Are Historians Wrong to Consider the War Between the States a "Total War"?

YES ⬅

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. . . **T**he idea of total war was first applied to the Civil War in an article about William T. Sherman published in the *Journal of Southern History* in 1948: John B. Walters's "General William T. Sherman and Total War."[1] After this initial use of the term, it was quickly adopted by T. Harry Williams, whose influential book *Lincoln and His Generals,* published in 1952, began with this memorable sentence: "The Civil War was the first of the modern total wars, and the American democracy was almost totally unready to fight it." Among the more popular Civil War writers, the idea also fared well. Bruce Catton, for example, wrote in a 1964 essay on "The Generalship of Ulysses S. Grant" that "He was fighting . . . a total war, and in a total war the enemy's economy is to be undermined in any way possible." Scholarly writers continued to use the term as well. In his masterful *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era,* Princeton University's James M. McPherson writes, "By 1863, Lincoln's remarkable abilities gave him a wide edge over Davis as a war leader, while in Grant and Sherman the North acquired commanders with a concept of total war and the necessary determination to make it succeed." Professor McPherson's book forms part of the prestigious Oxford History of the United States. In another landmark volume, *"A People's Contest": The Union and the Civil War* (Harper & Row's New American Nation series), historian Phillip Shaw Paludan writes, "Grant's war making has come to stand for the American way of war. For one thing, that image is one of total war demanding unconditional surrender."[2]

Surely any idea about the military conduct of the Civil War that has been championed by Williams, Catton, McPherson, and Paludan, that is embodied in the Oxford History of the United States and in the New American Nation series, can fairly be called accepted wisdom on the subject. Most writers on the military history of the war, if forced to articulate a brief general description of the nature of that conflict, would now say, as McPherson has, that the Civil War began in 1861 with a purpose in the North "to suppress this insurrection and restore loyal Unionists to control of the southern states. The conflict was therefore a limited war . . . with the limited goal of restoring the status quo ante bellum, not an unlimited war to destroy an enemy nation and reshape its society." Gradually, or as McPherson puts it, "willy-nilly," the war became "a total war rather than a limited one." Eventually, "Union generals William Tecumseh Sherman and Philip Sheridan saw more clearly than anyone else the nature of modern, total war, a war between peoples rather than simply between armies, a war in which the fighting left nothing untouched or unchanged."

President Lincoln came to realize the nature of the military contest and "sanctioned this policy of 'being terrible' on the enemy." Finally, "when the Civil War became a total war, the invading army intentionally destroyed the economic capacity of the South to wage war." Northern victory resulted from this gradual realization and the subsequent application of new and harsh doctrines in the war's later phase. . . .

Northerner and Southerner alike have come to agree on the use of this term, total war, but what does it mean exactly? It was never used in the Civil War itself. Where does it come from?. . . .

Unfortunately, like many parts of everyday vocabulary, total war is a loose term with several meanings. Since World War II, it has come to mean, in part, a war requiring the full economic mobilization of a society. From the start, it meant the obverse of the idea as well: making war on the economic resources of the enemy rather than directly on its armed forces alone. Yet there was nothing really new about attacking an enemy's economic resources; that was the very essence of naval blockades and they long predated the Civil War. The crucial and terrible new aspect of the notion of total war was embodied in the following idea, part of a definition of the term cited in the *Oxford English Dictionary:* "Every citizen is in a sense a combatant and also the object of attack." Every systematic definition of the term embodies the concept of destroying the ages-old distinction between civilians and soldiers, whatever other ideas may be present. Another citation in the *OED,* for example, terms it "a war to which all resources and the whole population are committed; loosely, a war conducted without any scruple or limitations." *Webster's . . . Unabridged* dictionary describes total war as "warfare that uses all possible means of attack, military, scientific, and psychological, against both enemy troops and civilians." And James Turner Johnson, in his study of *Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War,* asserts that in total war "there must be disregard of restraints imposed by custom, law, and morality on the prosecution of the war. Especially, . . . total war bears hardest on noncombatants, whose traditional protection from harm according to the traditions of just and limited warfare appears to evaporate here."

Close application of this twentieth-century term (the product of the age of strategic bombing and blitzkrieg and powerful totalitarian governments capable of mobilizing science and psychology) to the Civil War seems fraught with difficulty. Surely no one believes, for example, that the Civil War was fought "without any scruple or limitations." From the ten thousand plus pages of documents in the eight full volumes of the *Official Records* dealing with prisoners of war, to the many copies of General Orders No. 100, a brief code of the laws of war distributed throughout the Union army in 1863, evidence abounds that this war knew careful limitation and conscientious scruple. Even World War II followed the rules bearing on prisoners of war. Any assessment of the Civil War's nearness to being a total war can be no more than that: an assertion that it *approached* total war in some ways. By no definition of the term can it be said to *be* a total war.

Occasionally, the term total war approximates the meaning of modernity. T. Harry Williams used the terms interchangeably, as in this passage from

a later work in which he hedged a bit on calling the Civil War a total war: "Trite it may be to say that the Civil War was the first of the modern wars, but this is a truth that needs to be repeated. If the Civil War was not quite total, it missed totality by only a narrow margin."

Modernity is not a very useful concept in military history. Surely every war is thought to be modern by its participants—save possibly those fought by Japan in the strange era when firearms were consciously rejected. As a historian's term, modern when applied to warfare has a widely accepted meaning different from total. Modern warfare generally connotes wars fought after the French Revolution by large citizen armies equipped with the products of the Industrial Revolution and motivated more by ideology than the lash or strictly mercenary considerations. The Civil War certainly was a modern war in that sense, but it was not a total war in the sense that civilians were commonly thought of as legitimate military targets.

Perhaps no one who maintains the Civil War was a total war means it so literally. Historian Brian Bond provides a useful idea when he writes, "strictly speaking, total war is just as much a myth as total victory or total peace. What is true, however, is that the fragile barriers separating war from peace and soldiers from civilians—already eroded in the First World War—virtually disappeared between 1939 and 1945." Seeing how often that fragile barrier broke in the Civil War will tell how nearly it approached being a total war. All such matters of degree contain dangers for the historian trying to answer the question; the risk of sinking under a mass of piecemeal objections raised afterward by critics is very high. Even the most conservative of Civil War generals occasionally stepped over the boundaries of customarily accepted behavior in nineteenth-century warfare. General George B. McClellan, for example, did so in the Peninsula campaign, after only about a year's fighting. On May 4, 1862, he informed Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton: "The rebels have been guilty of the most murderous & barbarous conduct in placing torpedoes [land mines] *within* the abandoned works, near wells & springs, near flag staffs, magazines, telegraph offices, in carpet bags, barrels of flour etc. Fortunately we have not lost many men in this manner—some 4 or 5 killed & perhaps a dozen wounded. I shall make the prisoners remove them at their own peril." . . .

