Introduction

AMITE, LOUISIANA, 1861

In September 1861, Confederate troops camped in the yard of David Waters, a forty-year-old overseer residing in Amite, Louisiana. Waters had labored in the area before the Civil War, and he moved to Amite, a village in Livingston Parish north of Lake Pontchartrain, in the winter of 1860–1861. He welcomed the soldiers camping outside his house, at least at first, and he freely shared his food with them. But the relationship soured quickly. After the soldiers stole his fruit and damaged the trees, Waters threatened to fire on the plundering troops. One day he did shoot at them, killing a man. The soldiers, convulsed with fury, razed his home to the ground as the officers and a few comrades in the ranks tried and failed to stop them. The men, still "greatly enraged," then tore down Waters' trees and fences, set fire to his barn and other buildings, and obliterated his food supply while his female relatives watched, terrified. Waters escaped with his life, but he was ruined financially. The residence and the yard property were his only assets, his neighbor Sarah Lois Wadley said, and he had not been able to find work since the war broke out in April.[1]

Sarah Wadley might be expected to excuse the actions of these rampaging Confederate troops. The teenaged daughter of a slaveowning railroad executive, she lived a comfortable life, passing her time visiting, sewing, going to church, and reading. She had an introspective turn of mind, admonishing herself to trust God, be a better person, and count her blessings. She had kinfolk all over the region, and she was fond of Amite, which featured the intricate social life of many small towns. The Wadleys

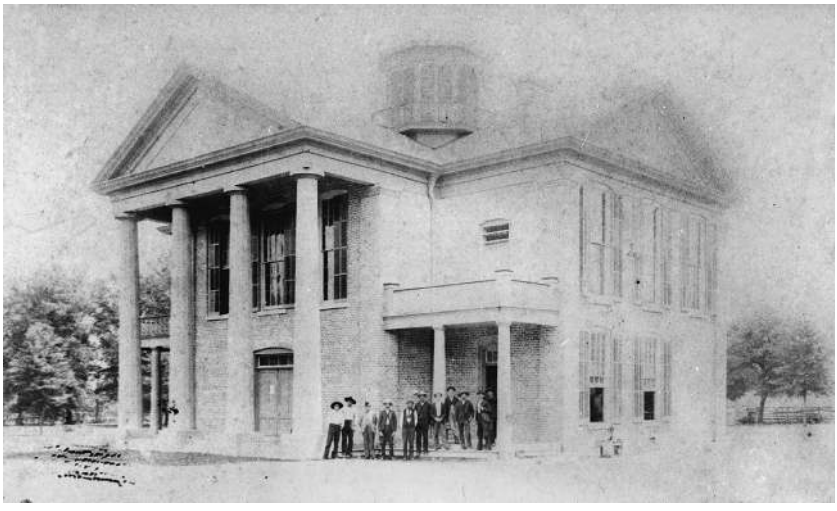

FIGURE 1.1 Courthouse in Amite, Louisiana, late nineteenth century. Courtesy of Tangipahoa Parish Library.

had many friends, including David Waters, whom they visited during the holidays in 1860 as custom dictated. When the political crisis unfolded that winter, some of the Wadleys supported the Union, but Sarah firmly believed in secession, and when the war broke out, she supported the Confederacy. Her father served in a noncombat capacity as a railroad superintendent, and she and her mother volunteered for a Confederate sewing society. She cheered the news of the rebel victory at the Battle of First Bull Run in July 1861.[2]

But the attack on Mr. Waters and his property horrified Sarah Wadley. She was stunned to hear about this onslaught on a friend and neighbor, calling it "dreadful" that "our own soldiers" could behave that way. The villagers feared that the rebel troops might set fire to the town, expanding their attack from a single family to the entire community, so a local guard patrolled the area for several days afterwards. Amite did not burn, much to the relief of the town-dwellers. Wadley blamed the debacle on Polish-American troops from New Orleans, yet the incident troubled her, particularly because Waters had been generous to the troops just before they demolished his property. What happened to him was wrong, she thought. Worst of all, Confederate officers could not stop it. This occurred when the Civil War was only six months old, and, although Wadley did not say so, all of it violated the Confederate Articles of War.[3]

