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Soldiers and Civilians in Columbia,
South Carolina January-February 1865

A Scholarly Monograph
By
Jacqueline G. Campbell
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Jacqueline G. Campbell

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About the Author



Jackie Campbell is a doctoral student at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. A native of Scotland, Mrs. Campbell came to the United States and took advanced classes in preparation for her admittance to the doctoral program. She has had a long time interest in the Civil War and Women's issues. This monograph is a convergence of those topics.

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A Bizarre Bazaar

The "dark leaden clouds" and the cold damp air reflected the melancholy mood of the citizens in Columbia, South Carolina, as 1864 drew to a close. As the bleak eve of the new year advanced, diarist Grace Brown Elmore wrote in her journal:

. . . the last of '64, a gloomy, dark day, the end of a gloomy year. . . Our present situation is darkly, terribly strange, and yet we must not, will not, give up hope. Four years ago if we had been compelled to fly from home we could not have been so downcast, for then we expected to give up home and everything and there were other parts of the Confederacy safe and ready to take us in. But now where shall we find, safety, where can we lay our weary heads and rest our sickened heart? There is not a spot to which we can flee with an assurance of safety.

Elmore's depressing assessment reflected the reality that had permeated the diminishing home front of the shrinking Confederacy. However, in Columbia, South Carolina—the very hearth of the rebellion—the New Year opened to the full gamut of emotions ranging from optimism to despair.¹

Columbia was now the epicenter for Southern society. A flood of refugees from Georgia, Tennessee, and other parts of South Carolina brought their habits and concerns to South Carolina's capital city. By 1865 Columbia's pre-war population of 8,000 had tripled. Residents assumed, with good cause, that the capital city with its strategic railroad connections, munitions factories, and chemical laboratory for the Niter and Mining Bureau, would be defended against the invaders.

Columbia was typical of the demographics of the few remaining Southern cities in that a large percentage of the population was female. In April 1864 the Treasury Bureau moved from Richmond to Columbia, bringing with it approximately 100 female workers. The Saluda Cotton factory employed large numbers of women producing cotton for the Confederacy. Various branches of the Confederate government maintained offices in Columbia. They depended on

¹Grace Brown Elmore Diary, December 31st, 1864, USC.

women to perform a large part of the work of the agencies. Because of its position as a major railroad depot some 1200 federal prisoners were housed in the city's insane asylum. Regularly scheduled trains provided important links with the coast and with Charlotte, North Carolina, providing essential subsistence to Lee's Army of Northern Virginia.

Encased deep within the old Confederacy, Columbia was perceived to be a place of security. Parents sent their young girls to boarding schools that were still operating. Wealthy families from Charleston and the Carolina Low Country brought with them their physical and human property. Seventeen financial institutions, compared with three before the war, were now in operation. Their vaults were filled to overflow with the valuables of wealthy South Carolina planters and merchants from Charleston. "[H]ere was to be found an accumulation of wealth, in plate, jewels, pictures, books, manufactures of art and *virtu*, not to be estimated—not, perhaps to be paralleled in any other town of the Confederacy."² Sallie Heyward described Columbia as a city "teeming with an overflowing population." Besides the many who had sought refuge there, others had transferred "their household goods, silver, jewels, and other valuable things to a place which was deemed perfectly safe. Thus it came to pass that our city was really a grand art gallery, as well as a treasure house for the persecuted children of our state."³

Yet the new year brought increasing anxiety to South Carolina as Sherman and his formidable army cast their shadow over the state. A 17-year-old resident, Emma LeConte heard dreadful accounts of "outrages and horrors" from her Grandmother in Milledgeville, Georgia, and could not help but worry about the fate of Columbia. On January 9th Mayor Goodwyn set up committees in Columbia to recruit labor and solicit aid in fortifying the city. The reaction of the people was far from encouraging. Despite the fact that personal correspondence reflected a feeling of apprehension, the people of Columbia failed to rally to Mayor Goodwyn's request. It seemed to the young Emma that Columbians had "reached that lethargic state in which men prefer to suffer anything rather than act."⁴

²William Gilmore Simms, Sack and Destruction of the City of Columbia, South Carolina (Columbia, 1865), A. S. Salley, ed. (Atlanta, 1937) 31. See also Charles Royster, The Destructive War (New York, 1993) 6; Elizabeth Massey, Refugee Life in the Confederacy (Baton Rouge, 1964) passim.

³Sallie Coles Heyward Diary, USC.

⁴Emrna LeConte, When the World Ended: The Diary of Emma LeConte, Earl

Another resident, Grace Elmore, was more concerned about the fate of women in the hands of the dreaded Yankees. She had thought long and intently upon the righteousness of suicide should that worst of all horrors happen:

Oh God have not this people taught us how impotent is the weakness and helplessness of women, have they not made us know that upon us will they wreak their vengeance by the most frightful and wicked of crimes, . . . Oh well they know how to avenge themselves, on women, what she values more than all things, the loss of which would be living death. God forgive me, if I had to choose between death and dishonor, I could not live.⁵

However, soon the populace of Columbia focused its attentions on an event designed to lift their spirits. On January 17th, 1865, the old State House housed a grand bazaar to raise funds for the Confederate cause. "How strange is . . . our life?" Elmore mused, "one moment gloomily considering the many chances of Yankee rule and the next looking with equally anxious earnestness after the pleasures and interest of the Bazaar." On the first day a crowd of 3,800 jammed the halls. Banners covered the walls with such slogans as "Don't Give up the Ship" and "Contribute to the Comfort of our Sick and Wounded Soldiers." Tables and booths, draped with damask and lace curtains, were set up to represent each of the Confederate States. The articles on display made it hard to imagine a war was going on. At the same time as LeConte was bemoaning the fact that their family was living on meals consisting of "a very small piece of meat . . . a few potatoes . . . a dish of hominy and a pone of corn bread," the tables at the bazaar strained under the weight of "ducks, turkeys, chickens, [and] every kind of meat that could be found in the Confederacy." ⁶

The bazaar was exciting. Everything imaginable was for sale, including a host of cakes and candies, jewelry, clothing and a collection of dolls and toys from Europe. Of course all these items came at a

Schenck Miers, ed. (New York, 1957) 3; Mrs. Robert Smith to Mrs. Mason Smith, January 11th, 1865, Mason Smith Family Letters, Daniel E. Finger Smith et al, eds. (Columbia, 1950) 161; *Columbia Daily South Carolinian*, January 19th, 1865, quoted in Marion Brunson Lucas, Sherman and the Burning of Columbia (College Station, Texas, 1976) 36.

⁵Elmore Diary, November 26th, 1864.

⁶ibid., 17; Elmore Diary, February 7th, 1865.

heavy price. A cake at the Tennessee table sold for seventy five dollars, while Emma LeConte heard of one large doll that was to raffle for two thousand dollars "Why," exclaimed her Uncle John, "one could buy a live negro baby for that." 7

Elmore captured the paradox of life in Columbia. "No one but those who have lived in times like ours can understand," she wrote in her journal. "[T]he gay and the tragic so closely intertwined, the utter abandonment of ones self to the pleasure of the present, when any brightness lightens our darkness the shutting out for the time the horrors that surround us." War cares were left at the door as people "jostled each other, laughed and made fun and forgot for the hour that the battle for home and fireside was soon to commence."

Of course not all the people in Columbia were as enthusiastic about this display. Although personally full of youthful exuberance, Lizzie Smith was aware of the disapproval of her aged aunt and uncle who found this manifestation of "dissipation & frivolity" positively sinful. "Ah! Well!" wrote Lizzie, "where there are young people they will be lively."⁸

Coming of age during the war years did, however, have a severe impact on young Southern women. Despite the temporary respite provided by the bazaar, the 17-year-old LeConte complained that she was unfortunate to grow up in these troubled times. "No pleasure, no enjoyment ... only the saddest anticipation and the dread of hardship and cares, when bright dreams of the future ought to shine on us. I have seen little of the light heartedness and exuberant joy that people talk about as the natural heritage of youth."⁹

For many Southern women in Columbia the bazaar was a demarcation point for years of frustration. So many of those in the elite classes had been brought up in a world predicated on paternalism. Within that society, in exchange for protection by their men, they tacitly agreed to give up their autonomy.¹⁰ The writings of our diarists

⁷ibid., 13.

⁸Elmore Diary, January 4th, February 7th, 1865, John Hammond Moore, Columbia and Richland Country (Columbia, 1993) 199; Lizzie P. Smith to Isabella Middleton Smith, January 19th, 1865, Mason Smith Family Letters, 163.

⁹Emma LeConte, When the World Ended, 21-22,

¹⁰For the most recent literature on gender roles in the ante-bellum and civil war South, see Victoria Bynum, Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South (Chapel Hill, 1992); Joan E. Cashin, A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier (Baltimore, 1991);

clearly make the point. In September, 1864, Grace Elmore had expressed frustration at the conventionalities that curtailed her choices. "[If I were a man," she pondered, "long ago would I have left the nest, but unfortunately being a woman, I have to choose between being a seven day wonder to the world an outcast from all affection at home, and dragging on a life of partial indifference, and lukewarm affection where I am." By January, 1865, she was not as discrete: "[W]hen I hear men talking quietly and calmly of Sherman reaching their homes as a matter of course . . . and yet be looked upon and endured by gentlemen, my heart fails. **There is some excuse for a woman, she is weak, helpless, and completely in their power.... I will say and do think our men have not done their whole duty in masse** (emphasis added)." ¹¹ The most famous Southern diarist, Mary Chesnut, limited her unmistakable criticisms to the generals who seemed to her to be "as plenty as blackberries, but none are in command." Conversely, there was no doubt in her mind about who was in command of the Union army that threatened her city. She concluded her January 17th journal entry in two succinct sentences: "The bazaar for the benefit of the hospitals opens now. Sherman marches constantly." ¹²

Catherine Clinton & Nina Silber, Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War (New York, 1992); Drew Gilpin Faust, Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War (Chapel Hill, 1996); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South (Chapel Hill, 1989); Jean E. Friedman, The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830-1900 (Chapel Hill, 1985); Stephanie McCurr^y, Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, & the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country (New York, 1995); George C. Rable, Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism (Urbana, 1989); Leslie A. Schwalm, A Hard Fight For We: Women's Transition from Slaver^y to Freedom in South Carolina (Urbana, 1997); Deborah Gray White, Ar'n't I A Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South (New York, 1985); Lee Ann Whites, The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1890 (Athens, 1995); Martin F. Weiner, Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-80 (Urbana, 1998).

Elmore Diary, September 30th, 1864, January 4th, 1865.

¹²Mary Chesnut, A Diary from Dixie, Isabella D. Martin and Myrta Lockett Avary, eds. (New York, 1905) January 17th, 1865.

The Devil Incarnate

The name of William T. Sherman was on the lips of many women in Georgia and the Carolinas. Ella Thomas, whose plantation in Burke County, Georgia, had felt the wrath of Sherman's troops, found herself contemplating this man on a January evening in Augusta.¹³ Shortly after Sherman had passed through Burke country, she had composed a letter to his wife that she had intended publishing in one of the Richmond papers. But, hearing of the death of Sherman's child, she had second thoughts. On this night she decided to copy it into her journal. Thomas berated Mrs. Sherman for bidding her husband "God speed" on a "fiendish errand" that had left her plantation devastated:

You thought it a gallant deed to come amongst us where by his confession he expected to find only the shadow of an army. A brave act to frighten women and children! desolate homes, violate the sanctity of firesides and cause the widow and orphan to curse the Sherman for the cause and this you did for what? to elevate the Negro race.... Rest satisfied Mrs. Sherman and quiet the apprehension of your Northern sisters with regard to the elevation of the Negroes—your husbands are amongst a coloured race whose reputation for morality has never been of the highest order.¹⁴

Ella Thomas meant Mrs. Sherman to believe that her husband and his soldiers were fraternizing with black women in the South. Whether or not Thomas accurately depicted the case, the position of black women was very different from that of the elite white women's voices we have heard so far. Many rich families from the coast brought their slaves with them to cities like Columbia. Mrs. Robert Smith was arranging to

¹³At this point it was still unclear where Sherman would strike next. The most likely targets were considered to be Augusta, Georgia, or Charleston or Columbia, South Carolina.