John B. Walters cited General Sherman's use of prisoners to clear mines as an example of his total war practices, but Sherman's reaction was in fact exactly like McClellan's. When Sherman saw a "handsome young officer" with all the flesh blown off one of his legs by a Confederate mine in Georgia in December 1864, he grew "very angry," because "this was not war, but murder." Sherman then retaliated by using Confederate prisoners to clear the mines. What at first may seem an incident suggesting the degeneration of warfare, in fact proves the belief of the protagonists in rules and codes of civilized behavior that have in the twentieth century long since vanished from the world's battlefields. The real point is that Union and Confederate authorities were in substantial agreement about the laws of war, and they usually tried to stay within them.

Leaving aside similar isolated instances caused by temporary rage, can a historian seeking to describe the war's direction toward or away from total war examine larger aspects of the war where the "fragile barriers" between soldiers

and civilians may have broken down? Since the conscious application of a new doctrine in warfare forms part of the total war interpretation, can a historian focus on certain figures in high command who held such doctrines and applied them to the enemy in the Civil War? Throughout, can the historian keep an eye on the dictionary definition of total war to measure the proximity of the Civil War to it? Surely this can be done, and short of a study of the Civil War day by day, there can hardly be any other test. . . .

Sherman is the Civil War soldier most often quoted on the subject of total war. An article about him gave rise to this interpretation of the Civil War, and indeed it is now widely held that, as historian John E. Marszalek has expressed it, William T. Sherman was the "Inventor of Total Warfare." "We are not only fighting hostile armies, but a hostile people, and must make old and young, rich and poor, feel the hard hand of war, as well as their organized armies," Sherman told Gen. Hency W. Halleck on Christmas Eve 1864. As early as October 1862 he said, "We cannot change the hearts of these people of the South, but we can make war so terrible . . . [and] make them so sick of war that generations would pass away before they would again appeal to it."[3]

The gift of sounding like a twentieth-century man was peculiarly Sherman's. Nearly every other Civil War general sounds ancient by comparison, but many historians may have allowed themselves to be fooled by his style while ignoring the substance of his campaigns.

Historians, moreover, quote Sherman selectively. In fact, he said many things and when gathered together they do not add up to any coherent "total-war philosophy," as one historian describes it. Sherman was not a philosopher; he was a general and a garrulous one at that. "He talked incessantly and more rapidly than any man I ever saw," Maj. John Chipman Gray reported. "It would be easier to say what he did not talk about than what he did." Chauncey Depew said Sherman was "the readiest and most original talker in the United States." And what Sherman said during the war was often provoked by exasperating, momentary circumstance. Therefore, he occasionally uttered frightening statements. "To secure the safety of the navigation of the Mississippi River I would slay millions," Sherman told Gen. John A. Logan on December 21,1863. "On that point I am not only insane, but mad . . . For every bullet shot at a steamboat, I would shoot a thousand 30-pounder Parrotts into even helpless towns on Red, Oachita, Yazoo, or wherever a boat can float or soldier march." This statement was all the more striking, coming from a man widely reputed by newspaper critics to be insane. On another occasion, Sherman said, "To the petulant and persistent secessionists, why, death is mercy, and the quicker he or *she is* disposed of the better" (italics added).[4]

In other moods and in different circumstances, Sherman could sound as mild as Robert E. Lee. "War," the alleged inventor of total war wrote on April 19, 1863, "at best is barbarism, but to involve all—children, women, old and helpless—is more than can be justified." And he went on to caution against seizing so many stores that family necessities were endangered. Later, in the summer of 1863 when General Sherman sent a cavalry expedition toward Memphis from Mississippi, General Grant instructed him to "impress upon the men the importance of going through the State in an

orderly manner, abstaining from taking anything not absolutely necessary for their subsistence while travelling. They should try to create as favorable an impression as possible upon the people." These may seem hopeless orders to give General Sherman, but his enthusiastic reply was this: "It will give me excessive pleasure to instruct the Cavalry as you direct, for the Policy you point out meets every wish of my heart."[5]

Scholars who pay less heed to the seductively modern sound of Sherman's harsher statements and look closely instead at what he actually did on his celebrated campaigns in Georgia and the Carolinas, find a nineteenth-century soldier at work—certainly not a man who made war on noncombatants. Joseph T. Glatthaar's study of Sherman's campaigns confirmed that, for the most part, Sherman's men did not physically abuse civilians who kept to themselves: atrocities were suffered mostly by soldiers on *both* sides; in Georgia and the Carolinas, Sherman's army recovered the bodies of at least 172 Union soldiers hanged, shot in the head at close range, with their throats slit, or "actually butchered." And only in South Carolina, the state blamed for starting the war, did Sherman fail to restrain his men in their destruction of private property. Before the idea of total war came to Civil War studies, shrewd students of the conflict had noted the essentially nineteenth-century nature of Sherman's campaigns. Gamaliel Bradford's *Union Portraits,* for example, written during World War I, observed: "Events . . . have made the vandalism of Sherman seem like discipline and order. The injury done by him seldom directly affected anything but property. There was no systematic cruelty in the treatment of noncombatants, and to the eternal glory of American soldiers be it recorded that insult and abuse toward women were practically unknown during the Civil War."[6]

Though not a systematic military thinker, General Sherman did compose a letter addressing the problem of noncombatants in the Civil War, and it described his actual policies better than his frequently quoted statements of a more sensational nature. He sent the letter to Maj. R. M. Sawyer, whom Sherman left behind to manage Huntsville, Alabama, when he departed for Meridian, Mississippi, early in 1864. Sherman also sent a copy to his brother, Republican Senator John Sherman, with an eye to possible publication:

> In my former letters I have answered all your questions save one, and that relates to the treatment of inhabitants known or suspected to be hostile or "Secesh." This is in truth the most difficult business of our army as it advances and occupies the Southern country. It is almost impossible to lay down rules, and I invariably leave the whole subject to the local commanders, but am willing to give them the benefit of my acquired knowledge and experience. In Europe, whence we derive our principles of war, wars are between kings or rulers through hired armies, and not between peoples. These remain, as it were, neutral, and sell their produce to whatever army is in possession.
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> Napoleon when at war with Prussia, Austria, and Russia bought forage and provisions of the inhabitants and consequently had an interest to protect the farms and factories which ministered to his wants. In like manner the allied Armies in France could buy of the

French inhabitants whatever they needed, the produce of the soil or manufactures of the country. Therefore, the general rule was and is that war is confined to the armies engaged, and should not visit the houses of families or private interests. But in other examples a different rule obtained the sanction of historical authority. I will only instance one, where in the siege of William and Mary the English army occupied Ireland, then in a state of revolt. The inhabitants were actually driven into foreign lands, and were dispossessed of their property and a new population introduced.

. . . The question then arises, Should we treat as absolute enemies all in the South who differ from us in opinion or prejudice, kill or banish them, or should we give them time to think and gradually change their conduct so as to conform to the new order of things which is slowly and gradually creeping into their country?

