

Activity 2: Total War

Student Name _____ Date _____

Directions: You have been assigned to imagine that you are either a Northern soldier or a Southern civilian in Georgia or South Carolina during the final months of the Civil War. Based on the following document excerpts, write a one page diary entry about what you have seen going on around you. This diary entry should explain your thoughts about total war and the new tactics and strategies being used.

From the Diary of Emma Florence LeConte:

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/leconteemma/leconte.html>

[Emma LeConte was only seventeen when Sherman's army destroyed Columbia, South Carolina, where she lived. Her father, Joseph LeConte, was a science professor at South Carolina College, and he also worked as a chemist for the Confederate government. In 1957 Emma's detailed accounts of Sherman's march through the South was published as a book, entitled *When the World Ended*.]

[...] Friday, 17th Feb. [1865]

How long is this distress of mind to continue! It is now about eleven o'clock, and the longest morning I ever lived through...At about six o'clock while it was still quite dark and all in the room were buried in profound slumber, we were suddenly awakened by a terrific explosion. The house shook - broken window-panes clattered down, and we all sat up in bed, for a few seconds mute with terror...After breakfast the cannon opened again and so near that every report shook the house. I think it must have been a cannonade to cover our retreat. It did not continue very long. The negroes all went uptown to see what they could get in the general pillage, for all the shops had been opened and provisions were scattered in all directions...An hour or two ago they came running back declaring the Yankees were in town and that our troops were fighting them in the streets. This was not true, for at that time every soldier nearly had left town, but we did not know it then. I had been feeling wretchedly faint and nauseated with every mouthful of food I swallowed, and now I trembled all over and thought I should faint. I knew this would not do, so I lay down awhile and by dint of a little determination got quiet again...

One o'clock p.m. - Well, they are here. I was sitting in the back parlor when I heard the shouting of the troops... I ran upstairs to my bedroom windows just in time to see the U.S. flag run up over the State house. O what a horrid sight! what a degradation! After four long bitter years of bloodshed and hatred, now to float there at last! That hateful symbol of despotism! I do not think I could possibly describe my feelings. I know I could not look at it... Everything is quiet and orderly. Guards have been placed to protect houses, and Sherman has promised not to disturb private property. How relieved and thankful we feel after all our anxiety and distress! -

Later - Gen. Sherman has assured the Mayor, "that he and all the citizens may sleep securely and quietly tonight as if under *Confederate rule*. Private property shall be carefully respected. Some public

buildings have to be destroyed, but he will wait until tomorrow when the wind shall have entirely subsided"...

Saturday afternoon, Feb. 18th.

[...] Of course we did not expect to sleep, but we looked forward to a tolerably tranquil night. Strange as it may seem we were actually idiotic enough to believe Sherman would keep his word! - A *Yankee* - and *Sherman!* It does seem incredible, such credulity, but I suppose we were so anxious to believe him - the lying fiend! I hope retributive justice will find him out one day. At about seven o'clock I was standing on the back piazza in the third story. Before me the whole southern horizon was lit up by camp-fires which dotted the woods. ...The fire on Main Street was now raging, and we anxiously watched its progress from the upper front windows. In a little while however the flames broke forth in every direction. The drunken devils roamed about setting fire to every house the flames seemed likely to spare. They were fully equipped for the noble work they had in hand. Each soldier was furnished with combustibles compactly put up. They would enter houses and in the presence of helpless women and children, pour turpentine on the beds and set them on fire. Guards were rarely of any assistance - most generally they assisted in the pillaging and firing. The wretched people rushing from their burning homes were not allowed to keep even the few necessaries they gathered up in their flight - even blankets and food were taken from them and destroyed. The Firemen attempted to use their engines, but the hose was cut to pieces and their lives threatened. The wind blew a fearful gale, wafting the flames from house to house with frightful rapidity. By midnight the whole town (except the outskirts) was wrapped in one huge blaze.

From Cornelia Phillips Spencer, *The Last Ninety Days of the War in North Carolina (1866):*
<http://docsouth.unc.edu/true/spencer/spencer.html#p26>

[Governor Zebulon Vance of North Carolina wrote the following to a close friend on September 22, 1864. It is taken from a book about the final weeks of the war in North Carolina, published by Cornelia Phillips Spencer in 1866.]