¹⁴Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, The Secret Eye: The Journal of Ella Gerrude Clanton Thomas, 1848-1889, January 3rd, 1865, Virginia Ingraham Burr, ed. (Chapel Hill. 1990).

bring her slaves to join her in Columbia in January of 1865, yet she feared that when they arrived it would be difficult to feed them. Conversely, Grace Elmore considered taking her slaves with her as she prepared to leave Columbia. She decided to discuss the matter with her more "intelligent" servants and warned them what to expect from the Yankees:

I tried to present as plainly as possible all the hardships we would have to undergo, that it would not be a life of ease to any, then on the other hand I told her how false and wicked the Yankees had been in their conduct to the Negro, how women and children had been abused just so soon as they had ceased to be an amusement and excitement.¹⁵

How these slaves interpreted their mistress's words we do not know. On the surface the arrival of Union soldiers would likely mean freedom. Yet black women had no reason to see any white man, Northern or Southern, as their redeemers. Past experience left them in conflict about their personal safety. And even should the Yankees bring freedom, what was their new role to be—mistress to the northern soldiers or menial laborer? They could not join the Union army; most had family ties, and indeed some of them felt loyalty, to the white women with whom they had spent their lives. One thing, however, was clear. Their owners were losing power and becoming vulnerable in ways with which slaves could identify. Privation, betrayal and fear of the future may have been new experiences for elite whites, but for slaves this was part of their daily experience. When they saw their white owners suffering the same types of personal tragedies and disrupted lives that they had inflicted on others, their reaction could only have been ambivalent. Still, for the most part, they kept their feelings to themselves. Mary Chesnut was aware that thoughts of freedom must be going through her slaves' minds, yet these "sphinxes" kept their innermost thoughts hidden from her and demonstrated only "increased diligence and absolute silence."¹⁶

¹⁵Mrs Robert Smith to Mrs Mason Smith, January 11, 1865, Mason Smith Family Letters, 161-62; Elmore Diary, December 24, 1864.

¹⁶Leon F Litwack, "Many Thousands Gone: Black Southerners and the Confederacy," in Owens et al., eds., The Old South in the Crucible of War (Jackson, 1983) 53-54. Mary Chesnut, A Diary from Dixie August 22nd, 1864.

As January turned into February, *Sherman Fever* grew. As rumors of the violence and unscrupulous acts of the "devil yankees" arrived with refugees from Georgia, many mothers sent daughters further inland to stay with distant family members. With every new rumor the panic increased as a feeling of inevitability settled on the city.¹⁷ Grace Elmore contemplated the different ways men and women reacted to the situation:

How queer the times, the women can't count on the men at all to help them; they either laugh at us, or when they speak seriously, 'tis to say they know not what to advise us, .. . but one thing each and all insist upon, and that is we must get away from the Yankees if possible. Our men do depend on us a great deal, in fact their time and thought are so fully occupied with what concerns the public welfare that they have none to spare to private matters. They belong to the confederacy and their private concerns have in a great measure ceased to engage their attention.

And so the ladies packed up those things they cherished most and braced to meet their future. As they closed down the bazaar that had brought them a momentary distraction from the encroaching danger, Grace Elmore described it as "[a] Tribute to our sick and wounded soldiers," paid with "loving hands and loving hearts, even with Sherman knocking at our door." Certainly as the cold winds intensified and the rains lashed down, nature reflected the mood of Columbia.¹⁸

¹⁷Sallie Coles Hayward Diary, Paper USC.

¹⁸Grace Elmore Diary, February 7" and 11th, 1865.

War Is Hell

Rain fell upon the head of Major Thomas Osborn, chief of artillery in the Army of the Tennessee, as he contemplated the new campaign that would take them into South Carolina. "We have had a very severe rain storm and the low country along the coast is badly overflowed and the roads are exceedingly bad. When we move they will become as bad as road can be." ¹⁹ Indeed as the bazaar opened in Columbia, the worst rains experienced in two decades had begun. Sherman's soldiers wrote their loved ones about the "slush and mud" that invaded their quarters. "I thought I had seen mud before but this beats everything I ever imagined." Nonetheless, Corporal Eli Ricker told his fiancée, Mary, in Illinois, that soldiers had learned to adapt themselves to their circumstances—"we do not govern events but are governed by them ...[w]e live neither theoretically nor sentimentally, but practically."²⁰

While Sherman's soldiers had been given time to recover from their march across Georgia, Corporal Ricker reflected on the political situation of the New Year. Lincoln's annual message had impressed him with the determination of the North to fight until the South was "compelled to submit to the national authority." For Ricker the only course for a patriotic citizen was to "give the Administration cordial and hearty support ... and to suppress ill murmurs at seeming shortcomings, as they can benefit our cause not one iota, while they add to the embarrassments of the Government and the dangers of the people." ²¹

¹⁹Thomas Osborn, Journal, January 25, 1865, The Fiery Trail: A Union Officer's Account of Sherman's Last Campaigns. Richard Harwell and Philip N. Racine, eds. (Knoxville, 1986).

²⁰ John G. Barrett, Sherman's March through the Carolinas (Chapel Hill, 1956) 45; Sgt. Rufus Meade to "Dear Folks at Home," January 30th, 1865, "With Sherman Through Georgia and the Carolinas: Letters of a Federal Soldier," James A. Padgett, ed., *GHO XXXIII* (March 1949) 67; Eli Ricker to "Dear Mary," January 23rd, 1865, "We Left a Black Track in South Carolina," Edward G. Longacre, ed., *JCHM LXXXII* (July 1981), 215.; Captain Dexter Horton, "Diary of an Officer in Sherman's Army Marching through the Carolinas," Clement Eaton ed., *JSH IX* (May, 1843) 241.

²¹ Eli Ricker to "Friend Mary," January 6th, 1865, "We Left a Black Track in South Carolina," 212-213.

What manner of men were Ricker and his comrades? As the handpicked force gathered on the South Carolina border to strike into the "cradle of secession," they were the nightmare of every unarmed civilian. These battle tested and hardened Union veterans had seen the very worst war had to offer. They had suffered the hardships incumbent in field duty and witnessed or caused thousands of deaths. They were aware of the sad treatment of their brethren in prisoner of war camps and felt anger. They also were self reliant and confident. They were successful and unstoppable. But they were fathers, sons, brothers, and husbands far from home. As Christmas 1864 came and went, they felt growing anger and a sense of anticipation as they prepared to enter South Carolina. Many soldiers believed they were entering the very cradle of the rebellion.²² William Scofield wrote to his sister of his reluctance to leave Savannah, a city he had found both charming and hospitable. Now "in the best of health," he felt ready to "stand the hardships of another campaign" through "that detested State of South Carolina." In a letter to his father, he expressed the feeling of anticipation felt by many of his comrades:

Oh! South Carolina look out . . . for the Hell Hounds of Yankeedom are on your track to burn your Cotton and destroy your crops. Your people at the North may have some sympathy for South Carolina but let me assure you the Soldiers have none. . . . We will be Wild Tigers let loose.²³

Major James Connolly was also eager to begin. "My health is excellent," he wrote to his wife, "and I don't care how soon we get over into South Carolina, for I want to see the long deferred chastisement begin." Meanwhile an army chaplain, GS Bradley, chose to focus his wrath on a specific element of South Carolina. "So far as the *women* are concerned, we might as well spare our pity, for they are the worst secessionists, and why should *they* not suffer."²⁴

²²-Joseph T. Glatthaar, The March to the Sea and Beyond (Baton Rouge, 1985) 140.

²³William Scofield to "My Dear Sister," January 25th, 1865, and to "Father," February 2nd, 1865, Scofield Papers, USC.

²⁴James A Connolly to "Dear Wife," January 19th, 1865, in Paul M. Angle ed., Three Years in the Army of the Cumberland (Bloomington, 1959); Rev. G. S. Bradley, The Star Corps; or Notes of an Army Chaplain, During Sherman's Famous 'March to the Sea' (Milwaukee, 1865) 225.

One Union soldier mused on the growing dissatisfaction with life in the field. "When I do get home," he wrote to his wife, "you will find your husband grown exceedingly awkward in all the usages of polite society, and I do not say this in jest, but in sober earnest for I feel it. Two years and a half of campaigning in the field wears off very much of the polish of civil life and is apt to make one regard those little niceties of civil life as mere frivolities, unworthy a man's attention."²⁵ Others, like Reverend Bradley, resented any criticisms of the campaign. "If, in the meantime, our Northern friends are impatient at our slow progress," he wrote to his wife, "all I have to say is, that I wish them no worse punishment than to be obliged to march just one day through South Carolina swamp and mud at the time of high water."²⁶

Soldiers were very much aware that the necessities of war had resulted in a shifting of personal values. Now they were involved in a campaign that was bringing the war into the homes of the makers of war. Thus soldiers who may have, as civilians, eschewed actions against noncombatants redefined their morality in terms of duty.²⁷ To carry out these duties they adopted and defended behavior that would not have been acceptable at home. Their sense of moral conflict was reflected indirectly, in letters such as this to a loved one:

I am most heartily sick of this kind of life. Oh what a pleasant retreat from the repulsive scenes of this man slaughtering life, would be the society of my family in some secluded spot, shut out from the calamities of war.²⁸

If there was a prevalent preoccupation in Sherman's army it was homesickness. "How my mind wanders to my quiet little home on

²⁵Captain Dexter Horton, January 20th, 1865, *op. cit.*; James Connolly to "Dear Wife," January 28th, 1865, Three Years in the Army of the Cumberland, 378.

²⁶Rev. G. S. Bradley, letter dated January 25th, The Star Corps, 250.

²⁷Reid Mitchell, The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home (New York, 1993) 36-37.

²⁸J. W. Bartnes to Wife, January 12th, 1865, Donald F. Carmony, ed. "Jacob W. Bartnes Civil War Letter," INMH LII (June 1856) 180: quoted in Glatthaar, The March to the Sea and Beyond, 43. On morality of soldiers see Mark Grimsley, The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy towards Southern Civilians 1861-1865 (Cambridge, 1995) *passim*.

the banks of the Shiawasee," wrote Captain Dexter Horton, a commissary officer, in his journal. At the time, the camp band was playing "Home Sweet Home." Captain William Thayer of the 4th Iowa Artillery, took time to compose a poem to his wife:

Dearest Wife I still remember
With a husband's aching heart
How it filled my soul with sorrow
When we two were called to part
Oft I feel within my bosom
As the shades of night appear
Purest love and fond affection
For my own my absent dear

When I get your welcome letters
As in distant land I roam
And you speak of our dear children
How it makes me sigh for home

But I hope the day is dawning
Which will close this bloody strife
And ere long to have the pleasure
Of embracing my dear Wife.²⁹

But before any such sentiments could be accommodated the campaign must be prosecuted. The soldiers, officers and enlisted men alike, geared themselves for yet another test of their fortitude and endurance. The epitome of their confidence and conviction to stay the course was their leader, William T. Sherman. Corporal Ricker believed he was the "profoundest man in the world." He saw Sherman as an originator of "deep plans and brilliant combinations and movements which surprise and startle mankind."³⁰

On the eve of the advance into South Carolina, Sherman was still formulating his tactical plan. His western men had developed a reputation for ruthlessness, and Sherman was concerned that this psychological conviction in the minds of the Southerners could provide

²⁹Captain Dexter Horton, January 23rd, 1865, *op. cit.*; William F. Thayer Papers, NCDAAH.

