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“My Thoughts Must Find a Vent”: Disjuncture and Resolution in Slaveholding Women’s Civil War Diaries

Lindsey Morgan Cantwell

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“MY THOUGHTS MUST FIND VENT”:
DISJUNCTURE AND RESOLUTION IN SLAVEHOLDING WOMEN’S CIVIL WAR DIARIES
by
LINDSEY MORGAN CANTWELL
B.A. in History and English Literature, Tulane University, 2007

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Disjuncture and Resolution in Slaveholding Women's Civil War Diaries
written by Lindsey Morgan Cantwell
has been approved for the Department of History

___________________________________________________________
Lee Virginia Chambers, Ph.D. (Chair)

___________________________________________________________
Virginia DeJohn Anderson, Ph.D.

___________________________________________________________
Peter Wood, Ph.D.

___________________________________________________________
Ralph Mann, Ph.D.

___________________________________________________________
Robert Buffington, Ph.D.

Date________________________

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories,
and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable standards
of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
“My Thoughts Must Find Vent”: Disjuncture And Resolution In Slaveholding Women’s Civil War Diaries

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Lee Virginia Chambers

Keywords: Southern women, Civil War, slaveholding ideology, diaries, Confederate

This dissertation utilizes social and cultural history approaches to examine southern slaveholding women’s diaries, seeking to answer this central question: what can these diaries reveal about how white southern women of the slaveholding classes met challenges to the slaveholding ideology during the Civil War? I read elite slaveholding women’s diaries for evidence of moments of disjuncture between the slaveholding class’s professed perspective and the doubt and mental struggle that confronted slaveholding women when they were faced with evidence that this perspective was either inadequate to explain their lived experience or, more frightening for the diarists, when that experience came into direct conflict with prevailing ideologies. I utilize the term “disjuncture” to identify those moments of crisis when diarists encountered a disconnect between what the slaveholding/white supremacist ideology prescribed and their own lived experiences. During the war, slaveholding white women in the South coped with these jarring moments in part by writing about the problem in their diaries and by using those private spaces to formulate a resolution to the crisis. I conclude that women of the slaveholding class sought to reconcile their feelings with social expectations through their private writings. These diaries served as a safe venue for women who were sometimes frustrated by the expectations that limited their ability to shape their own lives or challenge the slaveholding ideology that informed their identities, provided status, and gave their lives a sense of order.
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INTRODUCTION

My dissertation utilizes social and cultural history approaches to examine southern slaveholding women’s diaries, seeking to answer this central question: what can these diaries reveal about how white southern women of the slaveholding classes met challenges to the slaveholding ideology? This ideology, as outlined by Drew Gilpin Faust, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Eugene Genovese, and James Oakes, among others, was a racialist ideology that supported the institution of slavery and was built on a defense of the hierarchical relationships that ordered southern society.¹ Though the South experienced abolition and military defeat as the result of the Civil War, in the post-war decades, a new white supremacist ideology replaced the slaveholding ideology, but the racial regime of the New South was built on the same principles as the ideology of the slaveholding South: white supremacy and black subordination, traditional gender roles, and a distrust of the reforms that swept through northern states. Southern white slaveholding women, as well as men, were called upon to live up to this vision of social order, in part through adherence to a gender code that reaffirmed the power of the patriarch within the familial realm as well as in society as a whole.² Because my project is interdisciplinary, informed by gender,

² Though Oakes challenges the tradition that paints elite planters as the dominant political group in the South, he agrees that, as slaveholding became more widespread among a southern “middle class” during the cotton boom that spread slaveholding into new states in the Deep South, racist assumptions about African Americans created a common ideology among elites and the middle class. Drew Faust argues that in the antebellum period, southern slaveholders developed a coherent ideology concerning slavery in the face of abolitionism and rapid social change that included the democratization of politics for white men. The “positive good” defense of slavery, outlined by John Calhoun in 1837, renounced the idea that slavery was a national sin or necessary evil and came to dominate southern discourses around slavery. This position on slavery was built on biblical and pseudo-scientific arguments as well as on the argument that slaveholding was essentially a benevolent institution. Oakes, The Ruling Race, 35-122; Drew Gilpin Faust, A Sacred Circle:
literary, and psychological theories, I believe that its contributions will go beyond the already large body of Civil War scholarship and add to the excellent work being done by other scholars of gender, race, and class in Civil War southern society.  

In my dissertation I read elite slaveholding women's diaries for evidence of moments of disjuncture between the slaveholding class's professed perspective and the doubt and mental struggle that confronted slaveholding women when they were faced with evidence that this perspective was either inadequate to explain their lived experience or, more frightening for the diarists, when that experience came into direct conflict with prevailing ideologies. I utilize the term “disjuncture” to identify those moments of crisis when diarists encountered a disconnect between what the slaveholding/white supremacist ideology prescribed and their own lived experiences. During the war, slaveholding white women in the South coped with these jarring moments in part by writing about the

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1 This study is an examination of an elite subset of southern women and thus requires a discussion of economic class. With rare exceptions, each of the women in this project hailed from wealthy, well-educated families that had strong links to slavery. They had been raised in families that benefited from the labor of many enslaved people, and they experienced a level of leisure and luxury that most southerners—even most white southerners—could only dream of. They were, then, especially invested in slaveholding, even though many of them did not recognize its importance in their daily lives until the war threatened the institution. Their families helped to constitute the hegemonic slaveholding elite, which did much to shape public discourses about slavery, secession, and war. Non-elite whites were certainly capable of dissenting against the slaveholder consensus, but as Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese point out, among white southerners, and with exceptions, “planters, middling and small slaveholders, and nonslaveholders shared a broadly conservative worldview,” and the social, political, and religious agendas in the South were decided, in large part, by this small class of elite slaveholders. Stephanie McCurry has demonstrated that yeomen farmes shared planters’ assumptions about the necessity of strict gender and racial hierarchies. Though yeomen were not the equals of planters in the public realm, they ruled over dependents in the home with the same total authority and privileges as their planter neighbors. They could accept a social order in which they did not rank at the top as long as they maintained their power over racial and gender subordinates. Proslavery ideologues used women's perpetual dependence (as founded in nature and sanctioned by God) as a useful way of justifying social hierarchies while simultaneously engendering support from even non-slaveholding yeomen for the causes of slavery and secession. The language of natural rights and equality employed by northern abolitionists (and feminists) threatened to undermine not only slavery but also the mastery of men over their own families, threatening their status as men and as householders.  Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese, The Mind of the Master Class, 4–6. Stephanie McCurry, Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
problem in their diaries and by using those private spaces to formulate a resolution to the crisis. In the post-war years, southern white women adapted to loss and economic hardship by reconstructing the Old South through their memoirs and fiction. In other words, they mythologized the Old South as a way to cope with the changed conditions of the New South. In the process, these women erased or covered over wartime disruptions in their thinking and helped to rebuild a hegemonic southern ideology rooted in their faith in antebellum social systems.