When men take up arms to resist a rightful authority, we are compelled to use like force. . . . When the provisions, forage, horses, mules, wagons, etc., are used by our enemy, it is clearly our duty and right to take them also, because otherwise they might be used against us. In like manner all houses left vacant by an inimical people are clearly our right, and as such are needed as storehouses, hospitals, and quarters. But the question arises as to dwellings used by women, children and non-combatants. So long as non-combatants remain in their houses and keep to their accustomed peaceful business, their opinions and prejudices can in no wise influence the war, and therefore should not be noticed; but if any one comes out into the public streets and creates disorder, he or she should be punished, restrained, or banished. . . . If the people, or any of them, keep up a correspondence with parties in hostility, they are spies, and can be punished according to law with death or minor punishment. These are well-established principles of war, and the people of the South having appealed to war, are barred from appealing for protection to our constitution, which they have practically and publicly defied. They have appealed to war, and must abide its rules and laws.

Excepting incidents of retaliation, Sherman by and large lived by these "principles of war."[7]

Leaving "the whole subject" to local commanders nevertheless permitted considerable latitude for pillage or destruction and was in itself an important principle. Moreover, Sherman, who was a critic of universal suffrage and loathed the free press, thought a volunteer army, the product of America's ultra-individualistic society, would inevitably loot and burn private property. His conservative social views thus led to a career-long fatalism about pillage.[8]

Sherman's purposes in the Georgia and Carolinas campaigns, usually pointed to as the epitome of total war in the Civil War, are obscured by two months of the general's letters to other generals describing his desire to cut loose from Atlanta and his long, thin line of supply to march to the sea. From mid-September to mid-November 1864, Sherman worried the idea, and his superiors, explaining it in several ways. At first he argued from his knowledge of the political disputes between Jefferson Davis and Georgia governor

Joseph E. Brown that the march would sever the state from the Confederacy. "They may stand the fall of Richmond," Sherman told Grant on September 20, "but not of all Georgia." At the same time he belittled the effects of mere destruction: "the more I study the game the more I am convinced that it would be wrong for me to penetrate much farther into Georgia without an objective beyond. It would not be productive of much good. I can start east and make a circuit south and back, *doing vast damage to the State,* but resulting in no permanent good" (italics added).[9]

Less than three weeks later, Sherman gave a rather different explanation to Grant: "Until we can repopulate Georgia, it is useless to occupy it, but the utter destruction of its roads, houses, and people will cripple their military resources. By attempting to hold the roads we will lose 1,000 men monthly, and will gain no result. I can make the march, and make Georgia howl."

Ten days after that, he more or less combined his different arguments in a letter to General Halleck. "This movement is not purely military or strategic," he now said, "but it will illustrate the vulnerability of the South." Only when Sherman's armies arrived and "fences and corn and hogs and sheep" vanished would "the rich planters of the Oconee and Savannah" know "what war means." He spoke more tersely to his subordinates. "I want to prepare for my big raid," he explained on October 19 to a colonel in charge of supply, and with that Sherman arranged to send his impedimenta to the rear.

With plans more or less set, Sherman explained to Gen. George Thomas, who would be left to deal with Confederate Gen. John Bell Hood's army, "I propose to demonstrate the vulnerability of the South, and make its inhabitants feel that war and individual ruin are synonymous terms." Delays ensued and Sherman decided to remain in place until after election day. On the twelfth he cut his telegraph lines, and the confusing explanations of the campaign ceased pouring out of Georgia.

Sherman did not attempt the "utter destruction" of Georgia's "people." He did not really attack noncombatants directly or make any serious attempt to destroy "the economic capacity of the south to wage war," as one historian has described his purpose. After capturing Atlanta, for example, Sherman moved to capture Savannah and then attacked the symbolic capital of secession, South Carolina. He did not attack Augusta, Georgia, which he knew to contain "the only powder mills and factories remaining in the South." Though he did systematically destroy railroad lines, Sherman otherwise had little conception of eliminating essential industries. Indeed, there were few to eliminate, for the South, in comparison with the North, was a premodern, underdeveloped, agrarian region where determined men with rifles were the real problem—not the ability of the area's industries to manufacture high-technology weapons. Despite scorching a sixty-mile-wide swath through the Confederacy, Sherman was never going to starve this agrarian economy into submission, either. He had remarked in the past on how well fed and even shod the Confederate armies were despite their backward economy.

What Sherman was doing embodied traditional geopolitical objectives in a civil war: convincing the enemy's people and the world that the Confederate government and upper classes were too weak to maintain nationhood. He did

this with a "big raid." "If we can march a well-appointed army right through his [Jefferson Davis's] territory," Sherman told Grant on November 6, 1864, "it is a demonstration to the world, foreign and domestic, that we have a power which Davis cannot resist." In *Battle Cry of Freedom* this statement is followed by ellipsis marks and the statement, "I can make the march, and make Georgia howl!" But that appears to be a misquotation. In fact, Sherman went on to say something much less vivid and scorching:

> This may not be war, but rather statesmanship, nevertheless it is overwhelming to my mind that there are thousands of people abroad and in the South who will reason thus: If the North can march an army right through the south, it is proof positive that the North can prevail in this contest, leaving only open the question of its willingness to use that power.
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> Now, Mr. Lincoln's election, which is assured, coupled with the conclusion just reached, makes a complete, logical whole.

And Mr. Lincoln himself endorsed the view. In his letter congratulating Sherman on his Christmas capture of Savannah, the president counted the campaign "a great success" not only in affording "the obvious and immediate military advantages" but also "in showing to the world that your army could be divided, putting the stronger part to an important new service, and yet leaving enough to vanquish the old opposing force of the whole—Hood's army." This, Lincoln said, "brings those who sat in darkness, to see a great light." Neither Sherman nor Lincoln put the emphasis on the role of sheer destructiveness or economic deprivation. . . .

In fact, no Northerner at any time in the nineteenth century embraced as his own the cold-blooded ideas now associated with total war. If one seeks the earliest application of the idea (rather than the actual term) to the Civil War, it lies perhaps in the following document, written in the midst of the Civil War itself:

> [T]hey [the U.S.] have repudiated the foolish conceit that the inhabitants of this confederacy are still citizens of the United States, for they are waging an indiscriminate war upon them all, with a savage ferocity unknown to modern civilization. In this war, rapine is the rule: private residences, in peaceful rural retreats, are bombarded and burnt: Grain crops in the field are consumed by the torch and when the torch is not convenient, careful labor is bestowed to render complete the destruction of every article of use or ornament remaining in private dwellings, after their inhabitants have fled from the outrages of a brutal soldiery.
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> Mankind will shudder to hear of the tales of outrages committed on defenceless females by soldiers of the United States now invading our homes: yet these outrages are prompted by inflamed passions and madness of intoxication.

The source of the idea was, of course, Confederate, and it was a high Confederate source indeed: Jefferson Davis.

It may sound as though Davis was describing Sherman's march through Georgia or perhaps Sheridan in the Shenandoah Valley—most probably in a late speech, in 1864 or 1865. In fact, President Davis made the statement in 1861, in his Message to Congress of July 20. Davis not only described total war three years before Sherman entered Georgia; he described total war before the First Battle of Bull Run had been fought. It was fought the day *after* Davis delivered his message to Congress.

