Total War and the American Civil War:
An Exploration of the Applicability of the Label "Total War" to the Conflict of 1861-1865

Amy Renee Haines

University of Colorado at Colorado Springs

The Civil War of 1861-1865 is labeled the first modern war in America's history. It is also labeled as a "total war." This article explores the broader definition of "total war" and whether the term is accurately applied to this American conflict. The Civil War, through analysis of the intensity of the war, the range and scope of the conflict, and the mobilization of civilian and governmental forces, earns the label "total war." Ultimately, this pivotal American conflict foreshadowed the total wars the United States would come to fight in the 20th century.

We are not interested in generals who win victories without bloodshed.
The fact that slaughter is a horrifying spectacle must make us take war more seriously,
but not provide an excuse for gradually blunting our swords in the name of humanity.
Sooner or later someone will come along with a sharp sword and hack off our arms.
Carl von Clausewitz, On War (1832)[1]

The label "Total War" has been applied to American conflicts like the Civil War, World War I, and World War II. But what constitutes the label "Total War"? Total war conjures images of massive brutality to innocents, most easily visualized by the dropping of atomic bombs on Japan during World War II.[2] Historians agree that World War II is a classic example of total war tactics by the United States and Allied Powers, due in part to the advanced weaponry available to the modern U.S. Armed Forces, which created massive devastation in Japan and Europe.[3] A similar argument of available technology can be made when defining World War I as a total war. But how does the Civil War fit into the category of a total war conflict?

---

[1] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 260; quoted in Thomas Powers and Ruthven Tremain, *Total War: What It Is, How It Got That Way* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc, 1988), 107.
[2] Jeremy Black, *The Age of Total War 1860-1945* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2006), 126.
[3] Ibid., 121.

The Civil War is often termed the first modern American war, as the technology available in the 1860s had significantly improved over what was available during the Mexican-American War of 1846-48. Is modernity itself then a sufficient quality that enables the label of total war to be applied, and if so, what degree of modernity needs to be reached? Are there other qualifications the Civil War displays that make it a legitimate candidate for the total war label?

A working definition of the term "total war" is required in order to frame the answer to whether the Civil War falls into this category. The characteristics attributed to total war have been debated by historians and military leaders alike, and a single definition does not exist according to Jeremy Black, a professor of History at Exeter University in the United Kingdom, and author of over forty books on military history and international affairs.[4] In his book, *The Age of Total War 1860-1945*, Black does, however, distill the many arguments of definition and outlines criteria for determining whether a conflict has used total war methodology. He states that intensity, scope, and the goals of the conflict must all be taken into account, and "it is also worth considering, when discussing the definition and quality of totality… [it] should be judged in terms of the parameters of what was possible in any given chronological period."[5] In other words, total warfare and modern warfare are not interchangeable terms, and will have varying characteristics depending upon the technological capabilities of the combatants and the age in which they fought.

A further definition is given by David A. Bell, current Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Humanities at Johns Hopkins University, and author of *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It*. Bell states that total war is "often defined as a war involving the complete mobilization of a society's resources to achieve the absolute destruction of an enemy, with all distinction erased between combatants and noncombatants."[6]

It is these two perspectives on total war that will frame the analysis of the methods employed by the Union and Confederate governments, for the purpose of determining whether the label of total war is warranted when discussing the Civil War. Further, this analysis will provide insight into the expanded definition of total war as it is defined by Black and Bell.

Defining Total War

"The greatest pleasure is to vanquish your enemies and chase them before you, to rob them of their wealth and see those dear to them bathed in tears, to ride their horses and clasp to your bosom their wives and daughters."
Genghis Khan (1162-1227)[7]

---

[4] Ibid., 1.

[5] Ibid.

[6] David A. Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007), 7.

[7] James Chambers, *The Devil's Horsemen: The Mongol Invasion of Europe* (New York: Times Books, 1982), 6; quoted in Powers and Tremain, *Total War*, 105.

The phrase *total war* was first used after World War I within France and Germany, and was commonly employed to describe the style of fighting that occurred during this conflict.[8] As World War I was analyzed by contemporaries, like German general Erich Ludendorff, total war came to define not only a war of mass destruction, but also the further view of the potential for continued violence by nations against future threats.[9] However, post World War I historians have come to apply the term *total war* to classify conflicts that occurred prior to the Great War.[10] The definition of total war, then, is significant in order to apply it to conflicts like the American Civil War.