³⁰Ricker to "Sister Mary," January 24th, 1865, "We Left a Black Track in South Carolina."

problems. On the other hand, the personification of the Rebellion was South Carolina, Sherman believed that his soldiers would perform admirably and aggressively during this next leg of his march:

Somehow, our men had got the idea that South Carolina was the cause of all our troubles . . . and therefore on them should fall the scourge of war in its worst form. Taunting messages had also come to us, when in Georgia, to the effect that, when we should reach South Carolina, we would find a people less passive, who would fight us to the bitter end, daring us to come over etc., some that I saw felt that we would no longer be able to restrain our men as we had done in Georgia.³¹

From the outset the Carolina campaign was very different from that of Georgia, both physically and psychologically. The field of operations was harsher. In South Carolina they would encounter roads bordered by "dense woods full of almost impenetrable underbrush" and rivers whose "sedgy, oozy banks were covered for miles with dismal swamps." One can only imagine how soldiers' morale would be tempered by having to wade through icy cold water in an inhospitable climate so far from home. ³²

The difficulty of this environment was a factor which William Simms of Columbia felt might have used as a means of defending the state. After Sherman had passed through, he criticized the Confederate leadership for insisting upon lines of defense "chosen without any regard to the topography of the country." There were many places of "dense swamp ... and almost impenetrable thicket," where soldiers and officers who were familiar with the geography could have overcome a much larger Union force. ³³

In the absence of active combat, the Union soldiers made disparaging comments about the countryside. In this land of swamps and mud, they found poverty and what they judged to be sloth. In fact soldiers were bound to interpret the landscape in reference to their own

³¹ Witham T. Sherman. Memoirs, II (New York, 1984) 254.

³² Captain David P. Conyn^gham. Shermans March throu^gh the South with Sketches and Incidents of the Campai^gn (New York, 1865) 301; Henry Hitchcock, Marching With Sherman, M.A. DeWolfe Howe, ed. (Lincoln, 1995) 229

³³ William Gilmore Simms, Sack and Destruction of the City of Columbia. South Carolina, 29.

homes. Many of Sherman's soldiers had come from the West where professional surveyors had laid out straight roads and neat towns and where squares and courthouses imposed a sense of order over the countryside.³⁴ In South Carolina, Union soldiers found small towns, poor roads and impoverished people, all indications that their preconceptions of southern cultural and moral inferiority had been correct. Despite the fact that this land was "swampy and the least cultivable part of the state," Major Hitchcock believed "a Yankee farmer would make the same place *look* far more comfortable." Even among the rich, however, northern soldiers found room for criticism. Comparing a plantation owned by an allegedly "rich widow" to a northern farm, Major Hitchcock felt the owner had realized only "half the comfort out of her money that many a Northern farmer on 80 or 160 acres has. Rough rail fences, except just around the house—unthrifty looking yard, cabins and out buildings, and general air of slovenliness, dirt and waste."³⁵

The majority of the white civilians that Union soldiers observed seemed to be of the same "cracker or sand hill" species encountered in Georgia, whom Major Osborn described as "white trash."

They are lower than the Negro ... not fit to be **kept in** the same sty with a well to do farmer's hog in New England . . . every half mile we find a shanty with the poles a foot apart, a stick chimney, three or four half naked children, two or three with nothing but a shirt, but with an incrustation of dirt which entirely conceals the natural color. The mother with her person partially concealed by ragged cotton cloth and dirt combined.³⁶

Seeing this impoverished class reinforced the Yankee belief that the majority of whites were oppressed by a small, aristocratic, slaveholding population. This made it all the more difficult for them to understand why so many non-slaveholding whites were fighting. Northern soldiers could not accept the cultural traits of the South that allowed racial attitudes to cross class lines. Although both North and

³⁴Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers* (New York, 1988) 96.

³⁵Hitchcock Journal, February 2nd, 1865, 24 1 and 239.

³⁶Thomas Osborn Journal, February 4th, 1865.

South perceived a similar threat to their constitutional rights, a process that helped form opinion in both areas, southern social stratification was very difficult for northerners to discern.³⁷ Major Hitchcock described a "poor white" woman he came across as "slatternly," wearing a dress that was "dirty and slovenly" and having the "usual sallow" complexion, yet this woman owned a farm of 400 acres. As Union soldiers helped themselves to her corn and fodder, she seemed perfectly indifferent. Just the day before, she explained, Wheeler's Confederate cavalry had passed by and taken whatever they needed; "I didn't expect that of our own people," she told him.³⁸

The misbehavior of Confederate cavalry was not a new concern for southern civilians. Bill Arp, a noted southern humorist, who had been forced to flee from Rome, Georgia, wrote of the plight of "runagees" who frequently came afoul of these horsemen. In the backwood dialect in which he wrote his columns, he published this stinging rebuke:

The Konfederit cavilry is ubikuitous and everlastin.... I have traveld a beep of late, and had okkashun to retire into sum very sequestered rejuns, but nary hill nor holler, nary vale or vally, nary mounting gorge or inadsessibel raveen have I found, but what the cavilry had bin there, and jest left. And that is the reeson they can't be whipped for they ha^y always jest left, and took a odd hoss or two with em.³⁹

Confederate leaders were also alarmed. The Confederates had yet to mount any type of effective defense against the invading forces. The Confederate cavalry was suppose to be the eyes of the army, but, yet they were really just bummers in gray or butternut clothes-no better than the invading Yankees. In late January, General D.H. Hill had written that "[W]hat we need is efficient cavalry, not immense bands of plunderers scattered over the country." He believed that the Secretary of War should be alerted to "the necessity of disbanding or changing into infantry this ominous mob before they bring a famine

³⁷Glatthaar, The March to the Sea and Beyond, 68. ³⁸Hitchcock Journal, February 2nd, 1865,242.

³⁹Quoted in David B. Parker, Alias Bill Arp: Charles Henry Smith and the South's "Goodly Heritage." (Athens, 1991) 61.

upon the fighting men of the army." In fact he went so far as to suggest that all "marauders" be shot.⁴⁰

Civility was beginning to take a holiday in the Union army. Even as Confederates debated how to rein in their horsemen, army directives were issued to regulate their own soldiers actions:

The indiscriminate pillage of houses in disgraceful [and] demoralizing to this Army—The houses in the vicinity of free Negroes have been stripped of even the bed clothes and of family apparel—Brigade Commanders will at once take measure to put a stop these infamous practices.⁴¹

In fact color was no protection from these "rough riders," who would "go through a Negro cabin ... with just as much freedom and vivacity as they 'loot' the dwelling of a wealthy planter." Groups of foragers were sent in advance of the army "mounted on scraggy old mules, or cast off horses" and return at night with "strings of chicken, bacon, turkeys, and geese." ⁴²

These men came to be infamous as "Sherman's bummers." The term originally referred to a soldier who slacked off during routine army operations yet could be depended upon in a time of crisis. Later the term came to identify a:

ragged man, blackened by smoke of many a pine knot fire, mounted on a scrawny mule, without a saddle, with a gun, a knapsack, a butcher knife and a plug hat, stealing his way through the pine forests far out on the flanks of a column. Keen on the scent of rebels, or bacon, or silverspoons or corn, or anything valuable.⁴³

⁴⁰Major-General D. H. Hill to Lieutenant-General William J. Hardee, January 26th and January 31st, 1986. General Daniel Hill Papers, NCDAH.

⁴¹General Order, January 31st, 1865. Robertsville, South Carolina, Balloch Papers, Duke.

⁴²-George W. Pepper, Personal Recollections of Sherman's Campaigns in Georgia and the Carolinas (Zanesville, Ohio, 1866), 276; Conyngham, Sherman's March. 312.

⁴³Glatthaar, The March to the Sea and Beyond, 122. Pepper, Personal Recollections. 275-76.

While the main purpose of these foraging parties was to bring food back to their units, many took the opportunity to turn these absences from the ranks into a jaunt. Although these escapades were not encouraged, they were seldom punished. On one occasion two soldiers were apprehended stealing female clothes. As punishment the "ruffians" were ordered to march behind a wagon, wearing the stolen garments for six days "amidst the scoffs and jeers of other men." Another soldier received the "heartly application" of his commanding officer's boot.⁴⁴

Not all the soldiers, however, shared this tolerance of depredation. One army chaplain felt such outrages were enough to "make a soldier blush with indignation." Yet, he realized that although:

every effort that could be made was made to check the demoralization of the foragers, but the occupation tended to demoralization and 'the army must be fed and the Bummers must feed us.' Thus we reasoned, but deprecated the means used to bring about the result. Some would discriminate, others would not, and thus the few have caused a great deal of unnecessary suffering.⁴⁵

Regardless of whether their intentions were mischievous or malicious, civilians in the path of Sherman's troops feared the worst. It was a fact that the soldiers understood:

Think how you would admire him if you were a lone woman, with a family of small children, far from help, when he blandly inquired where you kept your valuables. Think how you would smile when he pryed open your chests with his bayonet or knocked to pieces your tables, pianos, and chairs; tore your bed clothing in three inch strips, and scattered the strips about the yard.⁴⁶

The white families were not the only victims. The slave population suffered as well. A South Carolina slave remembered Wheeler's men as being "just as hard and wolfish as de Yankees" as _____

⁴⁴Conyngham, Sherman's March 311.

⁴⁵Rev. G. S. Bradley, The Star Corps, 275-76.

⁴⁶Pepper, Personal Recollections, 276; see also Ricker to "Dear Abigail," April 5th, 1865, "We Left a Black Track in South Carolina."; James Connolly, Three Years in the Arm^y of the Cumberland. 387.

they stripped the area of provisions only one day ahead of the Union troops—who "took de rest of de hog meat, flour and cows. . . Dere was just bout five of them prowling round way from de main army, a foragin, they say."⁴⁷

The slaves expressed fear of all white soldiers. Amy Perry remembered that in the wake of attacks by both Yankees and Wheeler's cavalry in Orangeburg, "De white folks hab to live wherebber dey kin, and dey didn't have enough to eat. . . De culleded people didn't hab nutting to eat neider."⁴⁸

For many women, black and white, alone in the path of soldiers, there were more dangers than mere loss of property. Rape was a significant if irrational fear. There are few documented cases of rape and few soldiers were ever officially charged. Still then as today the charge was hard to bring and even harder to prosecute. In the climate of the march it would have been difficult for poor white women and slave women to receive sympathy or justice.⁴⁹

Evidence indicates that white soldiers viewed black women as the "legitimate prey of lust." Some officers even believed the "colored women are proud to have illicit intercourse with white men." A northern missionary and teacher for the Freedmen's Aid Society (based in the Sea Islands) stated that "no colored woman or girl was safe from the brutal lusts of the [white] soldiers—and by soldiers I mean both officers and men." She further complained that offenders were seldom punished.⁵⁰ -

Few black women have left a record of such treatment. Illiteracy and a sense of powerlessness were major factors in this dearth of evidence. Many of them, however, may well have been reluctant to open up that area of intimacy for "he said—she said" scrutiny. It may well be surmised that white Union soldiers in the South, starved for female company and shunned by southern women, were likely to turn to black women regardless of their willingness to participate.⁵¹

⁴⁷George P. Rawick, ed. The American Slave: A Composite Biography, 19 vols. (Westport, 1972) Vol, III, Part 4.172 (hereafter AS).

⁴⁸ibid., 252.

⁴⁹Susan Brownmiller, Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape (New York, 1976) 89.

⁵⁰Quoted in Leslie A. Schwalm, "A Hard Fight for We": Women's Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina (Urbana, 1997) 102-103. ⁵¹Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance." Signs 1. (1989): 12-20; Ervin L. Jordan, Jr. "Sleeping with the Enemy: Sex, Black

Northern soldiers' attitudes to the destruction of property and to the people who suffered the cruelties of war also varied. Civilians stood by helplessly while details of men tore up railroad lines, heated them and twisted the bars so that they could not be repaired. After destroying the railroad and the depot in Orangeburg, soldiers set fire to the cotton bales that were awaiting shipment. The crackling flames elicited different emotions from the perpetrators. Major Osborn, impressed by the "grandeur" of the scene, described smoke that "rolled up in volumes to the sky so impenetrable that not a ray of light could be seen through them." Another soldier found only tragedy in the scene. The "smoking ruins" and "tall black chimneys" were sad reality for a town that was filled with "old women and children, hopeless, helpless, almost frenzied, wandering amidst the desolation."⁵²

The occupation of Orangeburg effectively severed communications between the capital and Charleston.⁵³ Now only twenty-one miles from Columbia, Sherman learned that his plan to keep his ultimate goal from the Confederate army had succeeded. Both Charleston and Augusta were prepared for an onslaught, while Columbia remained so "confused by the rumors that poured in on it, [so] that both Beauregard and Wade Hampton . . . seem[ed] to have lost their heads." Isolated and without credible information as to Sherman's route, the populace of Columbia was set to panic when it became apparent they were in the path of Sherman's juggernaut.