...I never before have been so gloomy about the condition of affairs. [Confederate General Jubal] Early's defeat in the [Shenandoah] valley [in Virginia] I consider as the turning-point in this campaign; and, confidentially, I fear it seals the fate of Richmond, though not immediately. It will require our utmost exertions to retain our footing in Virginia till '65 comes in. McClellan's defeat [McClellan was the candidate of the Democratic Party in the 1864 presidential election] is placed among the facts, and abolitionism is rampant for four years more. The army in Georgia is utterly demoralized; and by the time President Davis, who has gone there, displays again his obstinacy in defying public sentiment, and his ignorance of men in the change of commanders, its ruin will be complete. They are now deserting by hundreds. In short, if the enemy pushes his luck till the close of the year, we shall not be offered any [peace] terms at all.

The signs which discourage me more than aught [anything] else are the utter demoralization of the people. With a base of communication five hundred miles in Sherman's rear, through our own country, not a bridge has been burned, not a car thrown from its track, nor a man shot by the people whose country he has desolated. They seem everywhere to submit when our armies are withdrawn. What does this show, my dear sir? It shows what I have always believed, that *the great popular heart* is not now, and never has been in this war. It was a revolution of the *Politicians*, not the *People*; and was fought at first by the natural enthusiasm of our young men, and has been kept going by State and sectional pride, assisted by that bitterness of feeling produced by the cruelties and brutalities of the enemy...

From Charles Colcock Jones, *The Siege of Savannah* (1874):

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jonescharles/jones.html>

[Union General William Tecumseh Sherman sent the following note to General U.S. Grant in November 1864, soon after Sherman captured Atlanta. The following is taken from the book *The Siege of Savannah*, published in 1874 by Charles Colcock Jones]

[...] Until we can repopulate Georgia, it is useless to occupy it: but the *utter destruction of its roads, houses and people* will cripple their military resources. By attempting to hold the roads we will lose a thousand men monthly, and will gain no result. I can make the march and *make Georgia howl...*
[Confederate General John Bell] Hood may turn into Tennessee and Kentucky, but I believe he will be forced to follow me. Instead of being on the defensive I would be on the offensive. Instead of guessing at what he means, he would have to guess at my plans. The difference in war is full twenty-five per cent. I can make Savannah, Charleston, or the mouth of the Chattahoochee. *I prefer to march through Georgia, smashing things to the sea.*

From Dolly Lunt Burge, *A Woman's Wartime Journal* (1918):

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/burge/lunt.html>

[The following is an excerpt from the diary of Dolly Lunt Burge, which was published in book form in 1918. Dolly had grown up in New England, but moved to Georgia as a young lady to be with her older sister. It was there that she met her husband, a wealthy plantation owner. Her husband died shortly before the war, leaving her control of the plantation and the slaves.]

[...] Sherman himself and a greater portion of his army passed my house that day. All day, as the sad moments rolled on, were they passing not only in front of my house, but from behind; they tore down my garden palings, made a road through my back-yard and lot field, driving their stock and riding through, tearing down my fences and desolating my home - wantonly doing it when there was no necessity for it.

Such a day, if I live to the age of Methuselah, may God spare me from ever seeing again!
As night drew its sable curtains around us, the heavens from every point were lit up with flames from burning buildings. Dinnerless and supperless as we were, it was nothing in comparison with the fear of being driven out homeless to the dreary woods. Nothing to eat! I could give my guard no supper, so he left us. I appealed to another, asking him if he had wife, mother, or sister, and how he should feel were they in my situation. A colonel from Vermont left me two men, but they were Dutch, and I could not understand one word they said.

My Heavenly Father alone saved me from the destructive fire. My carriage-house had in it eight bales of cotton, with my carriage, buggy, and harness. On top of the cotton were some carded cotton rolls, a hundred pounds or more. These were thrown out of the blanket in which they were, and a large twist of the rolls taken and set on fire, and thrown into the boat of my carriage, which was close up to the cotton bales. Thanks to my God, the cotton only burned over, and then went out. Shall I ever forget the deliverance...?