The term itself is misleading, as the word "total" can be linked with meanings that do not give an accurately full picture of what is meant in the context of conflict.[11] Often, total war is linked with the idea of slaughter and brutality of noncombatants, and though torture and cannibalism can be aspects of total war, they are not the sole determining factor of total war.[12] Ultimately, Black's comprehensive criterion of what qualifies as total war gives the broadest definition:

> …the intensity of struggle, the range (geographical and/or chronological) of
> conflict, the nature of the goals, and the extent to which civil society [is] involved
> in war, not only as victims but also because of an unprecedented mobilization of
> the resources of societies in order to permit a pursuit of war that [is], at once,
> more intense and more extensive than hitherto.[13]

In essence, Black is arguing that a combination of the above factors and their effect on the entire society, when taken collectively, can illustrate the difference between a limited war with massive destruction toward enemy noncombatants, and a total war of targeted or limited destruction toward enemy noncombatants.

An additional consideration is the application of the term total war (which defines a modern war like World War I) to earlier conflicts using weapons less technologically advanced. According to Black, one must discard the notion of equating the term *total* to *modern,* as "modern is thought of as contemporary or recent, and covers a wide variety of war making," and total war tactics will be limited by the technology available at the time of a conflict, and will therefore be different from age to age.[14]

Another important factor in the definition of total war is the ideology of the society involved in the struggle.[15] Bell describes France's belief in 1788 that its Austrian enemies were planning a "war of extermination," causing the enemy population to be "demonized….so that enemy soldiers weren't seen as honorable adversaries nor enemy noncombatants as innocent

---

[8] Bell, *The First Total War,* 9.
[9] Bell, *The First Total War*, 9; Black, *The Age of Total War*, 5.
[10] Bell, *The First Total War*, 7.
[11] Black, *The Age of Total War*, 10.
[12] Ibid., 4-5.
[13] Ibid., 1.
[14] Ibid, 3, 10.
[15] Ibid., 11.

bystanders."[16] Christian ideals perpetuated the concept of a "reign of peace…as a result of a providential change in human nature" but the "demonization" of the enemy made the move from savage warfare to civilized warfare beyond reach.[17] Ultimately, nationalistic and religious tendencies provide another device to gauge the ideological extent of the involvement of combatants and noncombatants alike.[18]

In this analysis of the Civil War, the working definition for total war will include exploration of the range and scope, the goals and strategies, and the level of involvement of civilians of both the United and the Confederate States of America.

The Range and Scope of the War: Geography, Money, Men, and Time

"But no less practical is the importance of another point that must be made absolutely clear, namely that war is nothing but the continuation of policy with other means."
Carl von Clausewitz[19]

The sheer scope of the Civil War in terms of geography alone is staggering. Actual military engagements occurred in twenty states, and three territories, totaling approximately 1,537,353 square miles of land.[20] This number represents about 45% of the total land mass of the United States today.[21] In comparison, the total area of land engagement for the United States in Europe in World War I would fit within the confines of the Eastern half of the United States. Due to geography alone, supply lines, logistical maneuvering, and the transport of troops (especially for the Union) required significant mobilization and manpower. Naval blockades, lack of rail lines for troop movement and supply, and distant fronts stretched resources both monetarily and physically. This can be compared with the challenges the Unites States faced in arranging transatlantic troop transports to Europe during World War I. The cost for this mobilization was measured in the billions of dollars by the end of the war. Some estimates place the total amount of Union expenditure by 1865 at just under $6.8 billion, which includes direct war costs, veteran's benefits, and interest paid on loans for the war effort.[22] Estimates for Confederate expenditures are harder to come by, but are approximated at almost $2.1 billion.[23] This amount does not include the losses sustained as a result of damage to Southern industry, infrastructure, crops, or land. These estimates are calculated from figures of the 1860s, and reflect the actual cost associated at the time the war was fought.[24] In terms of the financial and geographical requirements, the Civil War required a massive degree of political and civilian mobilization that was unprecedented and unequaled in America's history.

---

[16] Bell, *The First Total War*, 8.

[17] Ibid., 6.

[18] Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over* (New York: Vintage Civil War Library, 2007), 85, 128, 139.

[19] Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Howard and Paret, 69; quoted in Powers and Tremain, *Total War*, 107.