I employ techniques for reading the diaries that highlight the complex and often contradictory layers of personal and social identities that are at the center of studies of intersectionality. This term, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, explains how social identities are constructed along different and interlocking axes of power. For example, southern women of the slaveholding class enjoyed a great deal of privilege because of their race and class, but were often constrained by notions of proper femininity. In a society ordered on strict social hierarchies, slaveholding women embraced their gender subordination in order to uphold a racial system that benefited them in numerous ways. Though they sometimes chafed under expectations of docility and submission, they found few avenues for challenging the southern gender regime. In this context, their diaries created important outlets for frustration and reevaluation. Through private writings, women of the slaveholding class sought to reconcile their feelings with social expectations. Private writings, then, served as a safe venue for women who were sometimes frustrated by the expectations that limited their ability to shape their own lives or challenge the slaveholding

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ideology that informed their identities, provided status, and gave their lives a sense of order.

Within southern social codes, women were to be the willing subjects of male mastery within their homes. The “natural” relationships of gender underwrote masters’ power. In the plantation ideal, white men were supposed to exercise paternalistic rule over all dependents, including white women, children, and slaves of African descent. Elite white women accepted, at least in theory, the rule of the patriarch because they knew that maintaining strict hierarchies was key to protecting the unequal relationship of master and slave that undergirded their class and racial status. White women exerted influence—not power—within the home during the antebellum period, and when they did exercise power directly, it was only a “borrowed” power, one that ultimately still flowed from the master himself. “The construct of mastery,” writes Kirsten Wood, “became a virtual synonym for ‘household head,’” and a woman with a husband could never fully perform this function. Slaveholders’ writings often referred to “mistresses,” a term which meant a master’s wife and denoted authority over slaves and children and deference to the patriarch. In reality, mistresses had limited authority within the household, exercising it primarily over house servants with whom they had the most contact and always subject to override by the patriarch. Often, women found mastery a difficult concept to embody, and they turned to their husbands when slave control was necessary, even while they interjected themselves when a chance to display benevolence arose. Even when white men marched off to war, wives and mistresses ruled as stewards or regents, in their husbands’ steads. Within this


6 Ibid., 6.
context, questions about the morality of masters risked exposing the unjustness of a gender order that such women were powerless to change. Rather than butt their heads against a seemingly impervious social order, women used their diaries as spaces where they could discipline their thinking and come into line with a system that would have punished them for questioning male authority and female subordination. White southern women were pressured, and disciplined themselves, to reconcile discrepancies between the ideology of paternalism and their observations of abuses on the part of slaveholding men. The willful blindness of slaveholding women was possible within a social order that upheld the public morality of slavery and mastery despite the common depredations of white men upon slave women.

The concept of paternalism, as described by Eugene Genovese, “grew out of the necessity to discipline and morally justify a system of exploitation. It did encourage kindness and affection, but it simultaneously encouraged cruelty and hatred.”7 Paternalism represented a complex set of ideas that represented slaveholders’ recognition that their “property” consisted of people who had wills of their own. It was rooted in a pragmatic desire to make the master-slave relationship appear to be both mutually beneficial and natural, and its attention to reciprocity and even affection between masters and slaves supported the arguments of pro-slavery thinkers in the antebellum period. In the southern iteration of paternalism, masters’ guidance, benevolence, and care were met with obedience and loyalty on the part of enslaved people. It was a system that recognized the separate interests of master and slave, even while it recast these as an organic hierarchy, akin to the family. Benevolence was supposed to guide the master to be authoritative but

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7 Eugene Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 4.
kind, both with enslaved people and white subordinates, including their wives. In reality, benevolence on the part of both master and mistress often broke down, and enslaved people often refused to meet coercion with obedience. While many slaveholding women put stock in the image of themselves as “Lady Bountiful,” “they conformed but sporadically and unevenly to the ideals of charity and kindness that increasingly dominated southern prescriptions for slaveholding women” during the antebellum period. However, the ideal continued to inspire women who hoped to live up to expectations.

Examples of disjuncture in women’s diaries reveal that through their writing—the stories they chose to tell, the language they used, their arguments and justifications, and their moments of silence—women attempted to resolve contradictions, to occasionally lodge complaints against structures of power (in a safe and private space), and to reconcile apparent disparities in their experiences. Sometimes they absolved themselves or loved ones, and at other moments, they castigated those with power, including themselves. Often, they wavered among many different interpretations in ways that reveal internal struggles. These struggles, and the crises that engendered them, provide the material for examining the rhetorical strategies by which slaveholding women attempted to reconcile themselves to, and also to defend, the dominant white southern worldview.

It is the ideological work done in these diaries—the narratives that diarists create in response to what I term moments of crisis and disjuncture—that grounds my project. The diaries reveal some of the ways in which socialization into systems of power is an ongoing and constantly renegotiated process, as well as how these particular women negotiated their place in the southern white elite social matrix of gender, race and class. Thus, they

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8 Wood, Masterful Women, 35, 41.
add depth to studies of elite southern society, which is sometimes represented as monolithic, thinking as one mind on issues of slavery, secession, and war. The “master class” certainly reaped tangible and psychological benefits from supporting the South’s systems of power. My dissertation illuminates the tiny fissures in the slaveholding consensus that became more pronounced during the war, especially for women on the home front who faced new expectations that they defend the southern social system not only in rhetorical but also in practical ways. Practically, slaveholding women became responsible for maintaining slavery on the home front, carrying on the social and economic work of plantations and farms. Rhetorically, they turned to their diaries to pen newly self-conscious and ideological defenses of slavery for themselves and for posterity. Not all slaveholding women defended slavery, even as they continued to benefit from it. Mary Boykin Chesnut, for example, was well-known for her disgust with slavery, as much for what it did to slaveholding women and their families, as for the abuses that slaves themselves suffered. But even Chesnut saw northern abolitionism and the war as an attack on the character of southerners generally. While she was willing to castigate “bad” masters, she was also determined to show “how we were not as much of heathens down here as our enlightened enemies think.” Instead of repeating her father’s argument that slavery was a “positive good,” as many of her female cohort did during the war, Chesnut proclaimed her hatred of the institution, even while defending southern masters as good.

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9 For examples of this approach to southern slaveholders, see Anne Firor Scott, The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, The Mind of the Master Class. Genovese and Fox-Genovese speak of “the hegemonic master class.”


11 Mary’s father, Stephen Decatur Miller, was a prominent South Carolina politician who is “credited with launching the ‘positive good’ defense of slavery and anticipating [John C.] Calhoun in nullification and states’ rights.” Woodward, Mary Chesnut’s Civil War, xlvi.
Most women did not espouse Chesnut’s “heresies” regarding slavery and women’s subordination, but as the war disrupted hierarchies of power, women could not easily buy into slaveholding ideologies—including the righteousness of holding slaves, and the mutuality of interests between slaves and slaveholders—in which they had been raised to believe. For women who were increasingly invested in defending slavery as part of the southern “way of life,” it took significant emotional and intellectual effort to resolve moments of crisis that challenged those ideologies. Women performed this work in their diaries.