From the Journal of the Senate of the State of Georgia, 1865:

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/impls/gaextr65/gaextr65.html>

[The following is an excerpt from a speech made by Georgia Governor Joseph Brown to Georgia's state senate on February 15, 1865.]

Since your adjournment in November, the army of invasion, led by a bold and skillful General, have passed through our State, laid waste our fields, burned many dwelling houses, destroyed county records, applied the torch to ginhouses, cotton, and other property, occupied and desecrated the capitol, and now hold the city of Savannah, which gives them a water base from which they may in future operate upon the interior of the State.... It must also be admitted that Richmond is rendered insecure by the successes of General Sherman in the interior, and the position he has gained in the rear of that and other strongholds, which were relied on for defence....

Letter to James C. Calhoun (from W.T. Sherman), September 12, 1864:

<http://www.teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=1725>

Gentlemen: I have your letter of the 11th, in the nature of a petition to revoke my orders removing all the inhabitants from Atlanta. I have read it carefully, and give full credit to your statements of the distress that will be occasioned, and yet shall not revoke my orders, because they were not designed to meet the humanities of the case, but to prepare for the future struggles in which millions of good people outside of Atlanta have a deep interest. We must have peace, not only at Atlanta, but in all America. To secure this, we must stop the war that now desolates our once happy and favored country. To stop war, we must defeat the rebel armies which are arrayed against the laws and Constitution that all must respect and obey. To defeat those armies, we must prepare the way to reach them in their recesses, provided with the arms and instruments which enable us to accomplish our purpose. Now, I know the vindictive nature of our enemy, that we may have many years of military operations from this quarter; and, therefore, deem it wise and prudent to prepare in time. The use of Atlanta for warlike purposes is inconsistent with its character as a home for families. There will be no manufactures, commerce, or agriculture here, for the maintenance of families, and sooner or later want will compel the inhabitants to go. Why not go now, when all the arrangements are completed for the transfer, instead of waiting till the plunging shot of contending armies will renew the scenes of the past month? Of course, I do not apprehend any such thing at this moment, but you do not suppose this army will be here until the war is over. I cannot discuss this subject with you fairly, because I cannot impart to you what we propose to do, but I assert that our military plans make it necessary for the inhabitants to go away, and I can only renew my offer of services to make their exodus in any direction as easy and comfortable as possible.

You cannot qualify war in harsher terms than I will. War is cruelty, and you cannot refine it; and those who brought war into our country deserve all the curses and maledictions a people can pour out. I know I had no hand in making this war, and I know I will make more sacrifices to-day than any of you to secure peace. But you cannot have peace and a division of our country. If the United States submits to a division now, it will not stop, but will go on until we reap the fate of Mexico, which is eternal, war. The United States does and must assert its authority, wherever it once had power; for, if it relaxes one bit to pressure, it is gone, and I believe that such is the national feeling. This feeling assumes various shapes, but always comes back to that of Union. Once admit the Union, once more acknowledge the authority of the national Government, and, instead of devoting your houses and streets and roads to the dread uses of war, I and this army become at once your protectors and supporters, shielding you from danger, let it come from what quarter it may. I know that a few individuals cannot resist a torrent of error and passion,

such as swept the South into rebellion, but you can point out, so that we may know those who desire a government, and those who insist on war and its desolation.

You might as well appeal against the thunder-storm as against these terrible hardships of war. They are inevitable, and the only way the people of Atlanta can hope once more to live in peace and quiet at home, is to stop the war, which can only be done by admitting that it began in error and is perpetuated in pride.

We don't want your negroes, or your horses, or your houses, or your lands, or any thing you have, but we do want and will have a just obedience to the laws of the United States. That we will have, and, if it involves the destruction of your improvements, we cannot help it...

But, my dear sirs, when peace does come, you may call on me for any thing. Then will I share with you the last cracker, and watch with you to shield your homes and families against danger from every quarter.

Now you must go, and take with you the old and feeble, feed and nurse them, and build for them, in more quiet places, proper habitations to shield them against the weather until the mad passions of men cool down, and allow the Union and peace once more to settle over your old homes at Atlanta.

Yours in haste,
W. T. Sherman, *Major-General commanding.*