[20] Author's research from the US Census Bureau. *State Quick Facts: United States Census Data for the year 2000*, (accessed March 25, 2010).

[21] Ibid., *USA Quick Facts.*

[22] S. Mintz. "Civil War: Casualties and Costs of the Civil War." *Digital History*. (2007), http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/historyonline/us20.cfm (accessed March 25, 2010).

[23] Dick Weeks, "Cost of the American Civil War," *Shotgun's Home of the American Civil War*, http://www.civilwarhome.com/warcosts.htm (accessed March 25, 2010).

[24] Ibid.

Time is another important factor when analyzing the Civil War. Initially, the Union and the Confederacy believed the Civil War would be fought and decided within months. After the South Carolinians fired on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, President Lincoln called up only 75,000 men from state militias for just ninety days of service to suppress the rebellion.[25] By April 20, Virginian militia had seized the Union's Gosport Navy Yard and the South's secretary of war "predicted that his country's flag would fly over the U.S. Capitol by May 1."[26] Ultimately, the war was fought over the course of four grueling years, and due to the length of the conflict, demanded that 1,556,678 Union soldiers and 1,082,119 Confederate soldiers answer the call to arms.[27] The sheer number of men needed to sustain the war on both sides required the first conscription laws to be enacted in the United States, and created significant discontent as these drafts were enforced. The conflict required adjustments in logistical and strategic planning almost from the beginning, as the decisive battle to end the war once and for all never materialized for either side.

Raising huge armies that ultimately fight an extended war creates equally large numbers of casualties. The final numbers of combatant deaths for both sides numbered at just under 620,000 men, from both wounds and disease, with another 375,000 wounded.[28] In comparison, 4.7 million Americans fought in WWI with 116,516 killed and 204,002 wounded.[29] However, when comparing the numbers of troops that died in both wars, it is significant to note the percentage of the population that these figures represent. The death rate of the Civil War represented approximately 2 percent of the population, which by today's standards would be close to six million deaths.[30] In terms of total war, the impact that death had on the societies of both the North and South was revolutionary in and of itself. Ideological and social shifts occurred regarding acceptance of, and the meaning of, death for soldiers and civilians, having a transformative effect on the psyche of combatants and noncombatants in the North and the South.[31]

Mobilization of the North in response to the need to identify the dead and handle the high body count was "an official, even a professional effort."[32] These tasks were undertaken by the federal government, and shaped official policy toward casualties of war to the present day.[33] The significance of the political ramifications for the Union regarding this type of policy change cannot be overstated. Because the United States won the war, the changes to the government that came out of the Civil War have shaped present day America, from military administration to

---

[25] James McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire*: *The Civil War and Reconstruction* 3rd ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2001), 158,163.

[26] Ibid., 165-166.

[27] Mintz, "Civil War."

[28] Mintz, "Civil War"; With further information from Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage Civil War Library, 2008), xi; and Alan Axelrod, *America's Wars* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2002), 301.

[29] Andrea Stone, "'One of the Last': WWI Vet recalls Great War," USA Today, March 27, 2007, http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-03-27-cover-ww1-vet_N.htm (accessed March 25, 2010).

[30] Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage Civil War Library, 2008), xi.

[31] Ibid., xv-xvi.

[32] Ibid., 241.

[33] Ibid., 237.

the establishment of the greenback as legal tender.[34] The transformative effects of the war on the Federal government, as well as the state governments quelled in the rebellion, support the theory that the total war label is justified in this extent. When quantifying geographical involvement, transformation of policy, length of engagement, and the cost of the war both in financial and human terms, the American Civil War meets or exceeds other modern wars in terms of totality.

The Goals of the North and South

"If the people raise a howl against my barbarity and cruelty, I will answer that war is war, and not popularity-seeking. If they want peace, they and their relatives must stop the war."
General William T Sherman[35]

The ultimate goal or desired outcome of a war becomes a "key issue" in total war.[36] The difference between limited warfare and total warfare is often simply a matter of the endgame. Total transformation of the losing side is often the best example of a total war.[37]

