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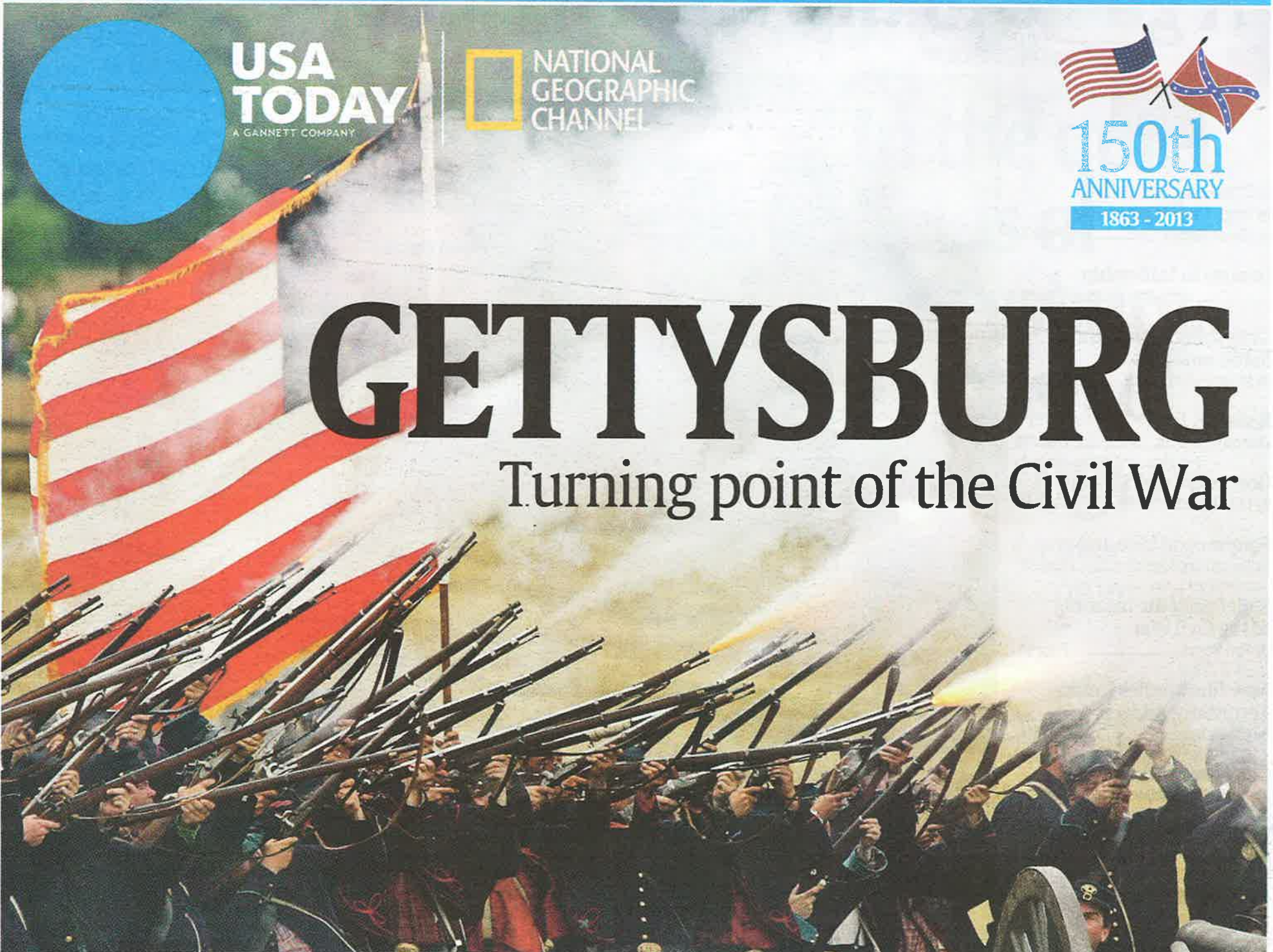
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CHANNEL



150th ANNIVERSARY
1863 - 2013

GETTYSBURG

Turning point of the Civil War



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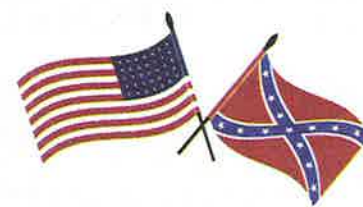
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Sherman's 'March to the Sea' still a sore subject for some



Devastating campaign left lasting, though ultimately changing, impression

Larry Copeland
USA TODAY

ATLANTA — Two years ago, when the Georgia Historical Society installed a marker commemorating the Civil War burning of the city outside the Underground Atlanta entertainment complex downtown, it touched off a mini brouhaha.