The first application of the *idea* to the Civil War came, then, in Confederate propaganda. Though it may not be a sectional interpretation now, it was an entirely sectional idea in the beginning. Its origins give perhaps the best clue to the usefulness of the idea in describing the Civil War. Total war may describe certain isolated and uncharacteristic aspects of the Civil War but is at most a partial view.

The point is not merely semantic. The use of the idea of total war prevents historians from understanding the era properly. . . .

Likewise, the economic aspect of total war is misleading when used to describe characteristics of the Civil War reputedly more forward looking than naval blockades. The ideas of economic planning and control from World War II cannot be applied to the Civil War. Hardly anyone then thought in such macroeconomic terms. Abraham Lincoln did calculate the total daily cost of the war, but he did not do so to aid long-range economic planning for the Union war effort. Instead he used the figure to show how relatively inexpensive it would be for the U.S. government to purchase the freedom of all the slaves in the border states through compensated emancipation. At $400 a head, the $2 million daily war expenditure would buy every slave in Delaware at "less than one half-day's cost," and "less than eighty seven days cost of this war would, at the same price, pay for all in Delaware, Maryland, District of Columbia, Kentucky, and Missouri."

From the Confederate perspective, the economic insight seems ironically somewhat more appropriate. The blockade induced scarcities on which almost all Confederate civilian diarists commented—coffee, shoe leather, and needles were sorely missed. The Confederate government's attempts to supply scarce war necessities led some historians to call the resulting system "state socialism" or a "revolutionary experience." Yet these were the outcome less of deliberate Northern military strategy (the blockade aside) than of the circumstance that the South was agrarian and the North more industrialized.

For its part, the North did little to mobilize its resources—little, that is, that would resemble the centralized planning and state intervention typical of twentieth-century economies in war. There was no rationing, North or South, and the Yankees' society knew only the sacrifice of men, not of materials. As Phillip Paludan has shown, agriculture thrived, and other parts of Northern society suffered only modestly; college enrollments fell, except at the University of Michigan, but young men still continued to go to college in substantial numbers. Inflation and a graduated income tax did little to trouble the claims made by most Republicans of surprising prosperity in the midst of war. The

Republican president stated in his annual message to the United States Congress in December 1864:

> It is of noteworthy interest that the steady expansion of population, improvement and governmental institutions over the new and unoccupied portions of our country have scarcely been checked, much less impeded or destroyed, by our great civil war, which at first glance would seem to have absorbed almost the entire energies of the nation.
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> . . . It is not material to inquire *how* the increase has been produced, or to show that it would have been *greater* but for the war. . . . The important fact remains demonstrated, that we have *more* men *now* than we had when the war *began*. . . . This as to men. Material resources are now more complete and abundant than ever.
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> The national resources, then; are unexhausted, and, as we believe, inexhaustible.

Democrats generally conceded prosperity by their silence and focused instead on race and civil liberties as campaign issues.

The essential aspect of any definition of total war asserts that it breaks down the distinction between soldiers and civilians, combatants and non-combatants, and this no one in the Civil War did systematically, including William T. Sherman. He and his fellow generals waged war the same way most Victorian gentlemen did, and other Victorian gentlemen in the world knew it. That is one reason why British, French, and Prussian observers failed to comment on any startling developments seen in the American war: there was little new to report. The conservative monarchies of the old world surely would have seized with delight on any evidence that warfare in the New World was degenerating to the level of starving and killing civilians. Their observers encountered no such spectacle. It required airplanes and tanks and heartless twentieth-century ideas born in the hopeless trenches of World War I to break down distinctions adhered to in practice by almost all Civil War generals. Their war did little to usher in the shock of the new in the twentieth century.

Notes

1. John B. Walters, "General William T. Sherman and Total War," *Journal of Southern History* 14 (November 1948): 447–80. See also John B. Walters, *Merchant of Terror: General Sherman and Total War* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973). Phillip Paludan mistakes the origins of Walters's ideas as being a product of the Vietnam War era, ignoring the anti-Yankee roots of the idea apparent in the earlier article. See Philip Paludan, *"A People's Contest": The Union and the Civil War* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 456. Other books on Sherman embracing the total war thesis include: John G. Barrett, *Sherman's March through the Carolinas* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1956); Burke Davis, *Sherman's March* (New York: Random House, 1980); and James M. Reston Jr., *Sherman's March and Viet Nam* (New York: Macmillan, 1984).

2. T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), 3; Bruce Catton, "The Generalship of Ulysses S. Grant," in *Grant, Lee, Lincoln and the Radicals: Essays on Civil War Leadership,* ed. Grady McWhiney (New York: Harper Colophon, 1966), 8; James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), 857; Paludan, *"A People's Contest,"* 296.

3. *OR* 44:798; *OR* 17, 2:261.

4. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom,* 809; John Chipman Gray and John Codman Ropes, *War Letters 1862–1865* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1927), 425, 427; Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962), 205; *OR* 31, 3:459; *OR* 32, 2:281.

5. *OR* 24, 2:209; John Y. Simon, ed., *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant,* 16 vols. to date (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1967–), 9:155, 156n.

6. Joseph T. Glatthaar, *The March to the Sea and Beyond: Sherman's Troops in the Savannah and Carolinas Campaigns* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1985), 72–73, 127–28; Gamaliel Bradford, *Union Portraits* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1916), 154n–155n, Paludan, though he says Sherman "helped announce the coming of total war," also states that "Sherman's idea of war was more description than doctrine." Paludan, *"A People's Contest."* 291, 302.

7. Rachel Sherman Thorndike, ed., *The Sherman Letters: Correspondence between General and Senator Sherman from 1837 to 1891* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894), 228–30.

8. Ibid. 175–76,181–82,185; M. A. DeWolfe Howe, ed., *Home Letters of General Sherman* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), 209.

9. *OR* 39, 2:412.

James M. McPherson   ➡ **NO**

From Limited to Total War: Missouri and the Nation, 1861–1865

A few years after the Civil War, Mark Twain described that great conflict as having "uprooted institutions that were centuries old, changed the politics of a people, transformed the social life of half the country, and wrought so profoundly upon the entire national character that the influence cannot be measured short of two or three generations." This profound transformation was achieved at enormous cost in lives and property. Fully one-quarter of the white men of military age in the Confederacy lost their lives. And that terrible toll does not include an unknown number of civilian deaths in the South. Altogether nearly 4 percent of the Southern people, black and white, civilians and soldiers, died as a consequence of the war. This percentage exceeded the human cost of any country in World War I and was outstripped only by the region between the Rhine and the Volga in World War II. The amount of property and resources destroyed in the Confederate States is almost incalculable. It has been estimated at two-thirds of all assessed wealth, including the market value of slaves.

This is the negative side of that radical transformation described by Mark Twain. The positive side included preservation of the United States as a unified nation, the liberation of four million slaves, and the abolition by constitutional amendment of the institution of bondage that had plagued the nation since the beginning, inhibited its progress, and made a mockery of the libertarian values on which it was founded. No other society in history freed so many slaves in so short a time—but also at such a cost in violence.