This transformative desire became present in the overall strategy of the Union as the Civil War progressed. Initially, as the North entered the war, the primary goal of the Lincoln administration was preserving the Union, not pressing for reform or ending slavery.[38] The North was determined to keep the border slave states of Missouri, Kentucky, Delaware, and Maryland from seceding, as their importance to the Union was paramount. Lincoln hoped the loyal border slave states would encourage deep Southern Unionists to rejoin the Union. Making slavery a war aim in 1861 would have potentially alienated the loyal border states into secession, destroying any hope for Southern Unionist sympathy for reconciliation.[39] Congress passed a resolution early in the war to provide the loyal border states a guarantee of protection; in July 1861, Congress affirmed "that the war in no way endangered the South's 'established institutions'."[40] The decision to transform the Southern institution of slavery came nearly two years after the first shots had been fired, and was primarily enacted as a war measure as opposed to an overt attempt at social reform.[41]

As 1861 ended and 1862 began, one Southern victory after another convinced Lincoln that bolder action was necessary to quell the rebellion, and to keep Britain and France out of the war. The conflict was changing tone and the Union responded with more aggressive action toward the South.[42] As abolitionist sentiments began to grow, a premature emancipation order from a Union general touched off fiery debate over the core issue of slavery.[43] This led to preliminary

---

[34] McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire*, 224.
[35] William Tecumseh Sherman, *Memoirs of General W.T. Sherman* (New York: The Library of America, 1990), 585.
[36] Black, *The Age of Total War*, 10.
[37] Ibid., 29.
[38] McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire*, 158, 163.
[39] Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation & Reconstruction* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 43.
[40] Ibid., 43.
[41] Ibid., 42; McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire*, 321.
[42] McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire*, 350.
[43] Ibid., 354.

measures against the slavery issue. The Confiscation Acts of 1861 and 1862, enacted by the Union, became attacks on the institution of slavery to circumvent its use as an agency of war for the states in rebellion.[44] A significant change in the goal of the Union was taking shape, with the prevailing opinion that "the war must be fought on 'different principles'; the time for 'white kid-glove warfare' was past."[45] Wiping out slavery once and for all would, according to the North's abolitionist movement, end the South's rebellion and allow for reunification of the country without the "cancer" of slavery.[46] However, the ultimate decision for emancipation came due to the combined factors of troubling defeats on the battlefield, declining manpower, and an attempt to preempt British or French recognition of the Confederate government.[47] After the narrow but welcomed Union victory at Antietam, Lincoln threw down the gauntlet that would doom the South, and its way of life, if they did not surrender.[48] He issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, attacking slavery where it was being utilized by the Rebel states as a resource of war. Lincoln anticipated the Emancipation Proclamation would weaken the South by depriving it of a significant source of manpower. This then changed the North's ultimate goal to one of total war against the South, as the Emancipation Proclamation was a tool to destroy the enemy's way of life.[49]

Throughout the conflict, the Confederate's war aims were focused on independence and the protection of the "institution of slavery."[50] The South's war aims never wavered in terms of the degree to which they would commit themselves to the protection of their ideals; total war was implemented immediately by Jefferson Davis and the Confederate government. The South began the war with a deficit of resources; as a result, the Confederate government instituted economic measures toward Southern citizens to supplement their meager treasury. The practices of impressment of personal property and tax-in-kind on crops stressed the Southern civilian population, and forced a level of personal sacrifice felt in the pocket books and stomachs of the noncombatants.[51] The South also immediately experienced a manpower shortage, and enacted a strict conscription act in April 1862, requiring men eighteen to thirty-five to serve, as well as extending enlistments for those already serving.[52] These measures created treasonous feelings within the citizenry of the South, but were grudgingly accepted by the populace because the ultimate goal of the South was lofty enough to provide incentive.[53] The Southern theory that rule by the Union was a worse fate than being drafted kept the soldiers in the field.[54]

The tenacity of the Confederate government to preserve the South, and within it the institution of slavery, became apparent later in the war. As manpower shortages became desperate toward the

---

[44] Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over*, 46.
[45] *U.S. Statutes at Large*, XII, 597 Senators John Sherman and William Pitt Fessenden, quoted in James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 500.
[46] Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over*, 85.
[47] Foner, *Forever Free*, 48.
[48] Ibid., 49.
[49] Black, *The Age of Total War*, 30.
[50] Foner, *Forever Free*, 42.
[51] Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over*, 57, 80.
[52] Ibid., 56.
[53] Ibid., 56-57.
[54] Ibid., 57.

latter part of the war, the Confederate Congress authorized enlistment of black, male slaves.[55] The arming and empowerment of slaves was a direct contradiction to the ideals and beliefs that the South held sacrosanct; however, this decision illustrates the propensity of the South to utilize all measures necessary in their pursuit of victory.[56]