Women, and the Civil War." Western Journal of Black Studies, Vol. 18, (2) 1994: 55-63

⁵²Thomas Osborn, Journal, February 13th, 1865, 119-20; Conyngham, 323.

⁵³William T. Sherman, Memoirs II, 274-6.

A Sad Encumbrance The Refugee's Plight

In Columbia, Mary Chesnut heard that Sherman had destroyed the town of Orangeburg. Word spread in the area that he and his soldiers had "left a track (his line of march) as bare and blackened as a fire leaves on the prairies." Despite the Governor's reassurances about the safety of Columbia, she decided to pack up and leave. Nothing, she felt, could stop the onward march of the Union Army. "If Beauregard can't stop Sherman down there, what have we got here to do it with? Can we check or impede his march? Can anyone?" On the other hand, Emma LeConte chose to believe the official assurances that Columbia was safe.⁵⁴

These two women reflect the dilemma many civilians faced—whether to stay and meet the invader or to pack up their belongings and flee. Many families agonized over this decision. "To go, meant horrible discomfort—[to] stay meant—we did not quite know what," wrote Mrs. Harriett Ravenel. She ultimately decided to stay noting what she heard about the capture and occupation of Savannah, "The city had been in the possession of the Federals for some months. Families had been protected. No very great injury had been done to person or property." However, on the whole, Sherman's occupation policies and actual performance in cities like Atlanta led many authorities to assume a similar fate awaited them. In Atlanta he had forcibly removed the civilian population. This lack of consistency fueled the increasing panic among residents of South Carolina's capital city.⁵⁵

For some, this was not the first time they had had to face such a decision. Mrs. Emily Goodlett had "refugeed" from Midway, arriving in Columbia only two weeks before. Mary Chesnut recounted the story of the Hamilton family, who acted as "a sort of *avant courier of the Yankee army*." They fled from Columbia to Alston, and then to Winnsboro, each time learning that the Union army was close behind

⁵⁴Chesnut, A Diary from Dixie, 343-344; Le Conte, When the World Ended February 12th or 13th, 29.

⁵⁵Mrs. J. J. Pringle Smith to Mrs. William Mason Smith, March 23rd, 1865, Mason Smith Family Letters Harriett Horry Ravenel Papers, USC; Mary Elizabeth Massey, Women in the Civil War (NY, 1966) 226.

them. Ultimately, they preceded the Federals into Lancaster, Cheraw and Fayetteville, North Carolina, before the Yankees passed them.⁵⁶

The refugees brought with them wild stories and exaggerated reports of what Columbians could expect at the hands of Sherman's men. Tales of atrocities and the inevitability of Sherman's arrival fueled speculation and panic:

[L]ong trains of fugitives line[d] the roads with wives and children, and horses and stock and cattle, seeking refuge from the pursuers. Long lines of wagons covered the highways. Half-naked people cowered from the winter under bush tents in the thickets, under the eaves of houses, under the railroad sheds, and in old cars left them along the route. All these repeated the same story of suffering, violence, poverty and nakedness.⁵⁷

By this stage of the war many civilians had learned that occupied property was more likely to survive—they decided to stay. In some instances, they offered a haven to refugees with the expectation that the small colony would be able to protect the home and their possessions.⁵⁸ A wealthy resident of Pickens District in the north west region of the state actually offered his "large landed estate and . . . all material on it" to refugees from Charleston or Columbia who could provide their own shelter and "all implements of husbandry. Unfortunately by February of 1865 few refugees still had the possessions necessary to meet these qualifications.⁵⁹

Columbia now had more refugees than anywhere in the state. Attracted by its "excellent transportation and communication facilities, hotels, boardinghouses, government ordnance plants and laboratories," they had hoped to reside there indefinitely. As these people decided to flee the city, they created "a traffic jam such as was seldom seen even in the Confederacy."⁶⁰

⁵⁶Chesnut, *A Diary from Dixie*, 371.

⁵⁷Simms, *The Sack and Destruction of Columbia*, 29.

⁵⁸Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Refugee Life in the Confederacy*, 25.

⁵⁹*Charleston Daily Courier* February 11th, 1865, quoting the *Columbia Daily Guardian*, n.d. in *ibid.*, 259.

⁶⁰*ibid.*, 82.

In addition to refugees and residents, there were also a number of government workers. In April 1864 the Treasury Note Department, the single largest employer of women in the Confederate Government, had moved from Richmond to Columbia, bringing one hundred female workers. Now the decision was taken to send them back to Richmond—then under a loose but unmistakable siege by General Grant in front of Petersburg.

One of these young women, Malvina Waring, chronicled her experiences as a note signer. Early in February she was clearly enjoying her new career. She reveled in the praise she received for finishing four packages of \$50 notes in one day and celebrated by buying a new bonnet for which she paid \$200. On February 11th she expressed her confidence that the Confederate forces were more than enough match for Sherman. "Is he coming, that terrible Sherman with all his legions?" she mused. "Well, and if he does Beauregard is coming too, and Hampton and Butler are already here so where's the sense in getting worried?" When the word of the move came she complained. "It is frightfully monotonous just because you are a woman, to be tucked away in the safe places. I want to stay. I want to have a taste of danger. . . . But I am overruled." However, she would soon get her fill of danger and some extra. In her entry the next day, Waring described crowds and chaos as frightened fugitives flooded the railroad station "begging for transportation." The sounds of "whizzing shells" told her that Sherman arrival was imminent. Fortitude turned to fear as she begged God to turn him back!⁶¹

The panic gripping the depot was palpable. Another of the Treasury girls described chaos such as she had never seen before. "The car windows were smashed in, women and children pushed through, some head foremost, others feet foremost." After several hours delay, the train moved north to Charlotte where northbound refugees ran into southbound refugees from Virginia. This milieu of populations of frightened, homeless, often destitute people created chaos and confusion. In Charlotte, the Treasury Girls received the news that they were to be furloughed. "Think of the girls from South Carolina," wrote one young woman, "with no homes, nowhere to go." And so they were too were cut adrift without sponsorship and stranded in a strange town,

⁶¹Malvina S. Waring, "A Confederate Girl's Diary," February, 7th, 11th, 12th and 15th, in Mrs. Thomas Taylor, eds., South Carolina Women in the Confederacy (Columbia, 1903).

far from family, friends. Rumors of the deteriorating military situation only added to their anxiety.⁶²

The burden of refugees without means or resources for self support burdened the host cities. In December 1864 a local editor had urged some of the overflowing population of Columbia to move elsewhere. Later, when he heard of the cold reception many of them had met with in the Piedmont, he published an article called "Refugee Haters." He accused up-country people of being so "cold" and "unsympathetic" that they were "no better than Yankees" who might "steal, cheat or lie in behalf of their fellow-in-arms." Still this was better than the "selfishness of those cold Southern hearts."⁶³

The paradox of the refugees was that, while they were not exactly welcomed wherever they went, they were often contemptuous of the accommodations that they found. Columbian Lizzie Smith fled the city and made her way to Alston, about twenty miles away. Upon arrival she wrote in the most disparaging terms, "Have you ever seen Alston? It is made up of about five little huts in a swamp & a dirty, low vulgar building called a hotel." Another refugee commented that the houses in Alston looked so poor that she doubted she would find suitable accommodation for the night. Ironically, she was forced to take shelter in a "poor miserable little hut."⁶⁴

Regardless of the standard of accommodation, carriages, wagons and families on foot jammed the road into Alston. Dr. Joseph LeConte, head of the Nitre plant in Columbia, led his particular party consisting of two wagons, two carts and one buggy; four whites and twenty-two blacks (five of these slaves and the others employees of the plant) together with their families. According to the doctor, this group of blacks proved to be a "sad encumbrance" to his party. Still, as they were the "wives and children" of his employees and had implored him to take them along, he believed he had no choice.⁶⁵

⁶²Janet E. Kaufman, "Treasury Girls," *CWTI* May 1986: 32-38; Massey, Women in the Civil War, 141; Mary Darby de Treville, "Extracts from the Letters of a Confederate Girl," in Mrs. Thomas Taylor, ed. South Carolina Women in the Confederacy, 183-184.

⁶³Daily South Carolinian (Columbia) December 3rd, 1864, quoted in Massey, Refugee Life in the Confederacy, 145.

⁶⁴Lizzie P. Smith to Carolina R. Ravenel, March 5th, 1865, Mason Smith Family Letters, 169; Mrs. Emily Caroline Ellis Papers, February 25th, 1865, USC.

⁶⁵Joseph LeConte, 'Ware Sherman: A Journal of Three Months Personal Experience in the Last Days of the Confederacy (Berkeley, 1937), February

When he received orders from Richmond to ship off his laboratory equipment, Dr. LeConte experienced first-hand the commotion at the railroad depot in Columbia. For two days he had fought for car space in a depot "crowded, jammed to suffocation with people and freight both public and private." Despite assurances from authorities that there was no danger, the panic level rose. Women and children begged to be taken aboard, and Dr. LeConte's heart went out to the "surging, pleading masses."⁶⁶

In the midst of this chaos, people arrived at different decisions about how to meet the threat. Grace Elmore decided to stay in Columbia with her mother, although she escorted her slaves to the depot to secure them safe passage. There they stood in the rain "huddled together under one umbrella, looking so cold and comfortless." The trains were too full, however, and they "formed a mournful procession" back home.⁶⁷ The Heyward family, on the other hand, decided that the white family members should flee and leave their home in charge of their "maid," who was told to move her family into the main house and protect it as best she could. If none of the white members of the family returned, it would be hers.⁶⁸

Other blacks were flooding into the town, bringing stories of destruction and rape. Elmore dismissed many of them as too sensational. But shortly after the war General D. H. Hill reported that, although he only knew of only a few "outrages" against white women, many such incidents had occurred in connection with "negro women." Henry Jenkins, a slave in Sumter County, condemned the Yankees for both "things they ought not to have done" and leaving undone "things they ought to have done." The war, it seemed to him had been more "bout stealin" than a "Holy War for de liberation of de poor African slave people." ⁶⁹

With rumors and refugees pouring into one side of the city and residents and other refugees continuing to evacuate the city, Columbia was the vortex of civilian activity in South Carolina. "What should be packed?" wondered Emma LeConte.⁷⁰

17th, 1865, 89 and February 15th, 86.

⁶⁶ibid

February 14th, 15th, 82nd and 83rd.

⁶⁷Grace Brown Elmore Diary, February 15th, 1865.

⁶⁸Sallie Coles Heyward Diary, USC.

⁶⁹ibid., February 13th, 1865; General Daniel Hill, Letter to '?', Columbia, November 1865, Hill Papers; Henry Jenkins, AS III, Part 3, 26. ⁷⁰Emma Le Conte, When the World Ended, February 15th, 1865, 31.

Cooperation was hard to find anywhere in the area by February of 1865. Governor Magrath had no positive response from Confederate President Jefferson Davis to his request for reinforcements. Governor Joseph Brown declined to send his Georgia militia to help (the fact that South Carolina had refused to send help into Georgia during Sherman's campaign may have influenced his decision). Magrath therefore turned to the people, exhorting them to carry out a scorched earth policy. He urged them to remove what they could and destroy what they could not. "Indulge no sickly hope that you will be spared by submission; terror will but whet his revenge," he warned them. Yet as late as February 14th Mayor Goodwyn still offered citizens of Columbia assurances of their safety.⁷¹

The absence of a systematic program of public information had a high cost. In November 1864 a Mississippi congressman concluded that keeping the people fully advised as to the events of the war might have "assisted in forming and preserving a healthy tone of public sentiment." Instead they now had a confused, perplexed, troubled and panic-stricken populace.⁷² Nowhere was this more apparent than in Columbia, as government officials, military personnel, and civilians all fought to get their respective goods, and persons, out of town:

Terrible . . . was the press, the shock the rush, the hurry, the universal confusion—such as might naturally be looked for, in the circumstances of a city from which thousands were preparing to fly, without previous preparations for flight—burdened with pale and trembling women, their children and portable chattels—trunks and jewels, family Bibles, and the *hires familiares*. The railroad depot for Charlotte was crowded with anxious waiters upon the train. . . . These scenes of struggle were in constant performance.⁷³

The chaos was so great that by February 15th martial law was declared in the city and the last available transport was assigned to

⁷¹*The Governor of the State to the People of South Carolina*, undated manuscript in "Legislative System, Messages, 1860-1865," USC, quoted in Lucas, *Sherman and the Burning of Columbia*, 39.