Readers may find it astonishing that such a thing could transpire so early in the war, and even more shocking that rebel troops could act in such a way inside the Confederacy. But such things did happen. In my research, I have frequently come upon similar accounts of harm visited on civilians and their property. Other rebel soldiers took food and timber and destroyed private homes, as did Union troops. Soon I began to wonder about military policy, which was supposed to provide some constraints on soldier behavior. As I did further research, I did not expect to find a simon-pure fidelity to policy; I have taught for too long at big state universities to expect people to follow bureaucratic regulations with perfect efficiency. But I was increasingly surprised at the indifference toward or defiance of policy among officers and privates in both armies. Then I began to wonder about prevailing attitudes among all soldiers toward resources, both human resources, such as the goodwill of someone like David Waters, and material resources, such as his food, his fences, and his house. The result is this book.

THE ARGUMENT OF THIS BOOK

The book focuses on attitudes toward resources, both human and material, and the wartime struggle for resources between soldiers and civilians. One of the major themes is that official policy had little impact on restraining armies in that struggle. The armies were composed largely of ordinary citizens, North and South, who were the products of a rural, small-town culture, and before the war, white people in both regions adhered to similar values of communalism and stewardship. Most of them accepted the notion that human beings had some obligations to each other and the corollary that they should be good stewards of valuable material resources, although some people mistreated each other, of course, and they sometimes wasted their resources. Neither region was an agrarian utopia, but the values of communalism toward other whites and stewardship of resources prevailed among most people in the South and North.

Then the war came. Both armies exploited fully the South's human resources – the knowledge and skill of the white population – and both armies destroyed, misused, and wasted material resources as they foraged, well beyond anything that occurred before 1861. Both armies always contained some men who tried to protect civilians and conserve physical resources, yet military needs triumphed over civilian society and the prevalent values of antebellum culture. Both armies made the

maximum use of what Yankee Private Edgar Ely called the "stuff" of war – the materials necessary for the contest – wherever they went in the Confederacy, the Border States, and the North. This was true regardless of their ethnic backgrounds, religious faith, political views, or when they joined the service. Most of the warriors in both armies – blue and gray – privileged their own needs over everything else.[4]

This was not the work of a few delinquents, random deserters, or occasional stragglers, but routine conduct among men in both armies. This was true for the infantry and the cavalry, officers of different ranks, in the eastern and western theaters. Historians have disagreed on the efficiency, professionalism, and organizational ability of the antebellum US Army, but very few career officers served in the Civil War armies, and West Point graduates who did serve did not always abide by procedure. The "laws" of war as they evolved over the centuries had little impact on actual behavior, nor did the small literature on military theory. The US Supreme Court did not give clear guidance, and the Confederacy never created its own Supreme Court; neither Abraham Lincoln nor Jefferson Davis was closely involved in setting policy on civilians and their resources. American troops were supposed to rely on the Articles of War, which dated from 1806, and Henry Lee Scott's *Military Dictionary*, published in 1861, a kind of almanac on military topics. The federal army's pronouncements by John Pope in 1862 and Francis Lieber in 1863 were designed to give soldiers more latitude in the field, but, just as important, they were supposed to give some protections to noncombatants and the material environment. Those protections did not work well in practice. Policy made a thin patch on the voracious needs of the two armies, which had their own momentum independent of military directives.[5]

Wars encourage transgressions of all kinds, and they typically consume an immense amount of resources. Throughout the modern era, armies have injured civilians and destroyed their property despite the prohibitions of official policy, and the American Civil War was no different. What is surprising is the scale of violation, and what is revealing is the impact on civilians. Too often, scholars have assumed that wartime policies automatically clicked into place, but military regulations were not self-enforcing; human beings had to enforce them. Officers and soldiers conformed to policy intermittently, or sometimes not at all. This book is about, among other things, the inability of policy to constrain human misconduct as the juggernaut of war hurtled forward. This was indeed a "total" war, in that it involved the complete exploitation of human and material resources. There was no "rosewater" period, as it is sometimes

called, when the armies refrained from exploitation. From the beginning, both armies practiced "hard" war because of failures of supply and discipline.[6]