The Civil War mobilized human resources on a scale unmatched by any other event in American history except, perhaps, World War II. For actual combat duty the Civil War mustered a considerably larger proportion of American manpower than did World War II. And, in another comparison with that global conflict, the victorious power in the Civil War did all it could to devastate the enemy's economic resources as well as the morale of its home-front population, which was considered almost as important as enemy armies in the war effort. In World War II this was done by strategic bombing; in the Civil War it was done by cavalry and infantry penetrating deep into the Confederate heartland.

It is these factors—the devastation wrought by the war, the radical changes it accomplished, and the mobilization of the whole society to sustain the war effort that have caused many historians to label the Civil War a "total war." Recently, however, some analysts have questioned this terminology. They maintain that true total war—or in the words of Carl von Clausewitz, "absolute war"—makes no distinction between combatants and noncombatants, no discrimination between taking the lives of enemy soldiers and those of enemy civilians; it is war "without any scruple or limitations," war in which combatants give no quarter and take no prisoners.

Some wars have approached this totality—for example, World War II, in which Germany deliberately murdered millions of civilians in eastern Europe, Allied strategic bombing killed hundreds of thousands of German and Japanese civilians, and both sides sometimes refused to take prisoners and shot those who tried to surrender. In that sense of totality, the Civil War was not a total war. Although suffering and disease mortality were high among prisoners of war, and Confederates occasionally murdered captured black soldiers, there was no systematic effort to kill prisoners. And while soldiers on both sides in the Civil War pillaged and looted civilian property, and several Union commanders systematized this destruction into a policy, they did not deliberately kill civilians. Mark Neely, the chief critic of the notion of the Civil War as a total war, maintains that "the *essential* aspect of any definition of total war asserts that it breaks down the distinction between soldiers and civilians, combatants and noncombatants, and this no one in the Civil War did systematically."

Even William T. Sherman, widely regarded as the progenitor of total war, was more bark than bite according to Neely. Sherman wrote and spoke in a nervous, rapid-fire, sometimes offhand manner; he said extreme things about "slaying millions" and "repopulating Georgia" if necessary to win the war. But this was rhetorical exaggeration. One of Sherman's most widely quoted statements—"We are not only fighting hostile armies, but a hostile people, and must make old and young, rich and poor, feel the hard hand of war"—did not really erase the distinction between combatants and noncombatants, for Sherman did not mean it to justify killing civilians.

To note the difference between rhetoric and substance in the Civil War is to make a valid point. The rhetoric not only of Sherman but also of many other people on both sides was far more ferocious than anything that actually happened. Northerners had no monopoly on such rhetoric. A Savannah newspaper proclaimed in 1863: "Let Yankee cities burn and their fields be laid waste," while a Richmond editor echoed: "It surely must be made plain at last that this is to be a war of extermination." A month after the firing on Fort Sumter, a Nashville woman prayed that "God may be with us to give us strength to conquer them, to exterminate them, to lay waste every Northern city, town and village, to destroy them utterly." Yankees used similar language. In the first month of the war a Milwaukee judge said that Northern armies should "restore New Orleans to its native marshes, then march across the country, burn Montgomery to ashes, and serve Charleston in the same way. . . . We must starve, drown, burn, shoot the traitors." In St. Louis the uneasy

truce between Union and Confederate factions that had followed the riots and fighting in May 1861 broke down a month later when the Union commander fighting in May 1861 broke down a month later when the Union commander Nathaniel Lyon rejected a compromise with pro-Confederate elements, which included the governor, with these words: "Rather than concede to the State of Missouri for one single instant the right to dictate to my Government in any matter . . . I would see you . . . and every man, woman, and child in the State, dead and buried."

These statements certainly sound like total war, war without limits or restraints. But of course none of the scenarios sketched out in these quotations literally came true—not even in Missouri, where reality came closer to rhetoric than anywhere else. Therefore, those who insist that the Civil War was not a total war appear to have won their case, at least semantically. Recognizing this, a few historians have sought different adjectives to describe the kind of conflict the Civil War became: One uses the phrase "destructive war"; another prefers "hard war."

But these phrases, though accurate, do not convey the true dimensions of devastation in the Civil War. All wars are hard and destructive in some degree; what made the Civil War distinctive in the American experience? It *was* that overwhelming involvement of the whole population, the shocking loss of life, the wholesale devastation and radical social and political transformations that it wrought. In the experience of Americans, especially Southerners, this approached totality; it *seemed* total. Thus the concept, and label, of total war remains a useful one. It is what the sociologist Max Weber called an "ideal type"—a theoretical model used to measure a reality that never fully conforms to the model, but that nevertheless remains a useful tool for analyzing the reality.

That is the sense in which this essay will analyze the evolution of the Civil War from a limited to a total war. Despite that fierce rhetoric of destruction quoted earlier, the official war aims of both sides in 1861 were quite limited. In his first message to the Confederate Congress after the firing on Fort Sumter by his troops had provoked war, Jefferson Davis declared that "we seek no conquest, no aggrandizement, no concession of any kind from the States with which we were lately confederated; all we ask is to be let alone." As for the Union government, its initial conception of the war was one of a domestic insurrection, an uprising against national authority by certain lawless hotheads who had gained temporary sway over the otherwise law-abiding citizens of a few Southern states—or as Lincoln put it in his proclamation calling out seventy-five thousand state militia to put down the uprising, "combinations too powerful to be suppressed by the ordinary course of judicial proceedings." This was a strategy of limited war—indeed, so limited that it was scarcely seen as a war at all, but rather as a police action to quell a large riot. It was a strategy founded on an assumption of residual loyalty among the silent majority of Southerners. Once the national government demonstrated its firmness by regaining control of its forts and by blockading Southern ports, those presumed legions of Unionists would come to the fore and bring their states back into the Union. To cultivate this loyalty, and to temper firmness with restraint, Lincoln promised

that the federalized ninety-day militia would avoid "any devastation, any destruction of, or interference with, property, or any disturbance of peaceful citizens."

None other than William Tecumseh Sherman echoed these sentiments in the summer of 1861. Commander of a brigade that fought at Bull Run, Sherman deplored the marauding tendencies of his poorly disciplined soldiers. "No curse could be greater than invasion by a volunteer army," he wrote. "No Goths or Vandals ever had less respect for the lives and properties of friends and foes, and henceforth we should never hope for any friends in Virginia. . . . My only hope now is that a common sense of decency may be infused into this soldiery to respect life and property."

The most important and vulnerable form of Southern property was slaves. The Lincoln administration went out of its way to reassure Southerners in 1861 that it had no designs on slavery. Congress followed suit, passing by an overwhelming majority in July 1861 a resolution affirming that Union war aims included no intention "of overthrowing or interfering with the rights or established institutions of the States"—in plain words, slavery—but intended only "to defend and maintain the supremacy of the Constitution and to preserve the Union with all the dignity, equality, and rights of the several States unimpaired."

