

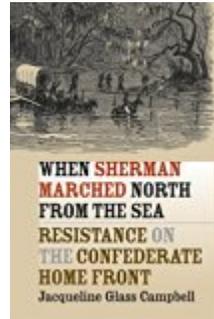
H-Net Reviews

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Jacqueline Glass Campbell. *When Sherman Marched North from the Sea: Resistance on the Confederate Home Front*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003. xii + 177 pp. \$27.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-2809-0.

Reviewed by Daniel E. Sutherland (Department of History, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville)

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Sherman's March and the Women

This slender volume (barely one hundred pages of text) is chock full of good stuff. Jacqueline Glass Campbell's goal seems modest enough: she wishes to judge the response of southern civilians to Gen. William T. Sherman's destructive march through the Carolinas, from February through April 1865. She accomplishes her objective in fine fashion, and she does so in the context of several interesting—and sometimes controversial—historiographical issues. Not all readers will agree entirely with Campbell's conclusions, but her treatment of the campaign as social, rather than military, history provides several useful perspectives.

Campbell, an assistant professor of history at the University of Connecticut, begins with two broad—and largely correct—assumptions. First, she believes that the consequences of Sherman's campaign become far more complex than past military narratives have suggested, when viewed through the eyes of all its players, both soldiers and civilians, both blacks and whites. Historians must consider “racial attitudes, gender ideology, and perceptions of the military as a cultural entity” (p. 3), Campbell says, if they are to understand how wars are fought. Second, Campbell believes that the impact of the campaign on civilians can only be determined by treating the federal invasion as a penetration of psychological as well as geographical space. Sherman's march was designed to destroy the Carolinas physically, but also to wreck civilian morale. Campbell wants to know how effectively Union soldiers accomplished the latter goal.

Campbell begins with a brief narrative of Sherman's march *from* Atlanta to Savannah. Embracing recent interpretations of the campaign, she suggests that the famous March to the Sea was not nearly as destructive as traditional interpretations would have it. Also, and more to the point, she uses this prelude to clarify her main interests and introduce her principal historiographical conclusions. Her focus, it turns out, is not so much on the entire civilian population as on women and blacks. While this is a bit disappointing, it does enable Campbell to state more forcefully her historiographical concerns. Most importantly, she challenges recent interpretations of Confederate women bowing to wartime suffering and deserting the rebel cause. On the contrary, Campbell says, Confederate women—most especially “elite” white women—became even more devoted to the Confederate nation as a result of their ordeal. Similarly, she challenges the assumption that all blacks—especially slaves—welcomed or profited from Union invasion. The relationship between white soldiers and slaves was complex, Campbell admits, but in many instances, blacks were abused in their person and property more severely than were rebels. Finally, Campbell judges that Sherman, traditionally one of the great devils of Confederate history, has been misrepresented.

Campbell pursues these same themes in tracing the more overlooked segment of Sherman's 1864-65 campaign, the march from Savannah through the Carolinas. She also adds an interesting observation about the Car-

olinas campaign itself. It might be assumed, she says, that Sherman's invasion would have been received differently in South and North Carolina. The latter state, after all, was supposedly in turmoil by this stage of the war, splintered by class divisions, high desertion rates among its soldiers, marauders prowling at will, and public officials at odds with the central government. Yet the notably poorer women of North Carolina, Campbell maintains, remained just as loyal to the Confederate nation as the well-to-do women of South Carolina, who would apparently have more to gain in the triumph of the Confederacy. The women of both states, she explains, as in Georgia, found a common foe in the Union army. "Moral outrage in the face of Northern behavior," Campbell concludes, "could reunite a fractured population and engender a new commitment to the Confederate cause." (p. 92).

Throughout her narrative, Campbell emphasizes the courage, spunk, and durability of rebel women, who emerge as a much larger part of her story and historiographical focus than do the slaves of the Carolinas. Far from being the victims of war, these white women rose to the occasion, not only to show courage in the face of physical suffering and emotional abuse, but also to demonstrate their ideological loyalty to the Confederate nation. Campbell also maintains that their gritty determination carried over into the postwar years, when many ex-Confederate women showed themselves as ready as any man to face the perils of political and economic reconstruction.