The military bureaucracies in charge of supply worked about as well as systems created quickly to function across vast geographic distances might work – that is, not very well. Both armies had difficulties with command structures, transportation, technology, and funding, since such large-scale operations had never been attempted before, but scholars have dissected these problems at the "wholesale" side of the supply process.[7] We need to scrutinize the "retail" story, that is, the interactions between soldiers and civilians on the ground. Historians have generally assumed that the Yankee army, after a bumpy start, figured out how to supply its men, while the Confederate army never figured it out. The evidence at ground level indicates that neither army functioned very efficiently when it came to supplying the troops. Even the Union army was not a well-oiled machine.[8]

Both armies practiced the "learn by doing" approach to training key officers in the military bureaucracy. Volunteer quartermasters and commissary officers underwent little or no instruction, and after they arrived on the front, some of them did not even know which powers could be wielded by their fellow officers, such as provost marshals. Whatever Yankee Captain Charles Francis Adams learned about the army, he recalled, he taught himself. He depicted the army as a machine in which no one knew what the machine was doing, and this was not just a federal problem. In November 1862, Confederate Adjutant General Samuel Cooper admonished a rebel major general to read the Articles of War, since the man did not seem to know the contents. George Cary Eggleston, like many other Confederate soldiers, blasted the incompetent rebel bureaucracy and said that its efficiency, whether it concerned passports or commissary supplies, did not improve during the war.[9]

What is more, neither army had reliable mechanisms to discipline soldiers who violated procedure. The courts-martial, which happened quickly with no set procedures, rarely convened to address mistreatment of civilians or their property. In the entire war, the Northern military commissions tried only thirteen Union soldiers for crimes against civilians or their property; scholar Robert Alotta estimates that ten federal soldiers, total, were executed for plunder, pillage, or theft of civilian property. The establishment of the US Judge Advocate General's Department in 1862, intended to bolster the court-martial system, had little influence on the men in the field. No records survive for rebel courts-martial or

executions, and the Confederacy never created a judge advocate office, but the historical evidence suggests that the outcome was much the same. The many soldiers in both armies who admitted violating regulations in their wartime or postwar writings correctly assumed that there would be no punishment. Nor did the compensation systems designed to reimburse civilians work very smoothly. The military, whether it was Northern or Southern, had no safeguards to ensure that operations took place within accepted parameters, something every functioning organization needs.[10]

The principal reason the bureaucracies did not work was the mentality that prevailed among many soldiers in both armies. The men in the ranks from both regions constituted an unruly populace, hard to control, as historians have noted; many of the troops voiced the same opinion. The Confederacy's size made it impossible for officers to monitor each other and men in the ranks, as federal officer Charles Wills remarked. The chain of command did not necessarily sway men in the field. Officers issued jeremiads about the abuse of civilians and their property, but they had a mixed impact on men in uniform, partly because other officers tolerated bad behavior or indulged in it themselves. Many soldiers perceived regulations as an annoyance that they would get around. Privates defied their conscientious officers and did as they wished, from the war's first months until the very end.[11]

Charles Perrow, the specialist in organizational studies, argues that bureaucracies can fail because their members bring with them preexisting attitudes from the rest of their lives, and, moreover, that bureaucracies do not always create new sets of values that everyone finds acceptable. Civil War troops did not have the business-like habits, the organizational skills, or the values to be good bureaucrats, and they were often indifferent toward process and procedure. To the contrary, they were the creatures of a political culture that harbored a strong distrust of government bureaucracies. Many of them did not want to fill out forms for civilians or give them paperwork while confiscating food, timber, or housing, so they did not. Many of them did not want to follow orders, so they did not. The military bureaucracy was not rigid and unyielding – the typical complaint about bureaucracies – but overextended and lax. And soldiers in both armies were driven by primal needs for sustenance, warmth, and shelter, and they were willing to do almost anything to meet their needs. The result was a "total" war in terms of destructiveness, without modern execution or efficiency.[12]