There were, to be sure, murmurings in the North against this soft-war approach, this "kid-glove policy." Abolitionists and radical Republicans insisted that a rebellion sustained *by* slavery in defense *of* slavery could be crushed only by striking *against* slavery. As Frederick Douglass put it: "To fight against Slaveholders, without fighting against slavery, is but a half-hearted business, and paralyzes the hands engaged in it. . . . Fire must be met with water. War for the destruction of liberty must be met with war for the destruction of slavery." Several Union soldiers and their officers, some with no previous antislavery convictions, also began to grumble about protecting the property of traitors in arms against the United States.

The first practical manifestation of such sentiments came in Missouri. Thus began a pattern whereby events in that state set the pace for the transformation from a limited to a total war, radiating eastward and southward from Missouri. The commander of the Western Department of the Union army in the summer of 1861, with headquarters at St. Louis, was John C. Frémont, famed explorer of the West, first Republican presidential candidate (in 1856), and now ambitious for military glory. Handicapped by his own administrative incompetence, bedeviled by a Confederate invasion of southwest Missouri that defeated and killed Nathaniel Lyon at Wilson's Creek on August 10 and then marched northward to the Missouri River, and driven to distraction by Confederate guerrilla bands that sprang up almost everywhere, Frémont on August 30 took a bold step toward total war. He placed the whole state of Missouri under martial law, announced the death penalty for guerrillas captured behind Union lines, and confiscated the property and emancipated the slaves of Confederate activists.

Northern radicals applauded, but conservatives shuddered and border-state Unionists expressed outrage. Still pursuing a strategy of trying to cultivate

Southern Unionists as the best way to restore the Union, Lincoln feared that the emancipation provision of Frémont's edict would

> alarm our Southern Union friends, and turn them against us—perhaps ruin our rather fair prospect for Kentucky. . . . To lose Kentucky is nearly the same as to lose the whole game. Kentucky gone, we can not hold the same as to lose the whole game. Kentucky gone, we can not hold Missouri, nor, as I think, Maryland. These all against us, and the job on our hands is too large for us. We would as well consent to separation at once, including the surrender of this capitol.

Lincoln thus revoked the confiscation and emancipation provisions of Frémont's decree. He also ordered the general to execute no guerrillas without specific presidential approval. Lincoln feared that such a policy would only provoke reprisals whereby guerrillas would shoot captured Union soldiers "man for man, indefinitely." His apprehensions were well founded. One guerrilla leader in southeast Missouri had already issued a counterproclamation declaring that for every man executed under Frémont's order, he would "HANG, DRAW, and QUARTER a minion of said Abraham Lincoln."

Lincoln probably had the Missouri situation in mind when he told Congress in his annual message of December 1861 that "in considering the policy to be adopted for suppressing the insurrection, I have been anxious and careful that the inevitable conflict for this purpose shall not degenerate into a violent and remorseless revolutionary struggle." But that was already happening. The momentum of a war that had already mobilized nearly a million men on both sides was becoming remorseless even as Lincoln spoke, and it would soon become revolutionary.

Nowhere was this more true than in Missouri. There occurred the tragedy of a civil war within the Civil War, of neighbor against neighbor and sometimes literally brother against brother, of an armed conflict along the Kansas border that went back to 1854 and had never really stopped, of ugly, vicious, no-holds-barred bushwhacking that constituted pretty much a total war in fact as well as in theory. Bands of Confederate guerrillas led by the notorious William Clarke Quantrill, Bloody Bill Anderson, and other pathological killers, and containing such famous desperadoes as the James and Younger brothers, ambushed, murdered, and burned out Missouri Unionists and tied down thousands of Union troops by hit-and-run raids. Union militia and Kansas Jayhawkers retaliated in kind. In contrapuntal disharmony guerrillas and Jayhawkers plundered and pillaged their way across the state, taking no prisoners, killing in cold blood, terrorizing the civilian population, leaving large parts of Missouri a scorched earth.

In 1863 Quantrill's band rode into Kansas to the hated Yankee settlement of Lawrence and murdered almost every adult male they found there, more than 150 in all. A year later Bloody Bill Anderson's gang took twenty-four unarmed Union soldiers from a train, shot them in the head, then turned on a posse of pursuing militia and slaughtered 127 of them including the wounded and captured. In April 1864 the Missourian John S. Marmaduke, a Confederate general (and later governor of Missouri), led an attack on Union supply wagons at Poison Springs, Arkansas, killing in cold blood almost as many black

soldiers as Nathan Bedford Forrest's troops did at almost the same time in the more famous Fort Pillow massacre in Tennessee.

Confederate guerrillas had no monopoly on atrocities and scorched-earth practices in Missouri. The Seventh Kansas Cavalry—"Jennison's Jayhawkers"—containing many abolitionists including a son of John Brown, seemed determined to exterminate rebellion and slaveholders in the most literal manner. The Union commander in western Missouri where guerrilla activity was most rife, Thomas Ewing, issued his notorious Order No. 11 after Quantrill's raid to Lawrence. Order No. 11 forcibly removed thousands of families from four Missouri counties along the Kansas border and burned their farms to deny the guerrillas the sanctuary they had enjoyed in this region. Interestingly, Ewing was William T. Sherman's brother-in-law. In fact, most of the Union commanders who subsequently became famous as practitioners of total war spent part of their early Civil War careers in Missouri—including Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan. This was more than coincidence. What they saw and experienced in that state helped to predispose them toward a conviction that, in Sherman's words, "we are not only fighting hostile armies, but a hostile people" and must make them "feel the hard hand of war."

That conviction took root and began to grow among the Northern people and their leaders in the summer of 1862. Before then, for several months in the winter and spring, Union forces had seemed on the verge of winning the war without resorting to such measures. The capture of Forts Henry and Donelson, the victories at Mill Springs in Kentucky, Pea Ridge in Arkansas, Shiloh in Tennessee, Roanoke Island and New Bern in North Carolina, the capture of Nashville, New Orleans, and Memphis, the expulsion of organized Confederate armies from Missouri, Kentucky, and West Virginia, the Union occupation of much of the lower Mississippi Valley and a large part of the state of Tennessee, and the advance of the splendidly equipped Army of the Potomac to within five miles of Richmond in May 1862 seemed to herald the Confederacy's doom. But then came counteroffensives by Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee in Virginia and by Braxton Bragg and Kirby Smith in Tennessee, which took Confederate armies almost to the Ohio River and across the Potomac River by September 1862.

Those deceptively easy Union advances and victories in early 1862 had apparently confirmed the validity of a limited-war strategy. Grant's capture of Forts Henry and Donelson, for example, had convinced him that the Confederacy was a hollow shell about to collapse. But when the rebels regrouped and counterpunched so hard at Shiloh that they nearly whipped him, Grant changed his mind. He now "gave up all idea," he later wrote, "of saving the Union except by complete conquest." Conmplete conquest meant not merely the occupation of territory, but also the crippling or destruction of Confederate armies. For if these armies remained intact they could reconquer territory, as they did in the summer of 1862. Grant's new conception of the war also included the seizure or destruction of any property or other resources used to sustain the Confederate war effort. Before those Southern counteroffensives, Grant said that he had been careful "to protect the property of the citizens whose territory was invaded"; afterwards his policy became to "consume everything that could be used to support or supply armies."