It all makes for a nice, concise case study with which to address a variety of historiographical themes. Campbell offers a well-grounded account of events, too. Her research in the primary sources, both published and unpublished, is good. Her secondary research on the Confederate home front could be broader—would even strengthen some of her key points—but it is sufficient for her purposes. Where readers are more likely to pause is in her interpretations of events. Perhaps her most convincing point—and probably the most important one from her perspective—is the resolve shown by Confederate women in the face of Sherman's invasion. This is a direct challenge to recent claims that the Confederacy collapsed because its female population ceased to support the war. One might quibble that Campbell is looking at only a tiny portion of the white female population, and she does, in fact, sometimes slip into unwarranted generalizations about all "Southern women" (especially on pp. 93-110), but she makes a good case for the response of those women in the path of Sherman's 1865 march.

The trickier part is to translate continued loyalty to southern independence into devotion to Confederate nationalism. This has been a hotly debated issue in recent years, the main sticking point being how to balance admitted rebel concerns over state rights and local prerogatives against a genuine identification with the nation. Being one of those people who believe national loyalty was relatively weak in the Confederacy, I kept looking for some knockout punch in Campbell's arsenal of evidence to convince me otherwise. It never came. The connection is more asserted than proved. She shows that Confederate women were "patriotic" and devoted to beating the Yankees, and that they saw "a direct link between the survival of their families and the survival of the nation" (p. 71), but that is not the same thing as embracing a national identity. Catch them off guard, and these people still would have called themselves Georgians or South Carolinians before they answered to the label Confederate.

Another area I can imagine fair-minded people discussing has to do with the "gender ideology" of North and South. I raise this issue with no little trepidation, as I am even less knowledgeable about it than I am Confederate nationalism. Yet my gut reaction is to think that Campbell has drawn too stark a difference between northern and southern views of gender. There were differences, to be sure, but I wonder if the criteria used by Campbell can satisfactorily explain them. She states that an industrial, urban, and middle-class northern society assigned more passive roles to women than did a southern society based on race and deference. These distinctions strike me as too stereotypical to be used with much precision, especially when employed, as Campbell does, to explain the reactions of Union soldiers to Confederate women. She assumes that these soldiers responded as they did because they shared a universal northern view of women. That seems a bit dicey to me. Campbell herself notes distinctions between the women of North and South Carolina, so might there not be differences between soldiers from Chicago and soldiers from rural Ohio? And how did such factors as education and religion—which Campbell does not consider—affect sectional gender roles? Again, I may be out of my depth here, but such issues set me wondering.

Finally, some readers may question Campbell's interpretation of William T. Sherman. As with the other historiographical issues she boldly tackles, this one, too, has produced a recent flurry of debate. Campbell joins those scholars who believe Sherman has been unjustly portrayed as a demon who waged war on civilians and un-

leashed “total war” upon an unsuspecting world. She also adds an interesting note to that debate by showing how our impressions of both Sherman and the Confederate women his men supposedly terrorized are intrinsically bound together: the image of Sherman as the scourge of the South has required that the region’s women be portrayed as vulnerable and defenseless. I like that twist; it has a certain appeal. Yet it may also have influenced Campbell’s reading of the evidence concerning Sherman. While I would not place him in the same camp as old Beelzebub, it may be that Campbell has let him off too lightly by assuming that if the interpretation of the weak woman is wrong than so, too, must be the contrasting image of Sherman.

The factors that work against this conclusion are too numerous to sort out here. Definitions of “total” war, distinctions between seventh-century dynastic/religious wars and nineteenth-century democratic wars, the gap between military “policy” and its implementation in the field, the evolutionary stages of Union military strategy, even the definition of “non-combatants” are all part of the mix. However, it seems to me that Sherman cannot be exonerated in the 1864-65 campaign without also accounting for the reputation he had already earned as a practitioner of “hard war.” To be fair, Campbell acknowl-

edges that Sherman is a difficult man to sort out. Yet her insistence, on the one hand, that he waged a perfectly traditional war, seeped in “prevailing ideologies of acceptable conduct that illuminated nineteenth-century social values” (pp. 55-56) stands in sharp contrast to her many references, on the other hand, to Union soldiers who felt compelled to justify or explain away the army’s strategy of exhaustion. A more profitable approach to understanding why the war was fought with increasingly destructive force—and not just by Sherman—may be to recognize the fact that *both* armies waged, in Jefferson Davis’s words, a “savage war,” and accept it on those terms. Let us assume that both sides were justified in waging war as they did, but then let us try to understand why they did so.

Still, none of these reservations about a few of her conclusions should detract from Campbell’s achievements. Her book is well worth reading for its insights on gender, race, and what she calls the cultural politics of war. Her study of a single campaign, strictly limited by geography and chronology, cannot be expected to satisfy every dimension of the complex interpretive structure she has erected. It is enough that she has offered new ways of considering those interpretations, and that, after all, is what good books do.

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