



Sherman and the Burning of Columbia

Marion Brunson Lucas

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In this edition of his widely acclaimed study, Marion B. Lucas tackles one of the most debated questions about the Civil War: Who burned South Carolina's capital city on February 17, 1865? Before the fires had finished smoldering, Confederates and Federals accused each other of starting the blaze, igniting a controversy that has raged for more than a century. To determine the actual origin of the fire, Lucas sifts through myriad official records, newspapers, and eyewitness accounts. The evidence he amasses allows him to debunk many of the myths surrounding the tragedy. Unlike generations of South Carolinians and students of the Civil War, he does not assign particular blame to William Tecumseh Sherman but implicates both Confederate and Federal troops. Lucas traces the damage not to a single blaze but to a series of fires—preceded by an equally unfortunate series of military and civilian blunders—that included the burning of cotton bales by fleeing Confederate soldiers.

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