During the war, there were many points of contact between soldiers and civilians, some of which conformed to regulations. Historian Paul

Escott wisely observes that there was much "interpenetration" between the white civilian world and the Southern army, and the same was true for white Southern civilians and the Northern army. The military and civilian populations were in some respects fascinated with each other. Many civilians were not *hors de combat* but deeply involved in war-making. Military interests and civilian interests did not always coincide, however, and those interests diverged more as time passed. When military necessity clashed with civilian necessity, noncombatants thought their needs should take priority, especially if their own survival was at stake. Alongside the fight between the armies, a parallel contest broke out between armies and civilians, an intense mutual endeavor more complicated than mere victimization. A few civilians benefited from relationships with the military, but a much greater number relinquished people, food, timber, and housing to the war. Many of them did not even understand the specifics of military policy, for either army. In this terrible struggle, the civilian population lost.[13]

When American men put on the uniform, many of them experienced an abrupt shift in outlook about human conduct and material things. Scholars disagree about their ideological commitments, their racial views, their styles of self-expression, their enthusiasm for their respective causes, their support for emancipation, and other issues,[14] but all troops sometimes needed help from civilians, and they all had to have food, warmth, and shelter. Many soldiers came to assume that they could take whatever resources they needed, freed from antebellum values of stewardship and community, and some of them relished defying authority. They enjoyed the freedom from restraint, according to Yankee Quartermaster Aldis Brainerd, as if they had "no fear of man or God." Neuroscientists argue that individuals removed from their usual social constraints will take liberties that would be otherwise unimaginable, even more so if they are part of a crowd, and many wartime civilians made similar comments. Esther H. Hawks, the Union doctor working in South Carolina, stated that federal troops delighted in destroying things because they were away from the "refining influences of home" and coping badly with the war's privations.[15]

Soldiers in both armies nonetheless maintained a vigorous moral debate about the damage inflicted on civilians and the physical world, with some men advocating limits on military actions. They found the mistreatment of civilians and abuse of resources shocking, and they could not be persuaded to accept such conduct. One Union soldier, appalled by the looting in Virginia in 1862, remarked that "the genius of destruction is let

loose in war" and "Soldiers acquire a passion for destruction." Some of the troops framed it as a religious issue or a violation of moral standards, while others felt appalled by the sheer waste of so many resources. But these men were frequently overruled, ignored, or shouted down. When Confederate soldier J. M. Waddill argued that stealing while in the army was not the same as in civilian life, he expressed the views of many troops from the South and North.[16]

This work also explores the political divisions within the white Southern population and how they affected the war's outcome. Many people ardently supported the Confederacy, of course, believing that slavery should expand into the far West, the chief issue in the Election of 1860, and that secession should be attempted if slavery's expansion was blocked. But Confederate nationalism never took hold for many whites, and a substantial percentage opposed the war. Some 40 percent of white men in the slave states voted against immediate secession in the Election of 1860, and that number does not include white women who felt the same way but could not vote. Pro-Union politicians in the South failed to organize these people during the secession winter, yet the federal army quickly reached out to them when the war commenced, asking Unionists of both genders for help. In the early stages, they usually got it, just as the rebel army received help from its supporters. The incessant demands of both armies wreaked damage on all civilians, however, and many of them pulled back as their material resources disappeared. Yet being anti-Confederate did not necessarily mean supporting the Union, and the white South contained apolitical civilians who just wanted to stay out of the way.[17]

HISTORIOGRAPHY

This book builds on a dynamic historiography of excellent scholarship in several fields, although it departs from current scholarship in some important respects, beginning with relations between soldiers and civilians. Other scholars emphasize the inconsistency in how both armies treated civilians, and the inherent tension in those relationships,[18] without addressing the material consequences, as I do here. Historians have queried the role of gender during the war, since most soldiers were male and many civilians were female. They note that antebellum assumptions about the unchanging, inherent nature of the sexes proved to be malleable in time of war,[19] but, again, without treating how men and women used material resources. Military historians have noted the

difficulty officers had in controlling their soldiers but have not followed through on what that meant for the material basis of civilian survival. In terms of the greater political implications, these unwieldy, undersupplied armies suggest that neither the Southern government nor the Northern government had matured into a fully modern nation-state.[20]