⁷²Congressman Henry C. Chambers, Mississippi, address to House, November 10th, 1864, quoted in Bell Wiley, *The Road to Appomattox* (New York, 1975) 107.

⁷³Simms, *The Sack and Destruction of Columbia*, 33.

carry government property. From her refuge in North Carolina, Mary Chesnut heard that she had been one of the last refugees from Columbia who was permitted to enter a train by the door. After that "women could only be smuggled in by the window. Stout ones stuck and had to be pushed, pulled, and hauled in by man force."⁷⁴ Still seats were available to those with money. "No love could persuade [sic], Simms remembered, "where money failed to convince, and self glowing bloated in its dimensions, stared on from every hurrying aspect."⁷⁵ In a post-war investigation by South Carolina authorities into the huge losses of state supplies during the evacuation of Columbia, the committee found that "Columbia was evacuated in great haste and confusion, without any settled plan, or controlling head, to direct the conduct of affairs."⁷⁶

The chill of winter bit the residents and refugees alike. Emma LeConte complained of being cold; however, it was not enough to persuade her to venture into the bedlam of the streets. The noise of chaos was disquieting and she recorded that:

[A]ll day the trains have been running, whistles blowing and wagons rattling through the streets. All day we have been listening to the booming of cannon—receiving conflicting rumors of the fighting. All day wagons and ambulances have been bringing in the wounded over the muddy streets and throughout the drizzling rain, with the dark, gloomy clouds overhead.

By nightfall she was alarmed by a new sound—distant but distinct shelling. "I do not know why," she wrote in her journal, "but in all my list of anticipated horrors I somehow had not thought of a bombardment." Shivering from both the outer chill and inner dread she braced herself as best she could for the events of the next day.⁷⁷

⁷⁴Chesnut, Diar^y from Dixie, February 23rd, 1865, 351.

⁷⁵Simms, The Sack and Destruction of Columbia, 33-34.

⁷⁶South Carolina, Report of the Special Joint Committee, in Regard to Certain Public Property on Hand at the Evacuation of Columbia, and the Surrend Gen. Johnston's Army Columbia, 1866, quoted in Lucas, Sherman and th Burning of Columbia, 63.

⁷⁷Emma LeConte, When the World Ended, February 15th and 16th, 1865 31 and 35.

Just Retribution?

Commissary officer, Captain Dexter Horton, was also feeling the effects of the cold weather, commenting in his journal that "ice froze on hats and trees." In these conditions soldiers had crossed streams with water so bitterly cold that "many of the soldiers became almost paralyzed."⁷⁸ In the course of the prior week, Captain Horton's regiment had passed through Robertsville and Barnwell, both of which received the adjective "burned" as notations in his diary. However, in Barnwell there had been time for socializing with the "very handsome" Miss Clara Belle. Despite being a "bitter rebel," she had clung to his arm and asked him to stay. In fact, Captain Horton's diary contains evidence of a great deal of social intercourse between northern soldiers and southern civilians. Many days he found time for drinking and dancing, generally enjoying the company of "southern ladies." Still he was moved and troubled by one encounter with a woman who begged his protection with one breath and in the next, chastised her southern sisters for fraternizing with the enemy. He decided to leave her to the "mercy of cruel straggling soldiers."⁷⁹

Soldiers also varied in their reactions to the many blacks that flocked to the ranks of the Union army "happy the day of jubilee had come." Captain Horton noted the "fun" the soldiers had with the "colored children" and "getting niggers to ride mules they couldn't." Lieutenant C.C. Platter of the Ohio Infantry Volunteers found South Carolina one of the most remarkable places for contrabands he had ever seen. Another soldier credited blacks with a "large share of shrewdness, and take a more just view of the present struggle than we generally gave them credit for." Other blacks, especially children, seemed to be confused by stories their owners had told them about the Yankees. One black child was heard to say, "Mamma the Yanks have good feet; not like de debbil, as massa says."⁸⁰

⁷⁸Horton, "Diary of an Officer," 244; S. F. Fleharty, Our Regiment: A History of the 102nd Illinois Infantry Volunteers (Chicago, 1865) 138.

⁷⁹Horton, "Diary of an Officer," 243 and 245.

"Ibid., 245-246; C.C. Platter Papers, USC; Conyngham, Sherman's March. 320-321. On attitudes of African-American children to the Civil War, see Peter Bardaglio, "The Children of Jubilee: African American Childhood *in* Wartime," in Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, eds., Divided Houses, 213-229.

Not every soldier, however, derived such entertainment from the blacks following their ranks. Lieutenant Thomas Myers wrote about these "dammed niggers" in far more derogatory terms. He suggested to his wife that blacks preferred to stay at home "particularly when they found out that we only wanted the able bodied men and to tell you the truth the youngest and best looking women." Although soldiers often felt that by welcoming fleeing slaves they were depriving secessionists of their property, these "hangers-on" subsequently became an encumbrance to the forward march of the troops. In a letter to his wife, Lieutenant Myers indicated that the army cared little for the blacks. "The useless part of these [contrabands] we soon manage to lose—sometimes in crossing rivers--sometimes in other ways."⁸¹

Lieutenant Myers' frank letter to his wife also expressed a greater interest in the material gains of the campaign, "Gold watches, silver pitchers, cups, spoons and forks, which had been collected by the soldiers, were now as common as "blackberries." After such goods were collected, he explained how they were divided among the troops:

1/5 and first choice falls to the share of the Commander-in-chief and staff; 1/5 to the corps commander and staff; 1/5 to Field Officers of the Regiment, and 2/5 to the company. Officers are not allowed to join in these expeditions without disguising themselves as privates.... Officers over the rank of Captain are not made to put their plunder in the estimate for general distribution. This is very unfair, and for that reason in order to protect themselves, subordinate officers and privates keep back everything that they can carry about their persons - such as rings, ear-rings, breast pins, etc., etc., of which I have about a quart. I am not joking.⁸²

⁸¹Ilorton, "Diary of an Officer," 245-246. Platter Journal, Platter Papers Lt. Thomas J Myers to "My dear wife," February 26th, 1865, T.J. Myers Papers, NCDAH.

⁸²ibid. This letter was apparently dropped by Lt. Myers and picked up 1 slave woman who then gave it to her mistress, Miss Floride Cantey of Camden, South Carolina. The letter was published by the local paper and subsequently by papers in Columbia. Interestingly a copy also appears Grace Brown Elmore's papers. Miss Cantey vouched for the authenticity of the letter, stating "The finder could neither write nor read, and there were Confederate men in the neighborhood to forge such a letter, or to invent many facts as the letter contained."

While the authenticity of this particular letter may be questioned, other evidence suggests that looting was done on a systematic basis. In March George Balloch, wrote asking his wife if she had received the goods he had shipped from Savannah. He wondered what she thought of a particular statuette, adding: "I suppose if I send much more plunder you will need a larger house to hold it. I have another small lot ready for shipment."⁸³

Captain George Fleharty, 102nd Illinois Infantry, detailed in his diary an image of the countryside "alive with men who made foraging their sole business." Despite the fact that men were sent out in organized squads under the supervision of officers, "hundreds were constantly out, independent of all control. . . . Many roamed through the country solely to plunder, and in their nefarious work threw off all restraint—fearing neither God nor man—nor his mythical majesty the Devil."⁸⁴

Fleharty made a clear distinction between foragers and pillagers. The latter "show no compunctions of conscience, even in the face of weeping women. We may well imagine," he wrote, "that a darker chapter could be written of the marauders, who . . . visited the lonely homes of defenseless women and children, far away from the marching columns. God pity any people that are subjected to the tender mercies of a raiding army."⁸⁵

News about the operations of Sherman's army reached the northern homefront through the letters sent by soldiers. Concerned that he might be judged "unfeeling," Major Samuel Duncan of the 14th New Hampshire Volunteers felt the need to justify the "fearful destruction" wrought on South Carolina as one of the "legitimate fruits of the rebellion." His words conveyed a conviction, shared by many of his comrades, that South Carolina's pillaging was just retribution for its sins. Although he acknowledged some sadness, his overriding feeling was one of triumph when he saw a planter's house going up in flames. "Is rebel property more sacred than the lives of our loyal soldiers?" He declared to his future wife:

Yet so the braggart miscreants of the South
& the too tender hearted people at home would seem to
assert when they raise their hands in holy honor

⁸³George Balloch to "My Own Jennie," March 28th, 1865, in George Williamson Balloch Paper, Duke University.

⁸⁴S. F. Fleharty Diary, February 6th, 1865.

⁸⁵ibid. February 12th, 1865.

because a rebel's house or cotton has been given to the flames.⁸⁶

This harsh policy of retribution created controversy and conflict with in the army and in the North. While many soldiers proudly reported the activities many others sought approval from their families.⁸⁷

In the view of many soldiers South Carolina was the instigator of the war. However, the march and reality of creating hardship and misery for individual women and children aroused the most basic instincts of the male populace. Many soldiers reflected upon how their own wives and families might fare had the war been brought to their doorstep. "How would you like it," a soldier asked his sister, "to have troops passing your house constantly for two days, dozens within it all the time ransacking and plundering and carrying off everything that could be of any use to them?" He experienced mixed emotions of excitement and guilt when entering homes, taking provisions and having "women begging and entreating [you] to leave a little when you are necessitated to take all." This soldier consoled himself, however, in the knowledge that he "never went beyond my duty to pillage."⁸⁸ Major Hitchcock had no such reservations and declared to his wife that "even in the case of women—Southern ladies—what they received was but a just retribution for the large share they personally had in bringing on and keeping up this war."⁸⁹

To a large extent, soldiers differentiated southerners on an arbitrary class basis. While the upper class planters of South Carolina were deserving of northern contempt, the poor and suffering could elicit a reluctant sympathy. Captain Conyngham described a group of civilians who hung around the camp "with a fawning, cringing,

⁸⁶Samuel Duncan to Julia Jones, March 15th, 1865. Duncan/Jones Papers, New Hampshire Historical Society, quoted in Nina Silber and Mary Beth Sievens eds., Yankee Correspondence: Civil war Letters between New England Soldiers and the Home Front (Charlottesville, 1996) 51.

⁸⁷On this debate see Mark Grimsley, The Hard Hand of War; James M. McPherson, For Cause & Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War (I\ York, 1997); Gerald F Linderman, Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War (New York, 1987) and Reid Mitchell, Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home (New York, 1993).

⁸⁸Corporal Elis Ricker to [Sister] Abigail, April 5th, 1865, 224. ⁸⁹1-Hitchcock to Mary Hitchcock, April 7th, 1865, Marching with Sherman, 288.

subserviency . . . craving a bite to eat, while our foragers disinterred barrels of pork and sweet potatoes around the premises."⁹⁰

One group of southern women who did gain the compassion of Sherman's men were the approximately 400 female employees of the Saluda cotton factory, who wept and wrung their hands as they saw their only source of income go up in flames. Once again, "the innocent suffer for the crimes of the guilty," commented a soldier. Another soldier displayed more contempt than pity commenting that the women were "unkempt, frowzy, ragged, dirty, and altogether ignorant and wretched." They lived, he wrote, in "dirty wooden shanties ... filled with broken crockery, dirty pots and pans, and other accumulations of rubbish."⁹¹

The objective was in sight as Sherman's men stood on the banks of the Congaree River with the city of Columbia before them. Corporal Ricker saw Columbia's inviting streets as a temptation to "many a 'vandal' to tread their 'hallowed pavements.'" "It was one of the finest sights I ever beheld to look from the point where we were drawn up in line of battle upon that beautiful but doomed city," wrote Major Farwell to his hometown paper. Still he tried to imagine how the citizens might feel:

I can conceive of nothing more terrible than our appearance to the citizens of Columbia as we stood upon that hill only a mile distant, drawn up in line of battle, while the shots from our batteries told them but too plainly that they were at our mercy.

