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Joan E. Cashin. *War Stuff: The Struggle for Human and Environmental Resources in the American Civil War.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018. 270 pp. $24.99, paper, ISBN 978-1-108-41318-3.

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Review of War Stuff: The Struggle for Human and Environmental Resources in the American Civil War

As I sat reading Joan E. Cashin's new book (before the pandemic), a co-founder of our local coffee shop in Americus, GA, sauntered by my table and asked what I was studying. I handed him *War Stuff: The Struggle for Human and Environmental Resources in the American Civil War*, and he launched into a local story. "I once heard that right after the Civil War," he said, "a planter caught a Union soldier in his vineyard. He shot him! Over some muscadine grapes!" Whether or not this specimen of Civil War memory was apocryphal, it echoed a real conflict at the center of *War Stuff*. Confrontations, sometimes violent, over resources were common between soldiers and civilians. This local memory involved a prominent Southern man against a US soldier, but other encounters fell outside North-South divide and pitted soldiers of both armies against white Southerners of varying loyalties.

Cashin traces how attitudes toward material resources changed during the Civil War with a formidable foundation of manuscript collections from more than eighty archives. As military history, *War Stuff* contributes to debates about soldier-civilian relations, gender, bureaucratic effectiveness, and ultimately, the extent to which either belligerent "had matured into a fully modern nation-state" (p. 9). It also fits within the so-called material turn and, at least in part, the environmental history of the era. Cashin builds on but diverts from existing scholarship by arguing that scholars have not paid sufficient attention to material dimensions and consequences. "No one has investigated prewar attitudes toward material resources in both the North and South and connected them to wartime events," Cashin writes. "This book is the first monograph to take such an approach" (p. 9).

The national debates over slavery that shattered political parties and shaped new ones did not

necessarily reflect different views about environmental resources. While acknowledging some degree of class conflict, Cashin cites the sharing of food, timber, and shelter as evidence of "an ethic of communalism, the notion that they had obligations to one another" in the antebellum South (p. 11). The same general attitude applied to the North. Cashin argues that white Northerners "approached material resources in much the same way, with the same mix of stewardship and carelessness" (p. 27). War created new categories of destructive competition beyond warring armies. "Troops in both armies developed new assumptions about the resources they needed to survive," Cashin writes, "a rapid shift in outlook by white men from the South and North who had practiced communalism and stewardship at home" (p. 29). War put white civilians, including partisan and nonpartisan men and women, in competition with the armies.

In Cashin's view, this transformation took place not over months or years but as soon as the war came. The Civil War, in other words, started as total war. This partly stemmed from the inability to provision armies. While hunger in the Confederate army and Southern bread riots are well-known features of Civil War history, Cashin extends privation to the US army as well. "Throughout the war, the Northern army probably had more food," Cashin writes, "but its efficiency in delivering food to the men has been greatly exaggerated." As a result, "Yankee soldiers, too, experienced real hunger" (p. 56). Armed, hungry soldiers on both sides adapted to these circumstances in myriad ways including raiding from their own supply wagons and taking from civilians. They may have preferred to target enemy houses, but in a pinch the hungry took from any source available.

Wartime policies are notable in *War Stuff* for their irrelevance to soldiers in the field. Soldiers ignored army regulations in 1861 as well as new ones throughout the war. In the summer of 1862, for example, US General John Pope stipulated that officers could confiscate property but they had to fill out paperwork and issue vouchers that loyal civilians could redeem at the end of the war. This was not a turning point. Cashin writes, "Taking food at will was already normalized, woven into daily routines, long before Pope came along" (p. 70). Confederate officers and government officials howled at Pope's orders, but Cashin reminds readers "that the Southern army already engaged in similar behavior" (p. 74). Confederate regulations, including the Impressment Act in March 1863, and later US policies, such as Lieber's Code, had "little to no influence" and a "negligible impact" on the struggle between soldiers and civilians over sustenance (pp. 78-79).

The individuals and historical forces that consumed large quantities of food also consumed timber and houses. Existing regulations in 1861, Cashin argues, "dovetailed perfectly with the antebellum idea of the 'round forty,' that is, the practices of squatters on public land who grabbed wood and then moved on" (p. 83). Early notions of this antebellum "communalism" faded quickly. The armies that consumed food in large quantities also took fence rales, deforested large areas, and set fires that burned out of control. The process Cashin describes here may better reflect changing attitudes toward real estate than natural resources. Deforestation, after all, "improved" landscapes in nineteenth-century America.[1] Perhaps that was why "ornamental" trees had better protection than others (p. 102). Still, the physical effect of Union and Confederate armies was important: deforestation, mud, and increasingly individualistic soldiers and civilians forced "to focus on self-preservation" instead of antebellum values of "communalism" (p. 107).

The struggle over food and timber interred the supposed "safe space" of private homes as soon as the war began. Soldiers rifled through possessions, looted relics and souvenirs, and burned carefully curated wooden and brick habitats. Central to Cashin's argument is that this struggle breached partisan lines. Civilians came to realize that loyal-

ty to one side or another did not protect them from either army. "The realization dawned on them at different times," Cashin writes, "but they went through the same painful process they experienced with the Southern army's seizure of food and timber—understanding eventually that military necessity took precedence over everything else" (p. 117).

While eschewing distinctions between a "soft" and a "hard" war, Cashin argues that the struggle between soldiers and civilians became more intense over time. It fell *further* out of control. "If the armies resembled machines," Cashin points out, "they were machines with no drivers" (p. 131). As the war dragged on, "houses" became almost "interchangeable with brush piles" and white Southern civilians no longer discerned meaningful distinctions between one army or another (p. 148). Sherman's march to the sea, in Cashin's view, was not exceptional for its destruction of resources. Yet white Southern memory became flattened after the war. Destruction became the disembodied force of war or—more commonly—selectively remembered as the fault of the US army. The "basic facts" about the struggle between soldiers and civilians were casualties of the Civil War (p. 171).

This is a valuable book that reopens a worthwhile discussion of the excesses of the Civil War. There is more to do. Cashin sets the parameters of *War Stuff* as a narrow struggle between white soldiers and white civilians. "Human resources," in fact, are restricted by definition in *War Stuff* to "the knowledge and skill of the white population" (p. 3). This framing is likely a quiet recognition that the author's charitable interpretation of white "communalism" across class lines (eerily similar to "paternalism") never extended beyond racial lines. It therefore takes a different antebellum and wartime context and analytical framework to understand the material effects of war upon enslaved and free African Americans. Moreover, as Cashin briefly signals in the final chapter and as my friend's story alluded in the cafe, Reconstruction is also a fruitful field for studying how this struggle for resources between the US army and Southern white civilians continued after Confederate soldiers surrendered. This also may help explain why Southern white memories became focused on the transgressions of the US army.

There is also more "war stuff" to recover in a field that has shown little sustained interest in material culture. As a contribution to the material turn in Civil War history, of which Cashin is the leading scholar, *War Stuff* points toward a future in which the things of the past that can be seen and felt come to the center of academic writing. The physical stuff textures the past in meaningful ways. After all, it took the gun, the buckshot, the vineyard, and the grapes, alongside preexisting ideas about private property and trespass, to lead to that violent confrontation still remembered in Americus. Coming amid a long struggle between soldiers and civilians over environmental resources, it was about a lot more than just "some muscadine grapes."

Note

[1]. Lisa M. Brady, *War upon the Land: Military Strategy and the Transformation of Southern Landscapes during the American Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 11; Steven Stoll, *Larding the Land: Soil and Society in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002), 20.

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