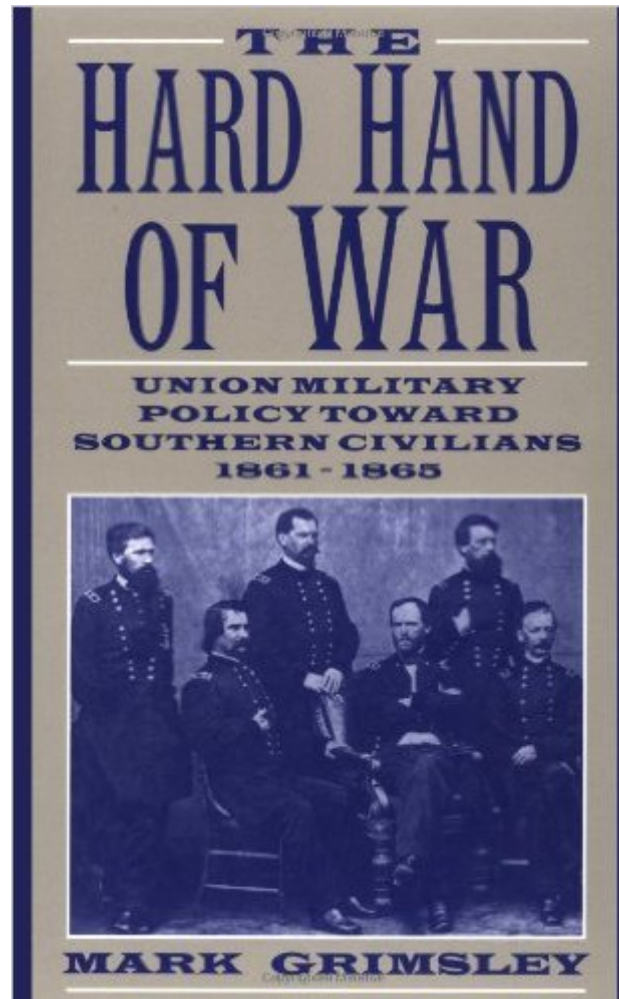


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The Hard Hand Of War



Synopsis

The *Hard Hand of War* explores the Union army's policy of destructive attacks upon Southern property and civilian morale--how it evolved, what it was like in practice. From an initial policy of deliberate restraint, extending even to the active protection of Southerners' property and constitutional rights, Union armies gradually adopted measures that were expressly intended to demoralize Southern civilians and to ruin the Confederate economy. Yet the ultimate "hard war" policy was far from the indiscriminate fury of legend. Union policy makers promoted a program of directed severity, and Professor Grimsley demonstrates how and why it worked. This volume fits into an emerging interpretation of the Civil War that questions its status as a "total war" and instead emphasizes the survival of political logic and control even in the midst of a sweeping struggle for the nation's future: the primary goal of the Federal government remained the restoration of the Union, not the devastation of the South. Intertwined with a political logic, and sometimes indistinguishable from it, was also a deep sense of moral justice--a belief that, whatever the claims of military necessity, the innocent deserved some pity, and that even the guilty should suffer in rough proportion to the extent of their sins. Through comparisons with earlier European wars and through the testimony of Union soldiers and Southern civilians alike, Grimsley shows that Union soldiers exercised restraint even as they made war against the Confederate civilian population.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is an expansion of Grimsley's doctoral dissertation and, as such, is written with academics in mind. That does not mean that Civil War or history buffs cannot pick it up and read it, but this book

does require some slogging. I managed to read it in a week for a graduate school class, but it wasn't the easiest read in the world. At any rate, I digress...the book itself is very interesting and one of the few books I've seen that tries to figure out when the Union armies turned to a "hard war" policy and why. The answers are surely not the final word on the subject as one reviewer pointed out some records that Grimsley missed or overlooked. However, Grimsley does have some useful information of the formation of Union military policy toward Southern civilians and how it evolved. Grimsley is smart to point out that there are always exceptions to the rule, but one gets a sense that much of his thesis is proven as to how and why the policy evolved. In short, at the beginning of the war the Union policy was one of conciliation toward Southern civilians, the thinking being that secession was not favored by a majority of the people and if Union armies occupied Southern areas, the people would rise up and want to rejoin the Union, especially if the Union armies treated them civilly. This policy began to shift in 1863 as Grant attempted to take Vicksburg and began to live off the land. Grant, and Sherman, still attempted to keep their men from outright looting, but were more than happy to confiscate supplies, while still leaving enough for the families they took from to eat themselves.

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