Antebellum southern elites sometimes exhibited doubts about southern social structures, including slavery, but in the end, these same politicians and slaveholding elites made the decisions that took their states to war in defense of slavery. Their actions, couched in the language of states’ rights and protecting a “way of life,” required that southern slaveholders circle the wagons and do the ideological as well as the material work to defend slavery. Once secession and war were facts, women of the slaveholding class could see little to do but defend the “peculiar institution” in the context of a war being fought to preserve it. As their sons and brothers and husbands marched off to fight,

12 Christine Heyrman argues that southern evangelical slaveholders sometimes experienced crises of conscience over slavery, but that this ambivalence gave way to renewed assurances of the institution’s righteousness in the face of northern critiques. Faust has argued that southern intellectuals promulgated the idea of slavery as a “positive good” not as a defense against northern abolitionism but as a way to allay southerners’ own fears that grew from a rapidly changing society. The positive good defense—“sacred, communitarian, [and] traditional”—points to southerners’ own anxieties about nineteenth-century changes. The impetus to defend a traditional southern way of life only increased during the war. As Marli F. Weiner argues, “The vast majority of plantation mistresses left no trace of their views before the institution was directly threatened by war; their silence most likely suggests acceptance of the prevailing assumptions of southern culture.” During the war, however, slaveholding women frequently created self-conscious defenses of slavery in their private writings. Like Faust’s male intellectuals, female diarists crafted pro-slavery arguments in part as “self-affirmations” and to resist rapid and widespread change. Heyrman, Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Faust, A Sacred Circle, 112-131; Weiner, Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-80 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 92.
slaveholding women became invested in the belief that the war was being fought for righteous causes. As the South became the Confederacy, criticisms of slavery became, in effect, criticisms of country and repudiations of male kin who fought in the army or served in the government. Slaveholding women felt internal and familial pressures to support the war and everything it stood for. In this context, even minor moments of doubt were rendered particularly threatening, both politically and psychologically, even while wartime circumstances created new challenges for white southerners intent on justifying slavery and the war to preserve and extend it.

After the war, as white southerners dealt with the psychological trauma of defeat and black emancipation, white women performed a double move: they at once romanticized the antebellum past while often proclaiming that they and their female family members had always disliked slavery and only tolerated it as a necessity. Elite white women of the patriarchal South were, in fact, largely powerless to challenge slavery as an institution. They also recognized the privileges, including freedom from labor, that slavery provided them. Even that most outspoken critic of slavery, Mary Chesnut, lamented at the start of the war, “slavery has to go of course—and joy go with it.”\textsuperscript{13} As for Chesnut, slaveholding raised ambivalent feelings in many slaveholding women. They sometimes felt guilty for enjoying the fruits of an oppressive system, even while they were unable to imagine life without the comforts that slavery provided them. In the post-war period, however, elite diarists often proclaimed their innocence, either in promoting and protecting slavery or in enjoying its benefits for themselves. Both representations served

\textsuperscript{13} Woodward, \textit{Mary Chesnut's Civil War}, 88.
to rehabilitate the southern social order and enable its reestablishment in the postwar decades.

To select slaveholding women’s diaries as my primary body of source material is already to suggest that these diaries can reveal certain gendered experiences and concerns that men’s diaries could not. For example, slaveholding women often assumed the role of benevolent mistress, a role through which women were supposed to ameliorate the conditions of slavery and ultimately to support the notion that slavery was a benevolent institution. I am particularly interested in the ways that women negotiated their gender and race identities during the Civil War, when the hardships and disruption produced by war often put strain on those identities, as well as on the security provided by elite class standing. Of course, there is also a pragmatic reason for choosing slaveholding women’s diaries: their education and relative leisure (even during the war) provided them with the tools to leave detailed and self-reflective accounts of their thoughts and experiences. The Civil War is a particularly fruitful moment for examining these strategies, both because more women began to keep diaries and because the upheaval called into question formerly unassailable ideologies and demanded the defense of southern society in the face of incredible loss in the struggle to maintain it.

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14 The fact that slaveholding white women took on this ameliorative role suggests that they had some deep-seated awareness that slavery was not, in fact, a benevolent institution. Their attempts to make it so, without acknowledging that it was, at its root, coercive and dependent on violence, represents what we might call a “false consciousness,” the inability to see the true nature of relationships of power. In this case, that false consciousness is born of the need for the South’s ruling class to see themselves as decent people, even while they exploited African Americans. It placed a strain on mistresses whose power was severely circumscribed, even as they were given the enormous responsibility of turning a system of oppression and exploitation into one of mutuality, affection, and even “love.” The moments at which the true nature of the institution broke through their self-protective veil were moments of anxiety that bred a number of strategies on the part of diarists to protect themselves from seeing. These strategies include denial, fear, anger, and a renewed commitment to the racial ideologies of their families and their communities.

15 While more women, especially young women, did keep diaries for the first time during the war, both Fox-Genovese and Kimberly Harrison suggest that most women simply continued keeping diaries as they had
The ways in which slaveholding women attempted to reconcile their ideologies with their experiences can tell us much, I believe, about the process of socialization into systems of power and the constraints—particularly those of race and gender—under which nineteenth-century women operated. Their nascent, but ultimately unrealized, critiques offer insight into how these women grappled with flawed systems of power and resisted challenging them directly, in spite of moments of frustration. My project is not a story of victims and victimizers, nor is it meant to reflect “negotiation” between the weak and the powerful. Rather, this study examines the strategies by which slaveholding women reassured themselves when doubts were raised in their minds about the structures and categories that gave their lives meaning and cemented their identities within a specific cultural context. It is, then, about how these women negotiated with themselves and came to terms with their roles as both oppressor and oppressed.

Historiography

The past four decades have seen an explosion in the examination of women’s roles in the antebellum and Civil War South. Diaries have played an important role in helping historians weave together histories of women, who often left few public records, particularly in the context of the conservative South, where women’s organizations were slower to bloom than in other regions of the United States. However, these works too often view white southern slaveholding women as a monolithic group, particularly in terms of before the war, though the content of these diaries often shifted dramatically to reflect war-time concerns. Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*; Kimberly Harrison, *The Rhetoric of Rebel Women: Civil War Diaries and Confederate Persuasion* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 2013). Weiner, as noted above, agrees that the content of women’s diaries changed during the war, including more explicit defenses of slavery and white southern society.
their ideological orientation. Debates over the ramifications of the Civil War for southern white women have focused primarily on two questions: did the war provide an opportunity for women to reject old gender norms, expressed through new roles during and after the war; and did southern women support the war (and the system of slavery which undergirded southern identity)?  

A third question has arisen in recent years, informed by the field of affect studies: How did white slaveholding southerners, including women, confront emotional issues such as death in war and destitution in the post-war period?  

Even though historians have made extensive use of women’s diaries in the past three decades, nobody has done the kind of extended Civil War-era study of moments of crisis and disjuncture that I propose. I suggest that this may be due to a tendency to see slaveholding women (and the slaveholding class generally) as a united front, thinking with one mind. While I don’t dispute that slaveholding women, as a rule, “stood by their men” in defending their privileges in a slave society, I am interested in examining how women dealt


with these moments of disjuncture—crises over slavery and the violence necessary to maintain it; the meanings of class in the context of the war’s leveling effects; the honor of white southern men who fought (or didn’t fight) for the South; patriotism to the Confederacy in the face of defeat; and gender norms, which slaveholding women both clung to and simultaneously challenged. In spite of forms of indoctrination that reached into the nursery, slaveholding white women’s thinking about these issues was consistently renegotiated rather than set in stone. Each individual moment of crisis, struggle, and eventual resolution, then, provides insight into how hegemonic discourses of race, class, and gender could be reexamined and reevaluated as well as how individuals became agents in disciplining themselves to systems of power. Each time a diarist faced such a disjuncture and turned to her private writings to resolve the crisis, she practiced a type of ideological self-regulation in order to make her reactions conform to dominant ideologies.