"Everything" included slaves, whose labor was one of the principal resources used to support and supply Confederate armies. If the Confederacy "cannot be whipped in any other way than through a war against slavery," wrote Grant, "let it come to that." Union armies in the field as well as Republican leaders in Congress had been edging toward an emancipation policy ever since May 1861 when General Benjamin Butler had admitted three escaped slaves to his lines at Fort Monroe, labeled them contraband of war, and put them to work for wages to help support and supply *Union* forces. By the summer of 1862, tens of thousands of these contrabands had come within Union lines. Congress had forbidden army officers to return them. Legislation passed in July 1862 declared free all of those belonging to masters who supported the Confederacy. Frémont in Missouri turned out to have been not wrong, but a year ahead of his time.

By the summer of 1862 Lincoln too had come to the position enunciated a year earlier by Frederick Douglass: "To fight against slaveholders, without fighting against slavery, is but a half-hearted business." Acting in his capacity as commander in chief with power to seize property used to wage war against the United States, Lincoln decided to issue a proclamation freeing all slaves in those states engaged in rebellion. Emancipation, he told his cabinet in July 1862, had become "a military necessity, absolutely essential to the preservation of the Union. . . . We must free the slaves or be ourselves subdued. The slaves [are] undeniably an element of strength to those who [have] their services, and we must decide whether that element should be with us or against us. . . . Decisive and extensive measures must be adopted. . . . We [want] the army to strike more vigorous blows. The Administration must set an example, and strike at the heart of the rebellion." After a wait of two months for a victory to give the proclamation credibility, Lincoln announced it on September 22, 1862, to go into effect on January 1, 1863.

With this action Lincoln embraced the idea of the Civil War as a revolutionary conflict. Things had changed a great deal since he had promised to avoid "any devastation, or destruction of, or interference with, property." The Emancipation Proclamation was just what the *Springfield Republican* pronounced it: "the greatest social and political revolution of the age." No less an authority on revolutions than Karl Marx exulted: *"Never* has such a gigantic transformation taken place so rapidly." General Henry W. Halleck, who had been called from his headquarters in St. Louis (where he was commander of the Western Department) to Washington to become general in chief, made clear the practical import of the Emancipation Proclamation in a dispatch to Grant at Memphis in January 1863. "The character of the war has very much changed within the last year," he wrote. "There is now no possible hope of reconciliation with the rebels. . . . We must conquer the rebels or be conquered by them. . . . Every slave withdrawn from the enemy is the equivalent of a white man put *hors de combat*." One of Grant's field commanders explained that the new "policy is to be terrible on the enemy. I am using negroes all the time for my work as teamsters, and have 1,000 employed."

The program of "being terrible on the enemy" soon went beyond emancipating slaves and using them as teamsters. In early 1863 the Lincoln administration committed itself to a policy that had first emerged, like other

total-war practices, in the trans-Mississippi theater. The First Kansas Colored Volunteers, composed mostly of contrabands from Missouri, were the earliest black soldiers to see combat, in 1862, and along with the Louisiana Native Guards the first to take shape as organized units. Arms in the hands of slaves constituted the South's ultimate revolutionary nightmare. After initial hesitation, Lincoln embraced this revolution as well. In March 1863 he wrote to Andrew Johnson, military governor of occupied Tennessee: "The bare sight of fifty thousand armed, and drilled black soldiers on the banks of the Mississippi, would end the rebellion at once. And who doubts that we can present that sight, if we but take hold in earnest?" By August 1863 Lincoln could declare in a public letter that "the emancipation policy, and the use of colored troops, constitute the heaviest blow yet dealt to the rebellion."

Well before then the conflict had become remorseless as well as revolutionary, with Lincoln's approval. Two of the generals he brought to Washington from the West in the summer of 1862, John Pope and Henry W. Halleck, helped to define and enunciate the remorselessness. Both had spent the previous winter and spring in Missouri, where experience with guerrillas had shaped their hardwar approach. One of Pope's first actions upon becoming commander of the Army of Virginia was a series of orders authorizing his officers to seize Confederate property without compensation, to execute captured guerrillas who had fired on Union troops, and to expel from occupied territory any civilians who sheltered guerrillas or who refused to take an oath of allegiance to the United States. From Halleck's office as general in chief in August 1862 went orders to Grant, now commander of Union forces in western Tennessee and Mississippi. "Take up all active [rebel] sympathizers," wrote Halleck, "and either hold them as prisoners or put them beyond our lines. Handle that class without gloves, and take their property for public use. . . . It is time that they should begin to feel the presence of the war."

With or without such orders, Union soldiers in the South were erasing the distinction between military and civilian property belonging to the enemy. A soldier from St. Louis with his regiment in west Tennessee wrote home that "this thing of guarding rebels' property has about 'played out.'" "The iron gauntlet," wrote another officer in the Mississippi Valley, "must be used more than the silken glove to crush this serpent."

Inevitably, bitter protests against this harshness reached Lincoln from purported Southern Unionists. A few months earlier the president would have rebuked the harshness, as he had rebuked Frémont, for alienating potential Unionist friends in the South. But in July 1862 Lincoln rebuked the protesters instead. He asked one of them sarcastically if they expected him to fight the war "with elder-stalk squirts, charged with rose water?" Did they think he would "surrender the government to save them from losing all"? Lincoln had lost faith in those professed Unionists:

> The paralysis—the dead palsy—of the government in this whole struggle is, that this class of men will do nothing for the government . . . except [demand] that the government shall not strike its open enemies, lest they be struck by accident! . . . This government cannot much

longer play a game in which it stakes all, and its enemies stake nothing. Those enemies must understand that they cannot experiment for ten years trying to destroy the government, and if they fail still come back into the Union unhurt.

Using one of his favorite metaphors, Lincoln warned Southern whites that "broken eggs cannot be mended." The rebels had already cracked the egg of slavery by their own rash behavior; the sooner they gave up and ceased the insurrection, "the smaller will be the amount of [eggs] which will be past mending."

William Tecumseh Sherman eventually became the foremost military spokesman for remorseless war and the most effective general in carrying it out. Sherman too had spent part of the winter of 1861–1862 in Missouri where he stored up impressions of guerrilla ferocity. Nonetheless, even as late as July 1862, as commander of Union occupation forces around Memphis, he complained of some Northern troops who took several mules and horses from farmers. Such "petty thieving and pillaging," he wrote, "does us infinite harm." This scarcely sounds like the Sherman that Southerners love to hate. But his command problems in western Tennessee soon taught him what his brother-in-law Thomas Ewing was also learning about guerrillas and the civilian population that sheltered them across the river in Arkansas and Missouri. Nearly every white man, woman, and child in Sherman's district seemed to hate the Yankees and to abet the bushwhackers who fired into Union supply boats on the river, burned railroad bridges and ripped up the tracks, attacked Union picket outposts, ambushed Northern soldiers unless they moved in large groups, and generally raised hell behind Union lines. Some of the cavalry troopers who rode with Nathan Bedford Forrest and John Hunt Morgan on devastating raids behind Union lines also functioned in the manner of guerrillas, fading away to their homes and melting into the civilian population after a raid.

