

Interpreting Sherman's Letter to James M. Calhoun, et al.

This document is a letter Sherman sent to the to the City Council of Atlanta in response to a prior letter they had sent requesting that Sherman show leniency on the city and not make the citizens of Atlanta evacuate. Read each question, and using a marker, highlight the correct answers in the section.

William T. Sherman
September 12, 1864
Headquarters Military Division of the Mississippi, in the Field,
Atlanta, Georgia

JAMES M. CALHOUN, Mayor, E. E. RAWSON and S. C. WELLS, representing City Council of Atlanta.

1. What economic activities does Sherman say there would be no more of?

Gentlemen: I have your letter of the 11th, in the nature of a petition to revoke my orders removing all the inhabitants from Atlanta. I have read it carefully, and give full credit to your statements of the distress that will be occasioned, and yet shall not revoke my orders, because they were not designed to meet the humanities of the case, but to prepare for the future struggles in which millions of good people outside of Atlanta have a deep interest. We must have peace, not only at Atlanta, but in all America. To secure this, we must stop the war that now desolates our once happy and favored country. To stop war, we must defeat the rebel armies which are arrayed against the laws and Constitution that all must respect and obey. To defeat those armies, we must prepare the way to reach them in their recesses, provided with the arms and instruments which enable us to accomplish our purpose. Now, I know the vindictive nature of our enemy, that we may have many years of military operations from this quarter; and, therefore, deem it wise and prudent to prepare in time. The use of Atlanta for warlike purposes is inconsistent with its character as a home for families. There will be no manufactures, commerce, or agriculture here, for the maintenance of families, and sooner or later want will compel the inhabitants to go.

2. Does the U.S.A. want the southern property? What does Sherman want from the people of Atlanta? How is he going to get this from the people of Atlanta? Why?

We don't want your negroes, or your horses, or your houses, or your lands, or any thing you have, but we do want and will have a just obedience to the laws of the United States. That we will have, and, if it involves the destruction of your improvements, we cannot help it...

But, my dear sirs, when peace does come, you may call on me for any thing. Then will I share with you the last cracker, and watch with you to shield your homes and families against danger from every quarter.

Now you must go, and take with you the old and feeble, feed and nurse them, and build for them, in more quiet places, proper habitations to shield them against the weather until the mad passions of men cool down, and allow the Union and peace once more to settle over your old homes at Atlanta.

Yours in haste,
W. T. Sherman, Major-General commanding.

Source: Teaching American History <http://www.teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=1725>