A Columbia resident, Madame Sosnowski would have concurred as she looked up at the gathering troops and, in fearful anticipation, trembled under the scrutiny of the "malicious eyes" of the enemy.⁹²

⁹⁰Conyngliam, *Sherman's March*, 319-320.

⁹¹*ibid.*, 326. Nichols, *Great March*, 156-158.

⁹²Major S. S. Farwell to his home paper, March 27th, 1865. "The Palmetto Flag, I *Annals of Iowa* XV (July, 1925) 61. Corporal Eli Ricker to "Friend Dan," April 2nd, 1865, 223; Madame Sosnowski's Account of the Burning of Columbia, Sosnowski-Schaller Family Papers, USC.

"Desolation Heightened by the Agonized Misery of Human Suffering"

On February 17th a tremendous blast awakened the residents of Columbia. "The house shook," wrote Emma LeConte, "broken windowpanes clattered down, and we all sat up in bed, for a few seconds mute with terror."⁹³ The explosion had been caused by looters who had inadvertently set off a store of gunpowder at the railway station. Looting was rampant on this eve of invasion and occupation. William Simms reported "females and negroes" among the looters. Not surprisingly many non military goods were carried off by Wheeler's Confederate cavalry. Simms reported the soldiers had "systematically, as if they had been bred to the business, proceeded to break into the stores along Main Street." Adding to the confusion and loss of order, the Chief Commissary Officer decided to throw open the stores to the public. This was a sure sign to the people that Columbia's fate was sealed.⁹⁴

As Sherman looked across the Congaree River on the smoldering "ruins of the railroad depot," he could see citizens and cavalry in the streets and "quite a number of Negroes [who] were seemingly busy in carrying off bags of grain or meal, which were piled up near the burned depot."⁹⁵ Later that morning, he received word that Mayor Goodwyn and a delegation of alderman were prepared to surrender the city. And so both citizens and soldiers prepared themselves for an encounter that was to reverberate in the annals of history for more than a century.

The assignation of blame for the burning of Columbia is not the focus of this study. The burning has been chronicled by many scholars but is concisely summed up by a Union soldier:

When the brigade occupied the town the citizens

⁹³Emma LeConte, February 17th, 1865,

⁹⁴Richmond Whig, March 7th, 1865, quoted in Lucas, Sherman and the Burning of Columbia, 54. Simms, The Sack and Destruction of Columbia,

⁹⁵Sherman, Memoirs II, 278. Sherman issued standard orders for the occupation of the City by General O. O. Howard, instructing him to "destroy public building, railroad property, manufacturing and machine shops; but .y spare libraries, asylums, and private dwellings." *ibid.*, 277,

and Negroes brought out whisky in buckets, bottles and in every conceivable manner treated the men to all they would drink. The men were very much worn and tired and drank freely of it, and the entire brigade became drunk. The enemy had taken the cotton out of the store houses and piled it in the main streets and set it on fire, which the citizens and soldiers, when we entered were trying to subdue, and had nearly accomplished.

But when they became thoroughly intoxicated, they began to break open the stores and plunder freely. The Negroes, escaped prisoners, state convicts, and such other people as would, all went into the work of pillaging with a will.

The day was dry and the wind blowing a gale. The fire in the cotton sprang up, and set some of the buildings on fire. By this time all parties were willing to assist it on.⁹⁶

These were the results and historic legacy of the three-day occupation of Columbia by Sherman's army. But underneath the flames can be found a host of voices that give a broader more insightful view. Now was the time when civilians and soldiers came face-to-face. Here southern women were called upon to become defenders of their homes. Here soldiers would struggle with issues of morality and vengeance.

Even before Yankee soldiers entered the city, Columbia's white families feared to venture into the streets. Instead they sent their slaves out as advance scouts, many of whom later returned with supplies of "sugar & bagging, tools, flour, salt, tobacco, &c."⁹⁷ The irony of this situation was not lost on Emma LeConte, who noted the kindness and loyalty of slaves who brought back provisions. "How times change!" wrote Emma, "Those whom we have so long fed and cared for now

⁹⁶Osborn Journal, February 17th, 1865; For a similar account see Hitchcock to his wife, March 12th, 1865. The best account of this episode is Lucas, The Burning of Columbia, who, after an thorough assessment of the evidence, concludes that approximately one third of the city was destroyed as a result of the combined factors of carelessness on the part of Confederate authorities in destroying cotton, a preponderance of alcohol that encouraged incendiarism by some Union soldiers and extremely strong winds.

⁹⁷Mrs. J. J. Pringle Smith to Mrsy William Mason Smith, March 23rd, 1865, Mason Smith Family Letters, 173.

help us. We are intensely eager for every item of news but of course can only hear through the Negroes."⁹⁸

Although starved for credible news, other sounds of that day etched themselves vividly in many women's memories. Grace Elmore heard "a steady roar, such as one hears when a little distance from a crowd of excited men, mingled with the trampling of horses as if running races and accompanied with yells, and screams as from drunken men. I cannot describe these sounds ... the night seemed an emanation of hell." Another resident was struck by the "bellowing" of cows led by Yankees through Main Street at the same time as a band was playing "Yankee Doodle," and "Hail Columbia," whose words they corrupted to "Hail Columbia, Happy land, If I don't burn you, I'll be damned."⁹⁹

William Simms recalled groups of soldiers on corners, "drinking, roaring, reveling—while the fiddle and accordeon were playing their popular airs among them." Some Yankees, however, remembered the sounds of music in a different fashion. Despite the fact that he wrote to tell his family that the period in Columbia was "the awfulest time I ever seen," Iowa Sergeant Henry Wright was also introduced to some "dozen young ladies," who played piano and guitar for them. "Miss Mollie Hook was my favorite," he continued "I almost fell in love with her and she declared she would marry a Hawk Eye or never marry." After the war the sergeant did in fact return to Columbia to claim his "secesh" bride."¹⁰⁰

Another soldier who found his stay in Columbia pleasant was Sergeant Robert Hoadley, who wrote to his cousin that he had:

Maid the acquaintance of several ladies some of
them wer' refugees from Charleston. I find the Ladies
(I speak of them becaus' we do not see hardely anybody
else but women in the Country) of North and South
Carolines much better educated and more enlightened

⁹⁸Emma LeConte Journal, February 17th, 1865.

⁹⁹Grace Elmore Diary, February 17th, 1865; Emily Geiger Goodlett Papers, USC;

"Hail Columbia," quoted in Rod Gragg, ed. The Illustrated Confederate J (New York, 1989) 185y

¹⁰⁰ Simms, The Sack and Destruction of the Cit^y of Columbia, 43; Seargent Henry H. Wright to "Dear Folks at Home," March 28th, 1865, in *"The Awfulest Time I ever Seen: A Letter from Sherman's Army,"* ed. Howard Norman Monnett, Civil War History VII (September 1962) 286.

than they wer' in Ala. & Georgia, they do not use quite
so much tobacco &tc.¹⁰¹

These soldiers' stories may seem even more incongruous when one considers that they were both soldiers in the Fifteenth Corps, a group of men whose infamous reputation had reached the ears of South Carolinians. A northern soldier told Grace Elmore that when these men were put in front, "we know it means fire and pillage."¹⁰² Another woman wrote that Sherman had sent his "Tigers" in first. "Whenever he sends these men ahead he intends to do his worst. He says he would not be afraid to go to the lower regions with this regiment in the lead."¹⁰³ Sherman himself confirmed the reputation of these men. "[I]f you have watched the history of that corps," he wrote to General Halleck from Savannah, "you will have remarked that they generally do their work pretty well."¹⁰⁴

Yet the juxtaposition of the infamy of the Fifteenth Corps against Sergeant Wright's apparently innocuous story is an excellent example of how individual encounters between civilians and soldiers often played out in very different ways from the grand narrative of pillage and destruction. This is not to deny the terror, suffering and very real loss experienced by many civilians. But in all fairness there was also much civility and socializing.

The extreme terror that women felt was most often expressed in images of hell and devils against a backdrop of flame. "The wind was raging," wrote Mrs. Bachman to her daughter. "The elements conspired with man to remind us of the scenes in which demons delight." A crowd of soldiers in another woman's yard filled the night air with "fierce yells of demoniac delight," while "their forms shone out hideously in numbers on all sides in the light of our flaming home." By midnight on the night of the 17th it seemed to Emma LeConte that "Sherman's Hellhounds" had turned the sky into a "quivering molten ocean." William Simms described "volcanic torrents of sulphurous

¹⁰¹ Sergeant Hoadley to "Cousin Ern," April 8th, 1865. Robert Bruce Hoadley Papers, Duke.

¹⁰² Grace Elmore Journal, February 18th, 1865.

¹⁰³ Anonymous Mother to "My dear Gracia," March 3rd, 1865, quoted in Katherine M. Jones, When Sherman Came Southern Women and the "Great March" (Indianapolis, 1964) 176.

¹⁰⁴ W.T. Sherman to Major-General H. W. Halleck, December 24th, 1865, in Sherman, Memoirs II, 227.

cloud" that engulfed buildings and brought them down in "great billow showers of glowing fiery members."¹⁰⁵

Throughout this saturnalia, soldiers broke into houses, threatened the residents, destroyed their possessions and made off with their valuables. One group burst into the Elmore household and ransacked their belongings, all the while "laughing, and saying coarse things, or talking in loud rough tones." "A roaring stream of drunkards," poured into Mrs. Ravenel's home. They tore up her carpets, burst open her trunks, and took her food. Yet, although she described them as "plundering and raging," they still seemed "curiously civil and abstained from personal insult." Both Ravenel and Elmore became convinced that these marauders had more interest in stealing than in abusing the white women with whom they came in contact. This realization conjured up feelings of "abhorrence and disgust" in Grace Elmore. "If I were but a man how firm would be my arm to strike," she raged.¹⁰⁶

Although these women may have lacked the physical strength of their men, they were able to call upon other weapons with which to defend their homes and persons. Many used the moral authority commonly ascribed to women of their race and class to stop soldiers in their tracks. Two women knelt and sang out a loud psalm, which "strange incantation" had an immediate influence on the soldiers in question. Another managed to make soldiers feel "sheepish" by her unflinching stare as she stood on her piazza. Mrs. Ravenel gave a more detailed account of this behavior:

If a number of men were fighting over a trunk or a closet, spoiling more than they took, and I would go and stand by, not saying a word, but looking on, they would become quiet, would cease plundering, and would sometimes stop to tell me that they 'were sorry for the women and children, but South Carolina must be destroyed.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵Mrs W. K. Backman to Kate Bacham, March 27th, 1865, USC, Lily Le to "My Precious Brother," March 2nd, 1865, in Jones, When Sherman Car 164. Emma LeConte Journal, February 18th, 1865; Simms, The Sack and Destruction of Columbia, 42.1

¹⁰⁶Mrs Harriett Horry Ravenel Papers, USC. Grace Elmore Journal, February 18th, 1865.

¹⁰⁷Conyngham, Sherman's March, 346. Mary Leverette to "My Dear Caroline," March 18th, 1865, Leverette Papers, USC. Mrs. Harriett Horry

William Simms later praised the women of Columbia for their "almost masculine firmness," displayed by a spirit of "inflexible endurance." They faced the taunts and insults of their assailants "in silence and with unblenching cheeks. When forced to answer, they did so in monosyllables only, or in brief, stern language."¹⁰⁸ And these taunts were many. To one group of women shivering outside their burning home, two officers allegedly called, "Ladies it is a cold night. Why don't you go into your burning town and warm yourselves?" Another took the blankets under which a group of children were huddling, telling them there was fire enough to keep them warm. While others shouted, "here they come, women and children rebels—let them suffer—who cares!"¹⁰⁹

The most important thing to these women was that the Union soldiers "should see no signs of regret or faltering" in the face of such taunts. Yet this did not stop women's sharp retorts, which they managed to hide behind a dissembling ladylike demeanor. "They [the Yankees] received the most nauseous doses of truth gilded with smiles." And the northern soldiers themselves often lauded the women of South Carolina as the "pluckiest, the bravest, [and] the most outspoken they had met in the South." One soldier was almost amused by a particular lady's retort when asked whether she had ever seen a Yankee before. "Oh yes," she replied, "we have often seen your fellows with a pack on their back or with a monkey and organ!"¹¹⁰

One group unable to call upon weapons of moral authority, nor allowed to escape with insults and rough words were black women. Physical assaults on white women were rare; black women fared far worse. "We should grossly err," wrote William Simms, "if, while showing the forbearance in respect to our white women, we should convey to any innocent reader the notion that they exhibited a like forbearance in the case of the black."¹¹¹ Blacks were robbed of their goods in the same way as whites. Soldiers "stole the servants' clothes, ripped open their trunks and boxes, especially ones which they declared

Ravenel Papers, USC.