My work seeks to add a new perspective on women’s ideologies in the Civil War South because my questions and methodologies also differ from those of other historians. Though most historians no longer treat diaries as a source of unbiased information—records of facts and events—they still tend to read diaries as true or straightforward accounts of the diarists’ moods, thoughts, and frustrations. But diaries were much more than spaces in which to vent discontents; they also promise to shed light on how ideologies are constructed, maintained, and reaffirmed in the face of significant challenges. The women that I have chosen as my subjects used their diaries to reassure themselves that what they had been taught to believe was still relevant in the very changed conditions of

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wartime. The question, then, is about the mental and emotional processes that these diarists employed in order to effect that self-persuasion. I read women’s diaries not for evidence of what they thought at any particular moment, but for evidence of how they controlled their thinking, how they restrained their minds from wandering into dangerous territory in response to unsettling events. The moments in which they did this are fleeting, but the diaries provide glimpses into these moments of turmoil that remained hidden from view most of the time. Each chapter will focus on one central story—on one woman’s moment of shock, despair, loss of faith, betrayal—and on the ways that that woman worked through the moment and succeeded in talking herself into renewed faith in the orthodoxies of the slaveholding consensus.

The question that has prompted most debate among women’s historians has concerned the war’s role in changing southern gender norms: to what extent did women’s unaccustomed freedoms and responsibilities during the war transform the South’s gender codes? Anne Firor Scott’s *The Southern Lady*, published in 1970, launched new examinations into elite white southern women’s roles. Utilizing diaries and post-war memoirs, Scott argued that southern women from slaveholding families chafed under social and religious expectations that they perform the role of the perfect and genteel “lady”—submissive, pious, virtuous, cheerful, and self-abnegating. Devoting chapters to “the reality” and “discontent” of southern mistresses, Scott refuted the concept of the leisured southern belle who was assumed to exemplify these womanly traits. However, Scott seemingly takes women’s doubts and complaints—especially about gender roles and slavery—at face value, a particularly interesting choice when working with postwar memoirs, revised diaries designed for publication, and reminiscences by both “ladies” and
their children. For example, authors of such texts often asserted their pre-war opposition to slavery, writing in a context in which slavery had already been abolished and southern women were engaged in revisionism about the South’s aims in the Civil War. For Scott, the war was the turning point in a story that is ultimately about the emergence of a southern “New Woman.” Scott writes, “The Civil War passed over the South like a giant tidal wave, cracking many structures so fatally that it was only a matter of time before they fell to pieces.” Among these structures, she argues, were antebellum gender codes.

Subsequent historians have taken up the question of whether or not the Civil War opened new avenues to female empowerment. Drew Gilpin Faust, in Mothers of Invention, asserts that the war upended old notions of social hierarchy, including gender. “What,” she asks, “was maleness when it was defeated and impoverished, when men had failed as providers and protectors? What did womanhood involve once the notion of dependence...
and helplessness became an insupportable luxury?” However, Faust argues that because of their belief in the fundamental assumptions of the antebellum slaveholding regime, elite women contained most of the change that the war threatened to impose on a postwar South. Faust demonstrates that, unlike Scott’s vision of a society transformed by war, “women of the wartime South invented new selves designed in large measure to resist change, to fashion the new out of as much of the old as could survive in the altered postwar world of defeated Confederates, regional poverty, and black freedom.”

Faust acknowledges that many women, after suffering years of deprivation, hardship, and loss, broke down, in their words, in nervous attacks, histeria [sic], and derangement. Faust does little to examine these diarists’ laments, using the passages instead as evidence that women developed a new sense of themselves as individuals with their own needs during the war. This idea supports her larger argument that southern women eventually used their own suffering to attack the Confederacy’s war and to compel their menfolk to return home. As Faust frames this argument, southern women reaffirmed notions of ladyhood and gendered responsibilities, claiming again for themselves the right to protection, if not other trappings of ladyhood, including leisure and wealth. Particularly in the face of black freedom, white southern women accepted the rehabilitation of patriarchy as a bargain they were willing to accept. Faust’s argument, then, is a rejection of Scott’s; in spite of wartime changes in gender roles and responsibilities, Confederate suffering and defeat prompted a resurgence of antebellum gender ideas of female helplessness and passivity rather than Scott’s nascent feminism.

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22 Faust, Mothers of Invention, 4.
23 Ibid., 8.
My project builds upon Faust’s argument in that it acknowledges the resurgence of systems of hierarchy in the postwar period that resembled as much as possible those of the antebellum years. However, my question—which neither Faust nor other historians have addressed—centers on how southern women did the mental work that allowed them to overcome their new sense of themselves as competent individuals during the war and again accept their subservience, reaffirm pre-war hierarchies, and reconcile the sacrifices of the war with the trauma of defeat.24 It was not only in response to external pressures like black emancipation that elite women attempted to reassert the slaveholding ideology, but also to internal conflict that threatened to uproot their sense of self and cause them to resent a society which they had little power to change.

Women, as well as men, carried on their mental work as well as their political and economic work to rebuild the South during Reconstruction. For women, this meant—in part—denying the many ways in which southern manhood had seemed to fail during the war. Southern women did not only reassert prewar ideologies in their own lives and families. Through their late nineteenth-century memorialization efforts, they projected these sometimes-suspect beliefs outward to the widest possible audience.25

The debate over the meanings of gender in the Civil War, of which Scott and Faust are emblematic, creates the background for my own work. Building on Faust’s work, I

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24 By “mental work,” I mean the process by which slaveholding women used their diaries to overcome doubts, to renew their faith, and to convince themselves that the ideologies that had shaped their thinking continued to be useful in describing their experiences, even when those experiences challenged and undermined slaveholding ideologies. These women used their diaries to work through the problem and to reach resolution.

25 These late-nineteenth century memorialization efforts were organized primarily around the United Daughters of the Confederacy and Ladies Memorial Associations. Though the period of Reconstruction is beyond the scope of my own project, other scholars’ work regarding the reestablishment of a society based on white prewar values supports my argument about the type of mental work done by southern women during the war. See Whites, Civil War as a Crisis in Gender for more discussion of the “reconstruction of southern white men” and women’s memorial societies. Also Gardner, Blood and Irony and Faust, Mothers of Invention.
argue that the reestablishment of postwar social structures required that southern women unlearn some of the lessons of the war, that they practice forgetting the experiences that had called into question the slaveholding worldview: violence in the exercise of mastery, the failures of white men to live up to promises of protection, and the intimate knowledge of the shortcomings of the southern honor code. These women had to “forget” that slavery was not benevolent but coercive, that they had successfully performed gender roles to which they should not have had access, and that “honorable” southern men could fail to live up to a gendered honor code, both on a personal and national level. Indeed, their diaries can illustrate how they managed this task and resolved themselves to upholding those structures that required their own subordination. My project covers the wartime period, but will help to explain what other historians have demonstrated: that white southerners were active in supporting the reestablishment and consolidation of white supremacist ideologies—derived from the prewar slaveholding worldview—during the postwar period.

