



From Conciliation to Conquest: The Sack of Athens and the Court-Martial of Colonel John B. Turchin

George C. Bradley, Richard L. Dahlen

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In the summer of 1862, the U.S. Army court martialed Colonel John B. Turchin, a Russian-born Union officer, for offenses committed by his troops in Athens, Alabama, including looting, safe cracking, the vandalism of homes, and the rape of young black woman. The pillage of Athens violated a government policy of conciliation; it was hoped that if Southern civilians were treated gently as citizens of the United States, they would soon return their allegiance to the federal government.

By examining the volunteers who made up Turchin's force, the colonel's trial, his subsequent promotion, the policy debate surrounding the incident and the public reaction to the outcome, the authors further illuminate one of the most provocative questions in Civil War studies: how did the policy set forth by President Lincoln evolve from one of conciliation to one far more modern in nature, placing the burden of war on the civilian population of the South?

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