This volume is part of the material turn in the Civil War field, in which scholars have begun to focus on the war's material dimension. Historians Joan E. Cashin and Michael DeGruccio have described monuments and relic-hunting, although they left much of the physical world untouched, as it were.[21] In addition, the book relies on the new environmental history by such scholars as Lisa Brady, Mark Fiege, and Brian Drake, which has alerted us to the significance of natural forces during the war, although we need more work on the interplay between armies, civilians, and the natural world.[22] The few historians who discuss wartime foraging tend to concentrate on food, and they neglect the civilian perspective; the best work on that subject remains Bell Wiley's work from years ago. He notes that rebel soldiers who took food from civilians contrary to procedure were either "blamable" or "innocent" and leaves it at that; Yankee foragers sometimes followed procedure, but he admits that expeditions could get out of hand, again without pursuing the implications.[23] A few pioneering historians have addressed the military's impact on timber and the built habitat. Megan Kate Nelson emphasizes the Northern army's actions, however, and she concentrates on urban life, while Mark Grimsley portrays Union General John Pope's Orders of July 1862 as a dramatic turning point in policy and behavior.[24] No one has investigated prewar attitudes toward material resources in both the North and South and connected them to wartime events. This book is the first monograph to take such an approach.

WHAT THIS BOOK DOES AND DOES NOT COVER

The opening chapter surveys the antebellum South and North, and the wartime chapters present case studies on people, food, timber, and habitat in the South, because these resources were essential to waging war. These chapters cover the years 1861 through 1863, in order to examine conduct before and after the policy landmarks of John Pope in 1862 and Francis Lieber in 1863. The last two chapters cover 1864 and 1865, when the war's cumulative impact on the South's resources became overwhelming. In all the chapters, I draw on the perspectives of other disciplines, such as material culture studies, culinary studies, forestry, architecture, and

disaster studies. The focus is on soldiers in the regular armies, and the book is about events on land. Since the wartime South consisted mostly of farms, plantations, villages, and modest towns, it concentrates on these places rather than the big cities. Black Southerners appear occasionally in the narrative as witnesses and participants, but slaves had fewer material resources than most whites, and both armies had separate policies for black Americans. Furthermore, important scholarship has already been done on many aspects of African-American life during the war. This work does not address court seizures of cotton or land, measures initiated by the governments, such as the First and Second Confiscation Acts in the United States in 1861 and 1862, or the Confederate tax-in-kind bill from 1863.[25]

Like most works of scholarship, this book is based on the surviving manuscripts. Many papers of the Confederate bureaucracies burned or disappeared at the war's end, but numerous other manuscripts are available, permitting a scholar to close many of the gaps. The written evidence for both sides is tremendous, including correspondence, diaries, memoirs, newspapers, the WPA Narratives, the US Southern Claims Commission, court-martial records, quartermaster records, and other collections in the National Archives. There is much more evidence on the topics discussed in this volume beyond what I have included here. The *Official Records of the War* is an exceptionally rich source in which thorny issues about armies, civilians, and resources surface from the beginning of the conflict to the end.

A few terms need to be defined: a "planter" is the owner of at least twenty slaves, and the "round forty," a common nineteenth-century phrase, refers to the practice of squatters who claimed 40 acres of public land, took all the wood, and then moved on. Out in the field, troops in both armies defined the noun "forage" as food and timber for both animal and human use, and they defined the verb "to forage" as the quest for those resources. Last of all, some famous names from the military and civilian worlds appear, but most of the book is concerned with ordinary people. Whenever possible, I have provided biographical information, including wealth-holdings and military ranks, but sometimes the details could not be recovered or confirmed. In other cases, soldiers changed ranks as they were promoted during the war.