26 Slaveholding men had led the South into a war in part to preserve the honor of southern slaveholders. For southerners, traditionally touchy about personal, familial, and regional (or state) honor, the battlefield represented the opportunity to prove their masculinity as they bested their opponents. However, the war required that men leave women at home, where they became newly responsible for protecting and preserving their own personal honor and that of the family, the “protection” which honorable men were supposed to provide. As these women managed as best they could at home, they were faced with evidence of male “shirking,” of dishonorable, even cowardly, behavior by southern armies and Confederate deserters, and—ultimately—of the failure of their men to defend the South’s honor by winning the war and establishing a separate nation. In light of these experiences, southern slaveholding women were confronted with the realization that their men were not ruled by the code of honor to the extent that they had believed. Some men, such as Generals Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, did succeed in living up to southern ideals regarding honor. These men came to be celebrated as heroes who embodied all the masculine honor of the South, and slaveholding women contrasted them with other southern men, including military and political leaders who fell short. See Chapters Three and Five.

Theories And Methodologies

Diaries present a number of challenges that require specialized theoretical and methodological consideration. One challenge lies in determining the status of diaries as public, private, or semi-public documents. The intended audience of each diary affected the ways that women wrote about events, emotions, and politics. For example, Mary Chesnut’s diary was arguably intended for a public audience, at least in its later iterations, which she viewed as a work in progress at the time of her death in 1886. Chesnut’s writing, then, must be viewed as at least partially fictive because she donned a particular public persona and consciously crafted her entries to reflect her desired perceptions of herself, her family, and the politics of the war. Other diaries appear to have been created for other purposes: to record public and domestic events, to reflect on those events, and to ruminate on one’s relationship with God. Though diaries created for these purposes would seem to contain less self-consciously constructed accounts than those written with an eye toward publication, such seemingly private writings were often shared with family members or passed down to children, if not ultimately to a wider public. Most diarists did


29 C. Vann Woodward summarizes the transformation of what we think of as Chesnut’s “diary” from her “journal,” kept through the war, into her “book,” written between 1881 and 1884, with the expectation of eventual publication. In revising her journal for publication, Chesnut omitted many potentially embarrassing notes about herself while elaborating on certain events and impressions until she had produced what literary critic Edmund Wilson describes as “a work of art” and “more genuinely literary than most Civil War fiction.” This revision was informed by her efforts at writing fiction in the period between the end of the war and her death. C. Vann Woodward, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, xv-xxix.
not have the opportunity to keep their journals “under lock and key,” as Mary Chesnut did, but there is considerable evidence that they tried to keep their writings private. Diaries often represented a mix of private and public, and they can not easily be separated into one of these simple categories. They should therefore be read as containing genuine accounts of both events and emotions, but the potential for affecting certain personas remains. Even private diaries illustrate that diarists often censored themselves, unwilling to commit their darkest or most private selves to the page.\(^{30}\) Slaveholding women attempted to keep their private lives from the hands of the Yankees. In order to do so, they routinely burned old letters and sometimes diaries as well. Many contemplated the destruction of their diaries but ultimately risked hiding them away instead, demonstrating both an anxiety about their contents and an attachment to the diaries as historical records and prized possessions.\(^{31}\) At

\(^{30}\) Ibid., xix; Though Eliza Andrews later decided to publish her diary, she claims that it was written as an entirely private account. Lucy Breckenridge also considered her diary to be private, and sometimes used a code when she wrote about her fiancé. Other diarists, like Susan Cornwall, resorted to tearing pages out of their diaries, gluing pages together, or redacting portions before they let others read them, a sign that they considered their volumes to be private at the time of writing. Others had no clear intention of sharing the diary, but considered that it may be a possibility at some point. Mary Caldwell, for example, wrote that she left out “family secrets” in case somebody looked over her diary at some future date. Mary Gray Caldwell, “It Does Appear as if Our Soldiers Were Made Altogether of Patriotism,” ed. Russell P. Smith in *The Journal of Fredericksburg History and Biography*, 11 (2012), 83. Likewise, Emma LeConte wrote, “Perhaps it is best not to put all I felt and suffered on paper. One of these days I may think those feeling were wicked.” Emma LeConte, *When the World Ended*, ed. Earl Schenck Miers (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1957), 98-99. Pauline Heyward, too, thought of her diary as a private space, but she censored herself in case this privacy was ever violated Pauline DeCaradeuc Heyward, *A Confederate Lady Comes of Age: The Journal of Pauline DeCaradeuc Heyward, 1863-1888*, ed. Mary D. Robertson (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 74-75.

\(^{31}\) Buck, *Shadows on My Heart*, 33, 49-50. Other diarists shared (or intended to share) their diaries with family and friends. Kate Foster kept a diary for her nieces and nephews to read one day. Kate Foster, Diary, June 25, 1863, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University. Ellen House kept hers for her brother Johnnie, and stopped writing after he was killed. Daniel E. Sutherland, introduction to *A Very Violent Rebel: The Civil War Diary of Ellen Renshaw House*, by Ellen Renshaw House (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1996), xx.

For example, Kate Carney burned most of her journal and expected to destroy the rest of it, according to an 1876 note. Kate Carney, Diary, n.d., in *Documenting the American South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, n.d.), docsouth.unc.edu. Lucy Breckinridge also planned to destroy her diary, writing, “I feel so tempted to tear this book up, but I intend to keep it until the 11th of next August, as a reflection of my faults and follies, inconstancies and inconsistencies...Yes, I'll keep it as an antidote to vanity,” and “I know I shall.
the very least, diaries were kept as records for the most private audience, the diarist herself. Diarists often crafted narratives that placed them at the center of the story and contained some type of moral or political purpose that was useful in the present and might be used for reflection in the future. They frequently looked over the pages of their diaries, using them as aids to help them reflect on what they had experienced and on who they were becoming.

The purpose of a diary might also shift over time. For example, Mary Washington Cabell Early kept a diary during the war, and she made a note in 1888 that she had reread the diary “after the lapse of many years. I have decided to keep it (though many things in it now seem morbid to me) because it is a record of the Spring of 1865, an interesting historical period. It may furnish some valuable information to my descendants.” Early provided another postwar note on the last page of the diary, this one in 1912. She wrote, “I do not wish this fragment of a diary to ever be destroyed as it possesses real historical interest.” There is evidence that Early revised some passages in her diary over time, including marked-out passages and what seem to be torn out pages. It is reasonable to conclude, then, that the importance of the diary shifted over time for Early, beginning as a private record and then a possible source of information for her family. Finally, the last entry seems to reiterate what the first entry asserted—that the diary has significance to people other than Early herself, but her last message seems to have a different purpose. Early asserted that the document must exist permanently and was of general historical interest.