The Strategies of the North and South

"The main thing in true strategy is simply this: first deal as hard blows at the enemy's soldiers as possible, and then cause so much suffering to the inhabitants of a country that they will long for peace and press their Government to make it.
Nothing should be left to the people but eyes to lament the war."
General Philip Henry Sheridan (1831-1888)[57]

The strategies employed by the Union took a further turn toward total war as 1863 brought the Emancipation Proclamation onto the national stage. However, more severe tactics were employed as 1864 began, with the campaigns led by Major General David Hunter in the Shenandoah Valley, and by Major General William Tecumseh Sherman in the Western and Eastern theaters of war. The most familiar of the Civil War campaigns, Sherman's March to the Sea, illustrates the progressively intolerant position of allowing Southern resources to continue to be available to the enemy. Sherman, under the command of General Ulysses S. Grant, redirected his efforts to "deprive the Confederacy of popular support and destroy its will to fight…cutting a swath of destruction as he went, doing whatever he could to devastate the lives of Southern civilians."[58] This very specific aim toward noncombatant resources constitutes the psychological transformation of Northern strategy. Prior to 1863, Northern strategy consisted of the attempt to capture the Confederate capitol, Richmond, and other strategic locations in order to strike at the heart of Confederate power. Once Grant was placed in command of Union forces in March 1864, this strategy was amended to focus instead on decimating the Confederate Army.[59] With Grant pushing south and Sherman pushing east to the coast in pursuit of the Rebels, each engagement saw the Confederate Army weakening. As the Union armies marched, the use of total war measures against the noncombatant population increased as Sherman's men lived off the land, burned money crops, confiscated animals, and put down guerrilla fighters.[60]

Meanwhile, the Shenandoah Valley had been the breadbasket of the South and was subsequently targeted by Hunter. Though Grant specifically ordered civilians and private property safeguarded, Hunter defied the orders and earned the nickname "Black Dave" from his troops due to the number of burned homes left in his wake.[61] Hunter justified this destruction as necessary, as Confederate troops and guerrilla fighters had repeatedly attacked federal supply

---

[55] Ibid., 205.
[56] Foner, *Forever Free*, 55.
[57] Archibald Forbes, *Memories and Studies of War and Peace* (London: Cassell, 1895), 241; quoted in Powers and Tremain, *Total War*, 112.
[58] Alan Axelrod, *America's Wars* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2002), 294.
[59] Ibid., 286.
[60] Ibid., 288.
[61] Thomas A. Lewis, *The Shenandoah in Flames: The Valley Campaign of 1864*, ed. by Time-Life Books (Alexandria: Time-Life Books, 1987), 42.

trains in the area. However, Hunter's continued engagements in the Shenandoah ultimately destroyed everything of value to the Confederate cause. Hunter's men even went so far as to desecrate the grave of Southern hero "Stonewall" Jackson in Lexington, Virginia, further illustrative of the psychological total warfare being committed.[62] Confederate General Jubal Early left no question as to the quality of destruction in the Shenandoah when he wrote: "The country had been stripped of provisions and many families left without a morsel to eat. Furniture and bedding had been cut to pieces, and old men and women and children robbed of all the clothing they had except that on their backs."[63]

The strategies of the South were no less significant in the argument of total war, though on the whole of a different character than those employed by the North. When the war began, the Confederate government saw their task as one of a defensive nature.[64] However, this changed to both a defensive and an offensive campaign prompted by General Robert E. Lee once he assumed command of Confederate forces. The engagement at Antietam in the fall of 1862 was a risk for Lee, but the possible benefits to the Southern cause made the gamble worthwhile.[65] His invasion of Maryland had the potential of earning European recognition for the South and even the possibility that the Union would sue for peace.[66] Confederate troops were ill-equipped to go into battle at this time as food supplies were almost non-existent, men were marching shoeless, and Lee was outnumbered by almost 2-1, but the decision was made to proceed with the invasion.[67] Ultimately, the battle of Antietam, and the subsequent battles at Gettysburg the following year, are telling of the lengths the Confederate Army was willing to go in order to force a decisive battle. The devastating losses that were a result of these battles weakened the Confederacy. It is significant to note that Robert E. Lee, a West Point graduate, studied Napoleonic total war tactics during his time as a cadet; more specifically those tactics as interpreted by Antoine Henri Jomini.[68] A primary strategy of Jomini, and Napoleonic warfare, is to "annihilate the enemy's force" with "a climactic battle" to assure victory.[69] Ultimately, Lee was unable to attain the decisive battle he wanted, but his strategy persisted in this train of thought.