¹⁰⁸Simms, The Sack and Destruction of Columbia, 49. ¹⁰⁹Harriott Middleton to Susan, March 10th, 1865, "Middleton Correspondence, 1861-65," Isabella Middleton Leland, ed. South Carolina Historical Magazine. 64 (April, 1964) 105; Grace Elmore Diary, March 7th, 1865; Mrs. H. H. Simons Papers, USC.

¹¹⁰Harriott to Susan, March 2nd, 1865, "Middleton Correspondence," 103; Conyngham, Sherman's March, (322).

¹¹¹ Simms, The Sack and Destruction of Columbia, 55.

contained clothes too fine for any Negro." Although many black residents of Columbia had greeted the arrival of the Yankees with "demonstrations of delight," and many "piloted the men to the best places for plunder," the coming of the army of "emancipation" fell far short of its promise. "The Yankees plunder the Negroes as well as the whites, and I think they are becoming somewhat disgusted with their friends," wrote Emma LeConte.

Although many blacks were seen guiding soldiers to the hiding places of family valuables and were implicated in keeping the supply of alcohol flowing, the assaults on black women reached such an extent that "at last, the Negroes themselves became thoroughly disgusted, and . . . vowed vengeance for the base treatment their women had been subjected too (sic)." 112

On the morning of February 18th, black women's naked bodies "bearing the marks of detestable sex crimes," were found in the streets of Columbia. One female slave was raped in the presence of her white mistress, while another "old Negro woman" was reported to have been "subjected to the most brutal indecency from seven of the Yankees." With the encouragement of the group to "finish the old Bitch," she was "put into the ditch and held under water until life was extinct." 113

Some slaves remained loyal to their white families. Grace Elmore's servants assisted in putting out the fire the northern soldiers set in her home. In the aftermath they took on a protective role in relation to their white mistress. One slave refused to let her into the downstairs billiard room until he had wiped off the coarse messages soldiers had written with chalk on the black board. 114

Many slaves did take the opportunity to claim their freedom, flee their white owners and follow the Federal troops. They were not, however, welcome additions to the ranks of Union soldiers. "The swarms of negroes who had flocked in front, and rear, and flanks of our columns, were something to remember," wrote army correspondent Captain David P. Connyngham. The fugitives were of "all ages, sizes, and both sexes, were either mounted on broken-down mules or horse or crammed into some rheumatic old coach, or were laboriously toiling

¹¹²Emma LeConte Journal, February 18th, 1865. Madame S. Sosnowski
Burning of Columbia," Georgia Historical Quarterly XIII (September, 192 203.

¹¹³John Bennett Walters, "Sherm and Total War" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1947) quoted in Barrett, Sherman's March Through Carolinas, 89; D. H. Trezevant Papers, USC.

¹¹⁴Grace Elmore Diary, February 18th, 1865

along, faint and sweating, rendering the air not very pleasant to the olfactory nerves."¹¹⁵

Other slaves expressed extreme ambivalence about leaving. Emma LeConte reported some of her slaves "dressed in their Sunday best," in preparation for their flight. But her maid, Mary Ann, wept in front of her mistress, fearing that the:

Yankees were going to force Henry to go off with them, and of course, she would have to go with her husband. He did not want to go and would not unless forced. She seemed greatly distressed at the thought of leaving the master and mistress who had supplied the place of father and mother to her, an orphan.¹¹⁶

In the aftermath of the invasion, the LeConte family became dependent on their slaves for both food and news.

The army correspondent of the New York Herald reported that, although in the majority of cases "the slaves betrayed their masters, revealing their property and joining in its destruction," he had also observed cases in which:

Slaves refused to leave their masters, or to betray them, though threatened with death. Cruel masters reaped the fruits of their tyranny now, while the property of kind ones was in many instances saved by the tact and discretion their slaves.¹¹⁷

But often blacks put their efforts into saving the few possessions they themselves owned. One slave displayed great ingenuity on a plantation just outside of Columbia. He saw the Yankees carrying away blankets from the main house, in a terrified tone he pleaded with them "not to mix them with his, as all the house girls had some catching disease (on which everyone was hastily thrown, & off they went, making him a present of an old mule)."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵Conyngham, Sherman's March, 344.

¹¹⁶Grace Brown Elmore Diary, February 18th, 1865; Emma LeConte Journal, February 19th, 1865.

¹¹⁷Conyngham, Sherman's March, 347.

¹¹⁸The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes. 1861-1866, March 4th, 1865, John F. Marszelek, ed. (Baton Rouge, 1979) 403.

Other humorous scenes were reported. Grace Elmore described one such incident outside her house. Her mother's carriage was being stolen by the Federals. Elmore wrote that the carriage was being:

drawn by eight or nine Yankees, shouting and laughing at the top of their voices, and neither could Mrs. Hagood nor I help laughing too, for inside of the carriage, fastened among the bags of flour stolen from our store room, were half a dozen or more turkey cocks stolen from our poultry yard, stretching their necks outside of the carriage, and all gobbling and trying to spread their tails and resent the indignities to which they were subjected; the absurdity of the whole scene will never be forgotten. Tho our enemies, w could not help for the moment entering in the spirit of the fun.¹¹⁹

In other civilians' accounts of the destruction of Columbia, written during or immediately after the event, the most predominant feature is that individual guards extended both sympathy and kindness. Although they describe the Yankees as a group in the most vituperative terms, on a one-to-one basis many soldiers and civilians touched each other on a very human level.

A woman, had described Sherman's men as "tigers," but she reportedly was protected by a Yankee captain from Iowa. Lilly Logan, in a letter to her brother, described the northern soldiers as "demons in human shape." Later she praised a "Yankee on horseback" who had escorted her to a place of safety and then returned to her house to save some of her belongings. "His name was Charles Lamar," she wrote. "Do not forget him, for I owe a great deal to his protection and kindness." ¹²⁰

Mrs. Pringle Smith befriended a guard who "stayed during the night & came off & on during the day, & always took supper & conversation, & became to our surprise quite one of the family."¹²¹ One guard openly wept at the state of the city. "The kindhearted man was appalled by the fate he believed was in store for us," wrote his

¹¹⁹Grace Brown Elmore Diary, February 17th, 1865, USC, *emphasis mine*. ¹²⁰Anonymous Mother to "My Dear Gracia," March 3rd, 1865; Lily Logan "My precious Brother," both in Jones, When Sherman Came, 177 and 164. ¹²¹Mrs. J. J. Pringle Smith to Mrs. William Mason Smither, March 23rd, 1865, Mason Smith Family Letters, (175).

southern charge. The next morning with tears in his eyes he told them, "If I saw any rebels burning down my home as all of your are seeing us burning down yours, I would hate them all my lifetime."¹²²

One of the most illuminating stories came from Mrs. W. K. Bachman, who described a night of terror with "[w]omen in the last stages of consumption, some with infants two weeks old, taking refuge in the damp, chill woods and taunted by their enemies." Yet her personal experience proved very different. Although she had been initially fooled by an "Indian" who pretended to be a guard, she was lucky enough to enlist the protection of Iowan Private David Davis, who was more than happy to make short shrift of this "imposter." He told Mrs. Bachman that he felt an intense hatred of Indians, who had murdered his sister and her children in Minnesota. When Private Davis took his leave, Mrs. Bachman presented him with a silver cup and told him, "I never thought I could feel towards an enemy as I did towards him." The next month Mrs. Bachman wrote to General Wade Hampton commending the actions of Private Davis. She received the following reply:

The man you mentioned as having protected your house ... was an enlisted man of the 4th Iowa Infantry—his regiment together with the 9th, 25th, 30th and 31st regiments were from Iowa and constituted the 3rd Brigade, 1st Division, Fifteenth Army Corps. . . . I can only say that so far as this man was concerned that, had he been captured by our men, ... and had the badge of the Fifteenth Army Corps located him, he would have been shot and left lying in the woods as were so many of his comrades.¹²³

The paradox of guilt by association with the Fifteenth Army Corps and the kindness of individual soldiers was recorded by William Simms. He stated that in many cases guards were "quick to betray their trusts." Yet "[t]he most dextrous and adroit of these . . . were chiefly Eastern men." The men from the western states, in which he included Indiana, Illinois and Iowa, "were frequently faithful and respectful; and,

¹²²Harriott to Susan, February 28th and March 2nd, 1865, "Middleton Family Correspondence," SCHM 54 (April, 1964) 102 and 104.

¹²³Mrs. W. K. Bachman to Kate Bachman, March 27th, 1865, Bachman Papers, USC.

perhaps, it would be safe to assert that many of the houses which escaped the sack and fire, owed their safety to the presence or the contiguity of some of these men."

On the other hand Simms went to great lengths to compare the treatment of blacks at the hands of men from the East and the West. The western men seemed to despise blacks, whom they "used as drudges . . . and rewarded with kicks, cuffs and curses, frequently without provocation." Westerners openly declared their reluctance to have any connection with blacks. The Eastern men's relationship with blacks, on the other hand, seemed to Simms to be of a totally different nature.

They hob-a-nobbed with the Negro, walked with him and smoked and joked with him. Filled his ears with all sorts of blarney; lured him, not only with hopes of freedom, but all manner of license. . . No doubt they succeeded in beguiling many, since nothing is more easy than to seduce, with promises of prosperity, ease and influence, the laboring classes of any people, white or black. . . But, as far as we have been able to see and learn, a large proportion of the Negroes were carried away forcibly. When the beguiler failed to seduce, he resorted to violence.¹²⁴

Many of the Union soldiers did, however, express compassion toward the white civilians in Columbia. One soldier hoped never to see such a scene of "drunken soldiers, rushing from house to house emptying them of their valuables, and then firing them. . . Men women, and children, some half naked, as they rushed from their beds . . . seeking their friends or trying to escape from the fated town." The devastation "sickened" Major Connolly. Although he had known South Carolina would suffer at the hands of the northern army, he "had

¹²⁴Simms, The Sack and Destruction of Columbia, 39 and 81. The que racial attitudes among mid-westerners remains to be explored, but Iher reasonable grounds to suspect, at best, an ambivalence among western, towards black emancipation and even more evidence to suggest extren prejudice against Native Americans. Barrett finds open hostility amon western troops towards blacks, quoting a stump speech made by one v "in which he expressed the desire that all Negroes he placed on an imn platform under which was enough powder to blow the congregation 'tc atoms", Sherman's March through the Carolinas, 86. Mark Grimsley

that utter disregard for blacks was the norm among Union Troops, The Hand of War, 196.

no idea how frightful the reality would be."¹²⁵ Similarly, the sight that greeted, Illinois surgeon E. P. Burton as he walked around Columbia on the morning of February 18th, etched itself into his memory:

Groups of women and children sitting on their litter—all that was left them—all looked tired—Many crying & despondent. Some all patient, submissive & quite—& some complaining terribly about the Yankees. I think a large proportion were poor & mostly women and children. I talked with some but it made me feel too bad to be endured.¹²⁶

Whatever their individual experience, citizens of Columbia held Sherman responsible for their plight. After all Sherman's troops were renowned for their discipline. "They were as an army, completely in the hands of the officers. Never was discipline more complete—never authority more absolute." It seemed to civilians that once Sherman was satisfied with the extent of the destruction he reestablished order almost instantaneously. Mrs. Ravenel felt that the "admirable discipline of General Sherman's army cannot be too highly estimated. They greatly mistake who attribute the horrors of that night to accident or insubordination, the skillful commander held his men in the hollow of his hand, and said to them so far shall thou go and no further." ¹²⁷

How uncanny it seemed to Grace Elmore to watch the Yankees leave Columbia in such a disciplined fashion. When the ranks stopped to draw some water from her well, which lay at the back of her flower garden, she was amazed at how carefully they tread the paths that they had totally disregarded for two days. As they passed she heard no loud voices nor witnessed any objectionable behavior:

It was hard to believe that these quiet, well behaved, well dressed men who walked thro our garden, so

¹²⁵Conyngham, Sherman's March, 331. Connolly to wife, March 21st, 1865, in Three Years in the Army of the Cumberland: The letters and Diar^y of Major James A. Connolly, Paul M. Angle, ed. (Bloomin^gton, 1959) 387.