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33 Mary Washington Cabell Early Diary, November 14, 1888, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.
34 Ibid., November 12 [7], 1912.
interest. Because she did not mention her family in the 1912 entry, it is reasonable to assume that Early had reevaluated the importance of the diary again and found that it had significance beyond the bounds of the family. It may have been this rethinking of the value of the diary that led Early to redact and remove portions of it. Early’s notes suggest that the audience for a diary may change over time, and her revisions imply that the content of the diary shifted along with its audience. As the imagined audience changed, Early revised the diary, suggesting that a once personal account entered into the realm of the public and the political.

I am aware that diarists’ disparate social locations require attention to a number of factors shaping the ways that they constructed their narratives and authored their personas. In choosing to use women’s diaries, my sources are, in general, limited to members of the slaveholding class, who had greater access to education and leisure time than their less affluent counterparts. I have made an effort to collect and utilize diaries from across the Confederate states, though some states, such as Virginia, are better represented than others. As Kimberly Harrison has pointed out, historians working with collections that cover the entire South must be careful to recognize differences in the authors and in the stories that they tell, corresponding to differences in circumstances, social locations, and relation to a shifting war front. I read diaries with an eye toward the differences created by the categories of age, location, political persuasion, relationship status, economic position, social status, the availability of family support networks (in particular, whether the diarist has been forced to become a refugee), and those who took on traditionally male roles and those who did not. Each of these categories has important bearing on women’s wartime experiences and so on the ways that they recounted their
experience. For example, as Harrison points out, married women were more likely to write about domestic concerns while younger unmarried women wrote more often about politics.\(^{35}\)

The question of how to approach texts that are at once personal and social has long been a subject of debate. Do diaries reflect the “secret lives” of women, and thus make us privy to thoughts never meant for public consumption, or are they meant to be quasi-public documents, representations of the self, meant to be seen by others? Further, can these diaries be used to make broader arguments about the society in which they were produced? The work of numerous scholars suggests that diaries should not be read in only one of these ways. Rather, a number of approaches must be used to understand the diary as a historical narrative, a self-representation or performance that was shaped by the writer’s position in a cultural matrix, and as a reflection of the social and cultural contexts in which she wrote. My purpose here is thus twofold: to explore how women’s diaries may be read as texts that inhabit a discursive space between private and public, and also how they can be read ethnographically, as a product of a particular time, place, and culture.

The following sections provide a brief description of the most important theoretical approaches to the textual analysis of diaries, silence, discourse, power, and socialization, with a particular emphasis on gender.

*Literary Theory*

Literary analysis plays an important role in my project, providing the tools for close readings of diaries. I suggest that diaries be read as literary texts representative of signifying systems. Literary comprehension, the first step in analyzing a text, is defined by

Herman Rapaport as the knowledge of a text that allows for the identification and understanding of such elements of writing as point of view, major themes, and key allusions. But I seek to move beyond such basic readings to investigate problems and offer hypotheses as to why certain texts were written in particular ways and to place these texts in a historical context. Diaries then become tools with explanatory power in helping us understand nineteenth-century social structures.\(^{36}\)

To explore these complex and multivalent aspects of diaries, I engage primarily in two types of literary readings: close reading and contextual analysis. Close reading “concerns the dichotomy between what the text literally says and what can be inferred.”\(^{37}\) In examining women’s diaries, I look closely at the meanings created by narrative structure and language to deduce the ideological work that those elements do within the mind of the diarist. In addition to point of view, structure, and word choice, I pay close attention to images and metaphors, tone, irony, length of entries when compared to the diary as a whole, the interplay between public and domestic concerns, moments of silence, patterns and form (particularly those borrowed from popular fiction, such as the novels of Sir Walter Scott) and even abnormalities in handwriting and punctuation that provide clues to a diarist’s frame of mind and her authorial intent. Evidence of moments of disjuncture can be found in diarists’ excited or despondent uses of language, as revealed by agitated handwriting, frequent underlining, and the use of stylistic elements such as exclamation marks which punctuate their writings. Such work is informed by my background in literary studies.


\(^{37}\) Ibid., 4
Contextual analysis brings me back to the historian’s craft, and I rely extensively on my knowledge of antebellum and wartime southern culture, gender roles, and racial regimes. In particular, my analysis rests upon the idea that the Civil War represented a moment of disruption, destruction, and new alternatives. However, as historians have demonstrated, the post-war era saw a closing of these alternatives and an effort by white southerners to reconstruct, as much as possible, pre-war race and gender codes. Southern women were disadvantaged in some ways by such a retrenchment. They were certainly not passive victims, however, but active participants in the process of rebuilding a “southern way of life.” The mental work that allowed them to participate in this project was done in large part during the war itself as women framed and evaluated the changes in their region, families, and personal lives.

Amy Wink’s work, *She Left Nothing In Particular*, is situated within a long-standing debate about whether women’s diaries are sources that reflect an individual’s pre-existing identity or whether they are spaces that allow women to create and/or reaffirm an identity. Wink emphasizes the ways in which public and private were often melded in women’s diaries; the private self of the diary informed, reinforced, or justified women’s public roles.\(^{38}\) Wink thus stresses the process of writing, the ways in which keeping a diary not only helped women to understand themselves and their world but also to exert some

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\(^{38}\) Amy Wink, *She Left Nothing In Particular*, xiii. In her insistence that “the writer is in control of the way she will tell her story,” Wink may pay too little attention to the constraints—cultural, social, and personal—that confronted women who wrote for themselves but rarely wrote with the freedom of knowing that their creations would be entirely private. Still, Wink notes that “this story of her own choosing reveals ‘the frameworks of meaning’ within which she understands her life” (xxii). Most women who left behind diaries (and all of the women that Wink examines) were white, had some access to education, and shared a Christian religious tradition. This is important to understanding why they wrote in the ways that they did. These characteristics were generally unacknowledged by the diarists but had a profound impact on the ways in which they shaped their experiences and interpreted both private and public events. Wink rightly eschews the private/public dichotomy, arguing that the relationship between the private voice of the diary and the public performance of gender identity is more complex.
measure of influence over that world, especially when coping with changing and uncertain circumstances. Through the process of articulating experience in their diaries, women transformed the quotidian and fleeting into the meaningful and lasting. In doing so, they linked their private selves and daily lives to the issues of the day through their interpretations. The stories that women chose to tell, and how they told them, reflected their understandings of the spaces they inhabited in the world.39

In women’s diaries, we see a new consciousness that public and private experiences were inextricably linked. For example, a woman who became a refugee, had the heart of domesticity—the home—invaded by white and black Federal soldiers, whose house was burned, goods stolen, and economic position rendered unstable if not downright dismal, experienced the effects of the public realm in immediate ways that challenged her notions of herself and of the southern world. These shifts in women’s experiences upset their ideas about gender roles, southern life, and class and race hierarchies, and their diaries reflect the means by which they tried to make sense of the tumultuous world around them. Ultimately, the diaries also provide insight into the ways that southern slaveholding women resolved their doubts in favor of supporting a dominant white racist southern ideology in the aftermath of the war.