Another example of the continuing escalation of Southern strategy toward total war tactics is the Chambersburg Raid of October 1863. Lee sent cavalry, let by J.E.B Stuart, into Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, which at the time was firmly controlled by the Union.[70] After the residents refused to pay a tribute of $500,000, Stuart burned much of the city to the ground.[71] The city had

---

[62] Ibid., 57.

[63] Ibid., 68.

[64] McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire*, 227.

[65] Ibid., 303.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid., 304.

[68] William R. Allison, et. al., *American Military History: A Survey from Colonial Times to the Present* (New Jersey: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2007), 139.

[69] Ibid., 141.

[70] Axelrod, *America's Wars*, 270.

[71] McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire*, 462.

no real strategic significance, but it "shocked, outraged, and humiliated Northern military and political leaders."[72]

One of the more telling moments of the South's shift toward total war was the decision of Confederate General Jubal Early to attack Washington, D.C in July 1864. He mandated this strategic decision as a political maneuver. The Federal elections of 1864 were looming on the horizon, and Early saw the benefit of forcing an attack on the political center of the North. If Lincoln lost the election, the potential for a negotiated peace existed, which would leave the Confederacy intact. Early hoped to make the Northern citizenry "ever more weary of the interminable war", and by attacking Washington, swinging the election away from Lincoln.[73] Early's attack failed, but the attack on Washington proved to be economically and politically disruptive, and struck a psychological blow to the Union.[74]

The above examples of strategy for both the Union and Confederate armies outline briefly some of the more extreme illustrations of the tactics used to wage total war. These are by no means the sole strategies employed, but offer a glimpse into the evolution of the process from a limited engagement to one that can be classified as a total war.

Civilian Involvement

*"The continent has been converted into a series of gigantic camps,
within each of which a whole nation stands in arms."*
The Economist, 1879[75]

Civilian involvement was unavoidable during the Civil War. Due to the nature of the conflict, noncombatants were forced into the center of the war in a myriad of ways: by their very proximity to the battlefield; by sacrifice of husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons; or by their ideological or political positions. The methods by which noncombatants were mobilized varied depending on location, yet their contributions to the total war effort are significant.

The Northern civilian, in general, did not support a war for the abolition of slavery, with discontent surfacing once this particular reform measure was instituted by Lincoln.[76] Yet, as the war progressed, and the Northern soldiers became entrenched in the cause of reform, many Northern civilians, especially women, rallied to the national cause of reform and played a crucial role in the war effort.

One example of Northern mobilization was the creation of wartime aid agencies like the Sanitary Commission and the Christian Commission. Funds for these agencies were raised primarily

---

[72] Axelrod, *America's Wars*, 270.

[73] Lewis, *The Shenandoah in Flames*, 69.

[74] Ibid., 87.

[75] Geoffrey Blainey, The Causes of War (New York: Free Press, 1973), 136; quoted in Powers and Tremain, *Total War*, 122.

[76] Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over*, 121.

through Fairs, and were organized and managed in large part by women.[77] These organizations provided supplies in large quantities to the troops, included items such as blankets, clothing, and medications.[78] Northern women also played a significant role as nurses for the Union soldiers with approximately 3,200 volunteers serving by the end of the war.[79]

Southern relief organizations were not as centralized as those in the North, but still provided valuable aid to Confederate soldiers. Due to the inability to get supplies to the front, however, Southern soldiers did not receive the same amount of benefits as their Northern contemporaries.[80] White Southern women also served as nurses in army hospitals, though fewer numbers served than in the North.[81]

One of the Southern tactics for mobilizing the civilian population in the total war effort is illustrated by the encouragement of guerrilla warfare. As General Hunter was burning the Shenandoah, the former Governor of Virginia, John Letcher of Lexington, called upon the people of the city to resist the Union forces by waging guerrilla warfare "'upon the vandal hordes of Yankee invaders'."[82] Civilians were encouraged to arm themselves with whatever was available, and to then lay in wait for Union troops.[83] The best known of these guerrilla warriors was John Singleton Mosby, who took advantage of the Southern Partisan Ranger Act of April 1862 to organize a band of men to resist the Union.[84] With a fluctuating force of just 800, he waged a guerrilla war in Northern Virginia that was so devastating that the Union army could not move supplies in the area without sustaining heavy casualties.[85]