¹²⁶Burton, Elijah P. Entry for February 18th, 1865, Diary of E. P. Burton. Surgeon. Seventh Regiment Illinois (Des Moines, 1939).

¹²⁷Simms, The Sack and Destruction of Columbia, 86. Mrs. Harriett Horry Ravenel Papers, USC. See also Mrs. W. K. Bachman to Kate Bachmn, March 27th, 1865, Bachman Papers, USC; Harriot to Susan, February 28th, 1865, "Middleton Correspondence."

carefully threading their way as not to tread upon the smallest plant, could be of that army who on Friday thronged the same spot, and made the garden hideous by their rampaging over every portion.

She could not suppress feelings of rage at the passing of this band of "insulters of women and children."¹²⁸

In the wake of Sherman's army, many women were struck by the ensuing silence. Mrs. Simons wrote of the "awful stillness and silence," which was only broken by the whispers of friends exchanging tales of their experiences.¹²⁹ It was the contrast to the conflagration of the previous two days that struck Emma LeConte:

The destruction and desolation around us which we could not feel while under such excitement and fear now exerts its full sway. The very air is fraught with sadness and silence. The few noises that break the stillness seem melancholy and the sun does not seem to shine as brightly, seeming to be dimmed by the sight of so much misery.¹³⁰

Feelings of desolation and despair were hard to resist. "What remained for us but to lie down and die?" asked Mrs. Simons. Emma LeConte echoed these sentiments of dread and isolation, yet found herself questioning the manhood of northern soldiers:

This is civilized warfare[?] [T]his is the way in which the cultured Yankee nation wars upon women and children! Failing with our men in the field, this is the way they must conquer. . . . It is so easy to burn the homes over the heads of helpless women and children, and turn them with insults and sneers into the street. One expects their people to lie and steal, but it does seem such an outrage even upon degraded humanity that those who practice such wanton and useless cruelty should call themselves men.¹³¹

¹²⁸Grace Brown Elmore Diary, February 21st, 1865, USC. ¹²⁹Mrs. H. H. Simons Papers, USC.

¹³⁰Emma LeConte Journal, February 21st, 1865.

¹³¹ibid., February 18th, 1865.

Yet one month later she was also questioning the manhood of southern soldiers who seem to have abandoned their female comrades. Had four years of suffering been endured for nothing, she wondered? If the Confederate army could not supply adequate defense then "[w]hy does not the President call out the women? . . . We would go and fight, too—we would better all die together."¹³²

But rhetoric was not sufficient to deal with the chronic, material hardships that now affected the city. The most immediate problem was food. The Middleton family depended on free rations that were distributed daily by city officials. Paradoxically, the LeConte family relied on their remaining slaves to bring them a little bacon each day while Emma complained about the blacks who were "flocking in from the devastated country to be fed. Mayor Goodwyn has ordered them to be sent back, as the town is threatened with starvation. Indeed, I do not know what will become of us unless relief comes in. . . ." Governor Magrath issued the following missive:

In the streets of the capital of your state are now thousands of your fellow citizens without shelter and without subsistence; they need food and I call upon you to assist me in relieving that population from the pressing wants with which they are afflicted.¹³³

But empty stomachs were still growling in March, and they could only have turned queasy by the overpowering smell of the carcasses of dead animals slaughtered by the Yankees and still littering the streets of the city.¹³⁴

Where was relief to come from? Conditions were no better in the surrounding countryside, and transportation systems had been virtually destroyed. Devastated plantations could no longer sustain whites or blacks. Onward marching Union soldiers realized that their devastation of the countryside had left many families isolated and destitute. Artillery officer Thomas Osborn cast an observant eye on the devastation that surrounded him:

The sufferings which the people will have to undergo will

¹³² Emma LeConte Journal, March 18th, 1865. ———

¹³³ Broadside issued by Governor Magrath, February 27th, 1865, in Shand Papers, USC.

¹³⁴ "Middleton Family Correspondence," 105; Emma LeConte Journal, February 18th and 22nd, 1865; Grace Elmore Diary, March 6th, 1865.

be most intense. We have left on the wide strip of country we have passed over no provision which will go any distance in supporting the people. We have left no stock by means of which they can get more. All horses, mules, and cattle, sheep and hogs have been taken. They cannot go outside of the country traversed for lack of transportation . . . we scarcely leave provision enough to last three days and often not a meal of victuals for a single person where there are a dozen to feed and more than this not infrequently without a board or bed blanket to cover themselves with nor a shinplaster to buy with.¹³⁵

Nor had the wave of destruction ended. On February 20th General Howard wrote to the commanding officers of both the 15th and 17th Corps, expressing his concern over the behavior of soldiers who were continuing to assault and rob civilians. "These outrages must be stopped," he wrote. "I call upon you and upon all the officers and soldiers under you, who have one spark of honor or respect for the profession which they follow, to help me put down these infamous proceedings and to arrest the perpetrators."¹³⁶

In South Carolina, people without power in the public sphere had been left to uphold the Confederacy in the face of invasion. Sherman recognized both this geographic and psychological isolation and seized the opportunity during his march through South Carolina to exploit the South's "greatest cultural weakness—its vulnerable network of social cohesion."¹³⁷ In his wake he left a population who were both materially and spiritually exhausted, a population that Sherman hoped would now focus its energies on the need for food and shelter, rather than on supporting further political and military conflict.

By the end of February, North Carolina braced for the inevitable, and both Governor Zebulon Vance of that state, and General Robert E. Lee were aware of the implications. Soldiers who had heard news of their family's fear and suffering were deserting and returning home. From his headquarters Lee penned the following warning to the Governor of North Carolina:

The state of despondency that now prevails among

¹³⁵Osborn, The Fiery Trail, Journal entry February 27th, 1865, 153.

¹³⁶Official Records. Series I, vol. 47, pt. 2, 506.

¹³⁷William W. Freehling, "Divided South: Causes of Confederate Defeat," in his Reintegrating American History (Oxford, 1994) 223.

our people is producing a bad effect upon the troops. Desertions are becoming very frequent and there is good reason to believe that they are occasioned to a considerable extent by letters written to the soldiers by their friends at home. In the last two weeks several hundred have deserted from Hill's corps, and as the divisions from which the greatest number of desertions have taken place are composed chiefly of troops from North Carolina they furnish a corresponding proportion of deserters.¹³⁸

Many Union soldiers now took the time to rationalize feelings of both guilt and pride over the destruction they had wrought. What memories would they take with them of their campaign in South Carolina? While still in Columbia, Captain David Connyngham described a scene of "desolation heightened by the agonized misery of human suffering." Another soldier, however, purposely chose more selective memory. "I have," he noted, "in this war, seen too much suffering by far, and choose rather to remember the magnificent splendor of this burning city."¹³⁹ In similar vein, despite earlier expressions of compassion, Major Connolly decided he "wouldn't have missed it [the Carolina campaign] for anything."¹⁴⁰

Chief Commissary Officer, George Balloch, struggled to come to terms with his emotions. On February 20th, on the road to Winnsboro, he was enjoying a plenitude of forage. Yet he "dreamed of home, father and mother and the happy days of childhood." Some days later he stopped in a churchyard to copy the following epitaph into his personal journal:

My name, my country, what are they to thee!
What—whether high or low my pedigree:
Perhaps I far surpassed all other men!
Perhaps I fell below them all—what then?
Suffice it stranger, that thou seest a tomb,
Thou knowest its use—it hides—no matter whom.

³⁸Official Records, Series I, vol. 47, 1270-71.

¹³⁹Conyngham, Sherman's March, 334; Osborn, The Fier^y Trail, Journal entry February 28th, 1865, 131.

¹⁴⁰Connolly to wife, March 21st, 1865, Three Years in the Army of the Cumberland, 388; for his expressions of compassion, see note 33 above.

Why would a soldier take the time to read a gravestone? Was he preoccupied with death and the afterlife? Was he struggling with questions of personal identity? By the time he reached North Carolina, however, Balloch's words had a more determined ring. He chose to focus on feelings of pride in his leader:

Glorious, noble, brave, honest General Sherman—who would not be proud to belong to an army led by such a leader. My heart fairly swells with honest pride within me when I think of the results of his operations. All the other movements of the war sink into insignificance when viewed beside his.¹⁴¹

Some soldiers and civilians took the time to consider the larger picture. Miss Emma Holmes told two Confederate soldiers who had escaped from the Yankees and sought shelter in her home that much blame lay on their own doorstep. "I told them," she wrote in her diary, "this raid & fearful desolation of our state had been brought about by the avarice of the people themselves, because their patriotism was in their pockets & they had to thank their own arrant selfishness for it."¹⁴²

Captain Connyngham took a moment to contemplate the meaning of war. To those who only read about it, war was a "splendid game of glorious battles and triumphs." He now knew, however, that the reality was very different. Not only could these "fireside heroes" not comprehend the bloody horrors of "maimed bodies and dissected limbs," war had even greater horrors. Among these, he dwelt on the "hopeless misery" of prisoners of war. And perhaps casting his mind back to Columbia, he continued:

Think of helpless women and children, fleeing in terror before the devouring elements, without a home to shelter them, without bread to feed them; think of the widows and orphans that water their scant bread with the tears of sorrow; think of all the sufferings, misery, ruin, death, war entails on mankind, and you will curse its authors, and wish that God had otherwise

¹⁴¹George Balloch Journal, February 20th, 29th; letter to "My Own J March 12th, 1865, Balloch Papers, Duke.

¹⁴²Emma Holmes, Diary entry March 4th, 1865, John F. Marszalek, Diary of Miss Emma Holmes (Baton Rouge, 1979) 406.

chastised his people.¹⁴³

But for the emotionally and materially drained people of Columbia, this was not the time to consider war in its broader perspective. These "pallid mourners" looked woefully at a "city wrapped in her own shroud, the tall chimneys and blackened trunks of trees looking like so many sepulchral monuments."¹⁴⁴

Nevertheless this image of destruction also held the promise of recovery. As he looked upon the uncompleted walls of the new State House, Major Thomas Osborn commented, "[i]f the building had been finished the state and country might well have been proud of it." Now it stood alone, against a backdrop of ruins. Yet at its base remained a bronze palmetto tree that had survived undamaged—"the emblem of the 'Sovereign State of South Carolina.'"¹⁴⁵

When Emma LeConte finally steeled herself to walk among the ruins, it was on a moonlit night and her mind waxed poetic:

As far as the eye could reach only pecter-like
chimneys and the shattered walls, all flooded over
by the rich moonlight which gave them a mysterious
but mellow softness, and quite took from them the
ghastly air which they wear in the sunlight. They
only lacked moss and lichens and tangled vines to make
us believe we stood in some ruined city of antiquity.¹⁴⁶

In these romantic images lay the seeds of the Lost Cause ideology that was to flourish in the ensuing years.

The northern soldiers, who came to be remembered as a band of marauders, left behind a desolate people. But for the most part these men did not leave with feelings of joy. Iowan William Thayer, as he left behind this smoldering path of destruction, took a moment to compose a poem to his mother:

Oh I'm not happy now Mother
My heart has lost its glee
And bitter my eyes have wept

¹⁴³Conyngnam Sherman's March, 335-36.

¹⁴⁴ibid., 334.

¹⁴⁵Osborn, The Fiery Trail, Journal entry, February 19th, 1865, 137. ¹⁴⁶Emma LeConte, Journal, May 17th, 1865.

Since last they gazed on thee
I've grown so weary of the strife
Upon life's desert wild
Oh Mother pray sweet peace may come
To bless thy youngest child.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷William F. Thayer Papers, North Carolina Division of Archives and History.

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