39 Elsewhere, philosopher Linda Alcoff writes about what she calls “positionality” in representations of the self, suggesting that “the position that women find themselves in can be actively utilized...as a location for the construction of meaning...The concept of positionality shows how women use their positional perspective as a place from which values are interpreted and constructed rather than the locus of an already determined set of values.” This approach thus gives women considerable agency while acknowledging the importance of the cultural terrain from which they speak and write as active subjects of their own life histories. Similarly, Wink argues that women diarists used their writing to perform and reaffirm their roles and status—in this case, their roles as privileged white women from slaveholding families in the midst of a war that increasingly seemed to be rooted in a desire to disrupt, even dismantle, their privileged positions. Linda Alcoff, Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
These insights into women’s diaries and the purposes they serve, when taken together, require that we read diaries with a critical eye. While diaries are records of events, we risk distorting women’s historical and affective experiences if we simply take their writings at face value. Not everything that women wrote in diaries was true—sometimes they concealed what they knew or self-consciously crafted their narratives, other times they skirted painful issues, and sometimes they were simply wrong or misled. Mary Chesnut, in revising her journal for what would become her well-known “diary,” excised passages that might have proved embarrassing, whether this was her delight over her husband’s jealousy or unflattering passages that revealed her vanity and critical impressions of others.\(^40\) Southern women often recorded rumors of Confederate victories as if they were true, a choice that represents what we may call wishful thinking. In March, 1864, for example, Mississippian Emilie Riley McKinley reported in her diary that “Our success in Florida has been glorious. Even the Yankee papers admit a defeat and are anxious….Gen. Thomas has been obliged to fall back from Tunnel Hill.” In fact, the Confederates had been driven from Tunnel Hill weeks earlier.\(^41\)

Rumors could also affect women negatively. One diarist lamented that “general Hood was killed, and President Davis is dead! If it is true, I shall feel as if we are really forsaken by Heaven and given up to be lost.”\(^42\) In the absence of reliable news, some women chose silence, not to repeat “Yankee lies,” while others filled their diaries with


\(^{41}\) Emilie McKinley, *From the Pen of a She-Rebel: The Civil War Diary of Emilie Riley McKinley*, Ed. Gordon A. Cotton (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 70. Emilie McKinley is a rare exception in this study. She is the only diarist whose writings I utilize who was not, herself, from a slaveholding family. Rather, McKinley was born in the North. However, she lived in slaveholding households during the war, working as a teacher for elite families. She was staunchly aligned with the views of the southern slaveholding classes, and her diary reflects her pro-slavery, anti-abolition, Confederate sympathies.

\(^{42}\) Loula Kendall Rogers, quoted in Sarah Gardner, *Blood and Irony*, 17.
“supposition, innuendo, and sheer fantasy.” Finally, some diarists chose silence over writing about difficult topics. Suffering the trauma of being forced to leave her home as a refugee, Kate Stone wrote, “I have had no heart to write of our horrid flight from home but will some day.” Indeed, she returned to the story of her journey at a later date, but her passage suggests that she needed time to process the event. Certainly, some women never found the time or mental fortitude to return to stories of trauma.

These women constructed diaries to reflect their values as much as their experiences, and we can intuit that this sometimes involved conscious and unconscious reconstructions. Diaries are, then, made up of both fact and fiction. Reading with an eye toward understanding why these women chose the narratives and interpretations that they did provides a window into understanding not only their values and cultural expectations but also the ways in which nineteenth-century southern women coped with significant change when their ability to control their lives was severely circumscribed. This was especially true during the Civil War, when constraints on their choices derived not only from strict social codes but also from the changes wrought by the war itself, which often came into conflict with those social expectations.

43 Gardner, Blood and Irony, 19.
45 See Chapter Five.
46 Alice Fahs’ The Imagined Civil War provides some of the cultural context helpful to understanding how slaveholding southern women experienced and wrote about the Civil War. Fahs argues that wartime popular literature encompassed a genre of “feminized literature” that recognized the importance of women’s patriotism and contributions in differing ways over the course of the war. Fahs’ insights shed light on the dual nature of women’s private writings: women performed a “public” role through their support and wartime suffering even as their diaries provided opportunities for more private expressions of doubt or discontent. For southern women, in particular, other methods of coping with loss and deprivation—avenues open to northern women, like wartime nursing—were limited by gender roles that stressed women’s domestic nature. In this context, southern women’s diaries may have been particularly useful as a means of dealing with wartime hardships and of performing their patriotism because other channels of action were closed to them. Fahs, The Imagined Civil War, 120-149.
The Meanings of Silence

Reading silence constitutes an element of my project that requires some theorization here as well. Metaphors, and punctuations of suspension such as pauses, omissions, and ellipses, as literary theorist Patricia Ondek Laurence points out, represent three types of silence in literature: "what is left ‘unsaid,’ something one might have felt but does not say; the ‘unspoken,’ something not yet formulated or expressed in voiced words; and the ‘unsayable,’ something not sayable based on the social taboos of Victorian propriety."47 I would add to these stylistic moments of silence the idea of skirting a topic that the diarist cannot confront directly, as in the case of Emma Holmes of South Carolina who struggled to describe an episode of slaveholder violence while crafting a narrative that is silent on the very reality of the violence at the heart of the episode.48 Laurence follows a long tradition of feminist scholars who have argued that speech, presented as “presence mastered,” has traditionally been associated with men, while women’s silence has been determined to be an absence or a lack.49 Novelists and literary theorists have begun to pay attention to these moments of not-speaking as representative of a sign of gendered internal subjectivity. It is in these moments, in the words of Virginia Woolf, that women are able to entertain “infidel ideas” that they dare not speak aloud.50

49 Derrida, quoted in Laurence, The Reading of Silence, 11-12.
50 Virginia Woolf, quoted in Laurence, The Reading of Silence, 2.
In literature, the question arises about the author's intent for silence: does it represent a psychological space for the reader or the writer? If we assume that diarists either believed that they wrote only for themselves or hoped that others believed that they did (and so that their accounts were arguably “true”), then historians can cautiously conclude that ruptures, holes, and spaces in a text represent the psychological needs and fears of the writer rather than the reader. For example, Emma Holmes certainly did not intend for later readers of her diary (if, indeed, she anticipated any) to use the silences in her text to reflect on the questions she almost raised—questions about sexual violence in particular. She did not raise them because they could not be said “out loud,” could not, possibly, be formulated into words even in her own mind. For Holmes, the process of writing the story that she wanted to believe allowed her to make that story the truth in her own life. Writing the story in this way helped Holmes to create a narrative that permitted her to ignore alternative possibilities. The diarist did not have to think about the questions at all if she was able to write a coherent account without reference to them.

