermath. A combination of southern male ideas of honor, the perpetuation of the idea of a threat of black rape of white women, and the adoption of northern notions of separate spheres all combined to alter the historical memory of women's actual roles during the war. Simultaneously, the Lost Cause myth deified Robert E. Lee whose victories and chivalry came to epitomize southern cultural superiority. Lee's hero needed a corresponding anti-hero, and a distorted view of Sherman's violation of southern mores and of southern womanhood came to serve that need.

Unsurprisingly in a work that includes only 110 pages of text, the few weaknesses stem from omissions rather than commissions. For instance, in looking at the interaction between northern soldiers and southern civilians, Campbell has painted a portrait devoid of white men. While certainly most white men would have been in the army, others would have remained at home. In their march through Georgia (legendary for its opposition to Confederate conscription), North Carolina (only slightly less infamous), and South Carolina (home to many plantations where white males would have been exempt), Sherman's men did not encounter a civilian population comprised entirely of white women and slaves. A comparison of the interactions that northern soldiers had with southern males to the interactions they had with southern females (i.e., were they harsher toward male plantation owners?) would strengthen Campbell's arguments regarding gender preconceptions. Additionally, her book makes a convincing case that the presence of northern soldiers did not demoralize but

instead strengthened southern resolve. Yet, these same resilient southerners quit the war just a few months later. While it is not Campbell's purpose to discuss the war's termination, this reader would have preferred a greater discussion of this seeming contradiction. A partial explanation to this conundrum lies in Campbell's contention (which echoes that of Gary Gallagher) that southerners tied their nationalism to Lee's army rather than to the Confederate government and therefore when Lee surrendered southern will disappeared. This contention has some merit, but it points out another area that Campbell could have explored further. Campbell's southern civilians may have been tied to Lee's army, but they seemingly lacked much of a connection to either a state or national government. While northern incursions stiffened southern resolve, one would assume that they must have either undermined some faith in the Confederate government or caused some to advocate changes in state or national policies, yet Campbell does not do enough to explore these issues.

These concerns suggest additional questions that could have been answered in **When Sherman Marched North from the Sea**. They do not, however, take much away from a well-written, well-argued, thought-provoking account of this less-remembered, but perhaps more important, part of Sherman's march across the South. Campbell convinces the reader that southern women did not react passively and that the presence of Union troops reinforced rather than destroyed their loyalty to the Confederacy. In accomplishing this goal, Campbell has deftly addressed and intertwined the fields of women's history, African-American history, military history, and public memory in a brief, accessible work. This book is valuable not only to scholars in all of these fields, but also to the general reading public interested in learning more about these areas.

John M. Sacher is an assistant professor of history at Emporia State University. He is the author of A Perfect War of Politics: Parties, Politicians, and Democracy in Louisiana, 1824-1861 (LSU Press, 2003) and is currently researching the Louisiana home front during the Civil War. He can be contacted at sacherjo@emporia.edu.