These operations convinced Sherman to take off the gloves. The distinction between enemy civilians and soldiers grew blurred. After fair warning, Sherman burned houses and sometimes whole villages in western Tennessee that he suspected of harboring snipers and guerrillas. The Union army, he now said, must act "on the proper rule that all in the South *are* enemies of all in the North. . . . The whole country is full of guerrilla bands. . . . The entire South, man, woman, and child, is against us, armed and determined." This conviction governed Sherman's subsequent operations which left smoldering ruins in his track from Vicksburg to Meridian, from Atlanta to the sea, and from the sea to Goldsboro, North Carolina.

When Mississippians protested, Sherman told them that they were lucky to get off so lightly: A commander

> may take your house, your fields, your everything, and turn you all out, helpless, to starve. It may be wrong, but that don't alter the case. In war you can't help yourselves, and the only possible remedy is to stop the war. . . . Our duty is not to build up; it is rather to destroy both

the rebel army and whatever of wealth or property it has founded its boasted strength upon.

When Confederate General John Bell Hood charged him with barbarism for expelling the civilian population from Atlanta, Sherman gave Hood a tongue-lashing. Accusations of barbarity, he said, came with a fine irony from "you who, in the midst of peace and prosperity, have plunged a nation into war . . . who dared and badgered us to battle, insulted our flag . . . turned loose your privateers to plunder unarmed ships, expelled Union families by the thousands [and] burned their houses. . . . Talk thus to the marines, but not to me, who have seen these things." Sherman vowed to "make Georgia howl" in his march from Atlanta to Savannah, and afterwards expressed satisfaction with having done so. He estimated the damage to Confederate resources "at $100,000,000; at least $20,000,000 of which has inured to our advantage, and the remainder is simple waste and destruction." And this turned out to be mere child's play compared with what awaited South Carolina.

Sherman was convinced that not only the economic resources but also the will of Southern civilians sustained the Confederate war effort. His campaigns of devastation were intended to break that will as much as to destroy the resources. This is certainly a feature of modern total war; Sherman was a pioneer in the concept of psychological warfare as part of a total war against the whole enemy population. Sherman was well aware of the fear that his soldiers inspired among Southern whites. This terror "was a power," he wrote, "and I intended to utilize it . . . to humble their pride, to follow them to their inmost recesses, and to make them fear and dread us. . . . We cannot change the hearts and minds of those people of the South, but we can make war so terrible . . . [and] make them so sick of war that generations would pass away before they would again appeal to it."

This strategy seemed to work; Sherman's destruction not only deprived Confederate armies of desperately needed supplies; it also crippled morale both on the home front and in the army. Numerous soldiers deserted from Confederate armies in response to letters of despair from home in the wake of Sherman's juggernaut. One Southern soldier wrote after the march through Georgia: "I hev conckludud that the dam fulishness uv tryin to lick shurmin Had better be stoped, we have gettin nuthin but hell & lots uv it ever since we saw the dam yankys & I am tirde uv it . . . thair thicker than lise on a hen and a dam site ornraier." After the march through South Carolina, a civilian in that state wrote: "All is gloom, despondency, and inactivity. Our army is demoralized and the people panic stricken. To fight longer seems to be madness."

Philip Sheridan carried out a similar policy of scorched earth in the Shenandoah Valley. Interestingly, Sheridan too had spent most of the war's first year in Missouri. There as well as subsequently in Tennessee and Virginia he saw the ravages of Confederate guerrillas, and responded as Sherman did. If guerrilla operations and Union counterinsurgency activities in Virginia during 1864 were slightly less vicious than in Missouri, it was perhaps only because the proximity of Washington and Richmond and of large field armies imposed some restraint. Nevertheless, plenty of atrocities piled up in John Singleton

Mosby's Confederacy just east of the Blue Ridge and in the Shenandoah Valley to the west. In retaliation, and with a purpose similar to Sherman's to destroy the Valley's resources which helped supply Lee's army, Sheridan carried out a campaign of devastation that left nothing to sustain Confederate armies or even to enable the Valley's inhabitants to get through the winter. In little more than a week, wrote Sheridan in one of his reports, his army had "destroyed over 2,000 barns filled with wheat, hay, and farming implements; over seventy mills filled with flour and wheat; have driven in front of the army over 4,000 head of stock, and have killed and issued to the troops not less than 3,000 sheep." That was just the beginning, Sheridan promised. By the time he was through, "the Valley, from Winchester up to Staunton, ninety-two miles, will have little in it for man or beast."

Several years later, while serving as an American observer at German headquarters during the Franco-Prussian War, Sheridan lectured his hosts on the correct way to wage war. The "proper strategy," said Sheridan, consisted first of "inflicting as telling blows as possible on the enemy's army, and then in causing the inhabitants so much suffering that they must long for peace, and force the government to demand it. The people must be left nothing but their eyes to weep with over the war."

Abraham Lincoln is famed for his compassion; he issued many pardons and commuted many sentences of execution; the concluding passage of his second inaugural address, beginning "With malice toward none; with charity for all," is one of his most familiar utterances. Lincoln regretted the devastation and suffering caused by the army's scorched-earth policy in the South. Yet he had warned Southerners in 1862 that the longer they fought, the more eggs would be broken. He would have agreed with Sherman's words to a Southerner: "You brought all this on yourselves." In 1864, after the march to the sea, Lincoln officially conveyed to Sherman's army the "grateful acknowledgments" of the nation; to Sheridan he offered the "thanks of the nation, and my own personal admiration, for [your] operations in the Shenandoah Valley." And while the words in the second inaugural about malice toward none and charity for all promised a generous peace, the victory that must precede that peace could be achieved only by hard war—indeed, by total war. Consider *these* words from the second inaugural:

> Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether."

The kind of conflict the Civil War had become merits the label of total war. To be sure, Union soldiers did not set out to kill Southern civilians. Sherman's bummers destroyed property; Allied bombers in World War II destroyed hundreds of thousands of lives as well. But the strategic purpose of

both was the same: to eliminate the resources and break the will of the people to sustain war. White people in large parts of the Confederacy were indeed left with "nothing but their eyes to weep with." This was not pretty; it was not glorious; it did not conform to the image of war held by most Americans in 1861 of flags waving, bands playing, and people cheering on a spring afternoon. But as Sherman himself put it, in a speech to young men of a new generation fifteen years after the Civil War, the notion that war is glorious was nothing but moonshine. "When . . . you come down to the practical realities, boys," said Sherman, "war is all hell."