The local chapter of the NAACP resisted. "They felt it was an inappropriate marker because it was going to be located on a street named for Martin Luther King Jr.," says W. Todd Groce, president and CEO of the historical society. "I called our African-American board members. They said, 'Do not move the marker. It's in the right place.'"

The marker remained and was unveiled in a ceremony that drew large crowds, many of them black people.

"When I spoke, I said that when Atlanta was burned, that meant the end of the Civil War, and the end of the Civil War meant liberty for African Americans," Groce says. "I said it was appropriate to be there, because Dr. King had to fight the last battle of the Civil War."

As the nation commemorates the 150th anniversary of the Civil War, Georgia's relationship with Union Gen. William T. Sherman and his March to the Sea — a 285-mile march of destruction from here to Savannah that was the most devastating campaign against civilians in the war — is evolving.

Thirty years ago, perspectives on Sherman, the march and the war itself seemed well set. White Georgians by and large loathed the Union general whose actions had visited severe deprivation upon their ancestors, wrecked the morale of Confederate forces and likely hastened the end of the war.

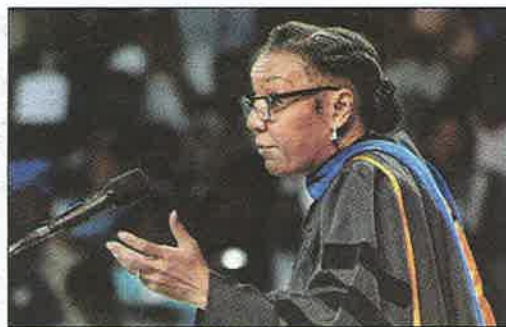
Black Georgians, when they reflected on it at all, did not regard Sherman's actions with the same bitter passion.

"We tend to focus mainly on white attitudes toward the war and Sherman's march," says Leslie Harris, an associate professor of history and African-American studies at Emory University. "I haven't been in many conversations about black attitudes."

That's all changing. Georgia historians are now emphasizing aspects of the Civil War and Sherman's March that are surely causing some grave-rolling by their predecessors: the role of African-American soldiers in the South; the critical part played by women on the home front; and the contributions of Unionists here who remained loyal throughout the war.



DAVID TULIS, AP



RICHARD BURKHART, AP

"I understand (Sherman) pillaged, and set fires and scorched the earth, but that was a way to end the war at all costs," says retired Georgia Supreme Court chief justice Leah Ward Sears.

"That makes us relevant, because it gives us a greater diversity of the collective history we share," says Brian Wills, professor of history and director of the Center for the Study of the Civil War Era at Kennesaw State University.

The Georgia Historical Society has been erecting historical markers commemorating these lesser-known aspects of the war, among others:

■ A spot in Dalton, north of Atlanta, that was the site of the only battle in Georgia in which African-American soldiers fought. Two regiments of U.S. Colored Troops were captured by Confederate forces there. They were not treated as

POWs, but were sent back into slavery. To the Southern combatants, "there was no such thing as a black soldier; it was just a slave with a gun in his hand," Groce says.

■ A site near Blue Ridge in north Georgia that was home to one of a handful of Unionists who refused to sign the Ordinance of Secession in 1861. "He said it was treason," Groce says. "Not all Georgians, and not all white Georgians, were united in fighting for the Confederacy. Fifty years ago no one would have acknowledged that."

■ A site in Columbus marks a bread riot. Similar riots occurred all over the South in 1863 and 1864 as poor white women went on rampages, breaking into stores where food had been hoarded by speculators and taking it. They were loyal to the Confederacy, but their children had to eat.

"We determined there was an opportunity to tell stories that had not been told," says Groce, a Virginia native whose ancestors owned slaves.

Leah Ward Sears never heard those stories when she was growing up as the only black child in her middle and high school classes in Savannah during the 1960s. She would go on to become the first African-American female chief justice in the USA when she became the chief justice of Georgia's Supreme Court in 2005.

"I can remember vividly the intensity of the indignation many of my white classmates had

The 18th Georgia Infantry of Civil War reenactors march uphill at Rose Hill Cemetery in Winder, Ga., on July 31, 2010.