Another significant illustration of Southern civilian involvement was the work performed in reclaiming soldiers' bodies from the battlefields. Unlike the Union, the Confederate government had no provisions for burial of the dead, and instead left the interment of fallen soldiers to the citizenry of the South. The creation of cemeteries for Confederate soldiers "became a grassroots undertaking that mobilized the white South in ways that extended well beyond the immediate purposes of bereavement and commemoration."[86]

The Southern civilian population had far less to rally behind in terms of nationalistic fervor than did the North. The Confederate government, with its economic sanctions, conscription laws, and suspension of civil liberties, did not provide the noncombatants of the South with a passion for which to support the cause of the war.[87] Instead, the Confederate citizenry rallied behind the idea that the Union and abolition were far worse than their own government's actions, and it was

---

[77] Michael Perman, *Major Problems in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 190.
[78] McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire*, 421.
[79] Ibid., 423.
[80] Ibid., 422.
[81] Ibid., 423-424.
[82] Lewis, *The Shenandoah in Flames*, 57.
[83] McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 738.
[84] Ibid., 737.
[85] Ibid., 737-738.
[86] Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 241.
[87] Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over*, 170.

for this reason that the noncombatants continued to aid the war effort even when the war was all but lost.[88]

Total War?

> *"It is well that war is so terrible—we would grow too fond of it."*
> General Robert E. Lee[89]

Examining the Civil War in terms of the criteria given by Jeremy Black and David Bell provides a more robust analysis of the extent of the American conflict of 1861-1865. Arguably, both the Union and the Confederate governments fought a total war, though at the outset, neither side anticipated the need for more than a limited war. As the conflict progressed, the North especially, quickly responded to the changing tone of the war and implemented more aggressive measures. When considering the degree of mobilization, the strategies employed, the extent of civilian involvement, the length and breadth of the conflict, and the ultimate goals of both the Union and Confederate governments, one is hard-pressed to consider the Civil War anything less than a total war. Though this analysis includes only the more sensational actions taken by both sides of the conflict, a deeper analysis further supports that the Civil War was the precursor to the total wars the United States would wage in the coming century.

References

Allison, William T., Jeffrey Grey, Janet G. Valentine. *American Military History: A Survey from Colonial Times to the Present*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2006.

Axelrod, Alan. *America's Wars*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2002.

Bell, David A. *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007.

Black, Jeremy. *The Age of Total War 1860-1945*. Westport: Praeger Security International, 2006.

Faust, Drew Gilpin. *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*. New York: Vintage Civil War Library, 2008.

Foner, Eric, Joshua Brown. *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation & Reconstruction*. New York: Vintage Books, 2005.

Lewis, Thomas A. *The Shenandoah in Flames: The Valley Campaign of 1864*. Ed. by Time-Life Books. Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1987.

Manning, Chandra. *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War.* New York: Vintage Civil War Library, 2007.

McPherson, James M. *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction*. 3rd ed. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2001.

---

[88] Ibid., 172.

[89] Glenn J. Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1959), 31; quoted in Powers and Tremain, *Total War*, 113.

---. *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Mintz, S. "Civil War: Casualties and Costs of the Civil War." *Digital History*. (2007).
        http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/historyonline/us20.cfm (accessed March 25, 2010).

Powers, Thomas, Ruthven Tremain. *Total War: What It Is, How It Got That Way*. New York:
        William Morrow and Company, Inc, 1988.

Sherman, William Tecumseh. *Sherman: Memoirs of General W.T. Sherman*. Ed. by Charles
        Royster. New York: The Library of America, 1990.

Stone, Andrea. "'One of the Last': WWI Vet recalls Great War." USA Today, March 27, 2007.
        http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-03-27-cover-ww1-vet_N.htm (accessed
        March 25, 2010).

United States Census Bureau. *State Quick Facts: United States Census Data for the year 2000*,
        http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/indes.html [link defunct] (accessed March 25, 2010).

Weeks, Dick. "Cost of the American Civil War." *Shotgun's Home of the American Civil War*,
        http://www.civilwarhome.com/warcosts.htm (accessed March 25, 2010).