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Views on Sherman's brutal march are slowly evolving

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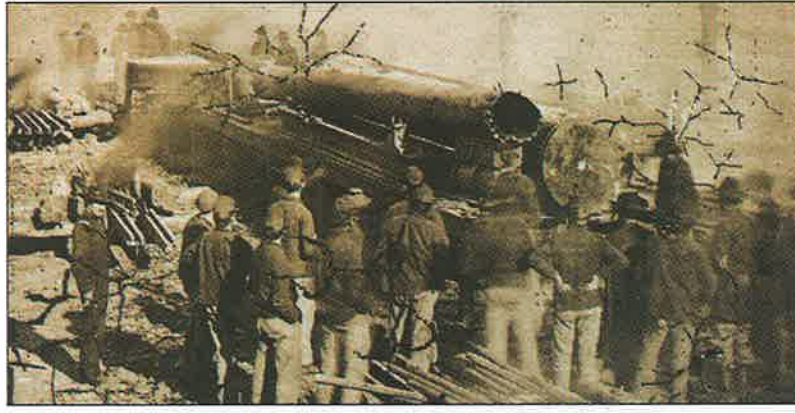
about Sherman's March to the Sea," Sears says. "I was always kind of perplexed by their intensity. ... To me, Sherman's march was a temporary suspension of Southerners' freedom, which slaves had had to endure for years."

Sherman's forces captured Atlanta on Sept. 2, 1864 — a pivotal victory, because Atlanta was an important railroad hub and the industrial center of the Confederacy.

Sherman decided to press the advantage with an unorthodox move — he would abandon his supply line and march across Georgia to the Atlantic. He believed the Confederacy derived great material and moral support from sympathetic Southern whites, whose factories, farms and railroads provided Rebel troops' needs.

Both President Lincoln and Union Gen. Ulysses S. Grant were skeptical of such a campaign, but eventually relented. On Nov. 15, 1864, Sherman divided his 60,000 troops into two armies and set out for Savannah. "The general issued an order outlining the rules of the march, but soldiers often ignored the restrictions on foraging," according to the *New Georgia Encyclopedia*.

Sherman's forces were opposed by some 8,000 Confederate cavalry and by units of Georgia militia, who could do little to slow the Union advancement. Sherman's soldiers laid waste to farms and plantations.



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Sherman's men destroy a railroad in Atlanta. The March to the Sea caused \$100 million in property damage, in 1864 dollars.

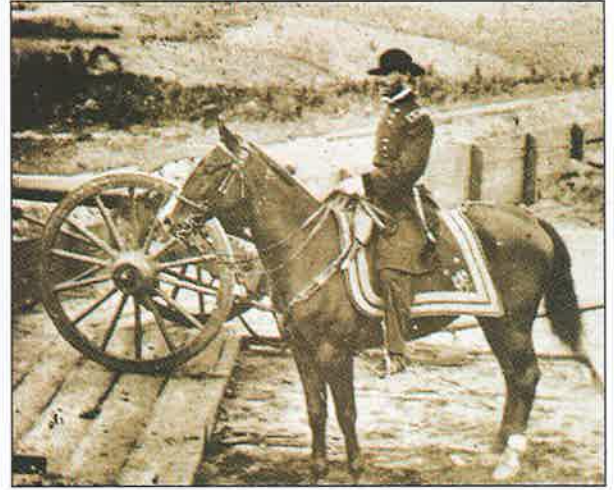
On Dec. 21, the mayor of Savannah surrendered. Sherman sent Lincoln a telegraph: "I beg to present you as a Christmas gift the City of Savannah, with 150 guns and plenty of ammunition, also about 25,000 bales of cotton."

The March to the Sea had caused \$100 million in property damage, Wills says — in 1864 dollars. Destroyed were 300 miles of railroad, bridges and telegraph lines.

"Sherman ... burned or captured all the food stores that Georgians had saved for the winter months. As a result of the hardships on women

and children, desertions increased in Robert E. Lee's army in Virginia," according to the *New Georgia Encyclopedia*. "By marching through Georgia and South Carolina he became an arch-villain in the South and a hero in the North."

Next year, the Georgia Historical Society will install a pair of historical markers to denote the beginning and end of Sherman's March to the Sea. The markers reflect the changing views on what happened a century and a half ago: Both refer to the troops under Sherman's command not as "Union forces," but as "U.S. forces."



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In 1864, Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman inspects battlements in Atlanta prior to his March to the Sea. After his capture of Atlanta, he went on to capture Savannah and divide the Confederate States of America.

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