51 Laurence, The Reading of Silence, 3.
52 There is evidence in Holmes's diary that she wrote for a potential audience, at least some of the time. For example, sometimes her writing takes on a self-conscious style in which Holmes uses flowery, poetic, or sentimental language. In her examination of women’s diaries as a genre, literary scholar Lynn Bloom examines not why women write diaries, but how they write them. Bloom argues that most diaries are written with the idea that there is, at least potentially, an audience beyond the diarist herself. She distinguishes between truly private diaries, like that of Martha Ballard, and “public private diaries,” such as those written by Anne Frank and Mary Chestnut. A truly private diary is distinguished in large part by its terse entries. These entries are meant to keep records regarding work, expenditures, weather, and social interactions. Because they are meant solely for the eyes of the writer, they do not elaborate on social connections, interpret events, or give insight into the intellectual pursuits or feelings of the writer. Public private diaries, on the other hand, "transcend the realm of the family legacies and historical records where truly private diaries live." Writers of public-private diaries, like Emma Holmes, create vivid scenes, explain the familial and social relationships among actors, and employ “techniques to circumvent the diary’s dailiness,” including foreshadowing and flashbacks. Finally, public private diaries are written in a way that showcases the creativity, skill, and intelligence of the diarist who sees herself as a writer, not as merely chronicling daily events. Lynn Z. Bloom, “I Write for Myself and Strangers’: Private Diaries as Public Documents” in Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries, ed. Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 35, 29.
Silences in the diaries can also be read as evidence of wavering convictions. For example, breaks in a usually regular diary during moments of personal or political crisis can reveal that women often avoided writing about issues or events that they found particularly troubling. Diarist Lucy Buck took long hiatuses from diary-keeping at moments in which Confederate defeat seemed especially likely and when she suffered the most severe hardships due to the war. In her moments of silence, Buck, a fierce patriot, indicated that the Confederate war effort was intensely important to her on a personal level and that there were constraints that operated against recording the failure of southern men to whip the Yankees and to protect hearth and home. One unusually long silence—from September 1864 to February 1865—finally ended when Buck wrote, “Those sad autumn days my heart was too sad….I had not the spirit to write.”53 The silences, then, reveal that Buck resisted recording events that reflected her growing despair and that would compel her to admit uncertainty about prevailing ideologies of sectional identity, the Confederate cause, and southern gender codes, all of which had ordered her life in the preceding years.54 Certainly, the way the war was proceeding on the ground influenced Buck, but she frequently wrote about Confederate military setbacks. Her sad heart represents her inability to process the loss of hope that Confederate defeat entailed. Suffering food shortages at home as well, Buck was bearing witness to the loss of her way of life that coincided with Confederate defeat. The combination proved so difficult as to silence her. To use Laurence’s phrase, the diary reflected what may have been “unsayable.”

54 Elizabeth Baer, “Ambivalence, Anger, and Silence: The Civil War Diary of Lucy Buck” This silence may suggest more than just despair about the Confederate war effort; it may also have represented Buck’s unwillingness to criticize southern soldiers or leadership. In this case, such criticism may have been beyond the pale for this southern patriot. It may also have represented too great a transgression against proper womanhood for the young Lucy Buck.
Buck recognized her own drop in spirits but chose not to record the events that left her so despondent because to record them would be to admit to her own loss of hope. Perhaps her suffering was “unsayable” because losing everything that she had known before the war was unthinkable. Her silence represents how high the stakes were for her as she watched the Confederate war effort unravel.

_Discourse, Power and Socialization_

Silence also becomes an important component of discourse and functions in sometimes contradictory ways in relationship to power. “Silence itself,” as Michel Foucault wrote, “is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said.”

Discourses do not represent a top-down exercise of power, but diffuse manifestations of power in which both speech and silence function to uphold power structures. The women in this study used the spaces of their diaries to at once question power and, by their silences—both within and without the diary itself—to reaffirm dominant discourses and avoid seditious ones. They practiced self-censorship in the public realm, in the private (or semi-private) space of the diary, and perhaps even in their own thoughts. Silences contained the potential for upholding systems of power.

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55 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 27. “Silence itself—the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers—is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said….There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say.”

56 Ibid. 84, Foucault identifies this self-censorship as the “injunction of nonexistence, nonmanifestation, and silence” when individuals confront discourses of power. Foucault’s theorization of discourse suggests that they are not enforced in a top-down manner from a position of power but negotiated—reinscribed or resisted—by individuals as part of an ongoing process. “Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowance for the complex and
It is my argument that during the Civil War, even though the possibility of subversion of the social order was greater than in other times, diarists’ ultimate unwillingness to turn these silences into verbalized critiques rendered them stillborn, giving way to a post-war resurgence of white unity of thought, especially in relationship to free black men and women. Many Civil War diarists ceased keeping their diaries abruptly with the end of the war. Southern women turned their attention to the pressing matters of defeat and Reconstruction, but they continued the ideological work they had begun during the war through memorialization efforts. Elite white women led the way in memorializing the dead and in reaffirming—through sentimental tributes to the Lost Cause—pre-war ideas about honor, patriotism, gender, and race. David Blight suggests that women’s early role in memorialization, drenched in sentimentalism, was essentially apolitical but gave way to post-war political meanings that linked the cause of Confederate nationhood and the struggles over the Reconstruction of the South. As Blight writes, “Virtually all major spokespersons for the Lost Cause could not develop their story of a heroic, victimized South without the images of faithful slaves and benevolent masters.” Women’s mental work during the war and their political work after it—evidenced first by their diaries and then by their memorialization work—supported the ideas of the Lost Cause. By overcoming wartime disruptions to the master class’s ideologies, elite southern women

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unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. In like manner, silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions; but they also loosen its holds and provide for relatively obscure areas of tolerance." Foucault, History of Sexuality, 100-101.

58 Ibid., 260.
renewed their commitment to these ideologies and carried them through Reconstruction and beyond.\textsuperscript{59}

The United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), a multi-generational and generally well-to-do organization, was of primary importance in giving southern women a political voice in the revisionist history of the Lost Cause. UDC records illustrate the importance of pre-war ideologies in maintaining the myths of the Lost Cause. The official “scrapbooks” of the UDC include volumes devoted to “Reconstruction and the Ku Klux Klan,” “Tributes to Faithful Slaves,” “Women of the Confederacy,” and “The Institution of Slavery and the Plantation Days.”\textsuperscript{60} Each of these volumes serves as an ode to a lost way of life, one that demonstrated its superiority over the North through its adherence to superior gender and race standards. The memorialization and historical work in which southern white women participated in the decades after the war could only have been accomplished as they practiced forgetting their own internal struggles over slavery, gender codes, and the honor and righteousness of the war for southern independence.

\textsuperscript{59} Many historians have demonstrated that the South met defeat by waging a new war, this one for control over the history of the war and the short-lived Confederacy. Southern women embraced this project at the close of the war, one for which they had been prepared by confronting their own moments of ambivalence during the war itself. Feeling a responsibility to the dead and to the honor of the living, southern women participated in a fashioning of southern history that stressed the righteousness of pre-war social structures. For discussions of women’s roles in the racial violence of Reconstruction and beyond, see Gaines Foster,\textit{ Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, \textit{New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the Southern States} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Nancy McClean, \textit{Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Drew Faust, \textit{Mothers of Invention}; David Blight, \textit{Race and Reunion}, Jane Censer Turner, \textit{The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 1865-1895} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003) and Sarah Gardner, \textit{Blood and Irony}; Hannah Rosen \textit{Terror in the Heart of Freedom}. Wheeler has argued that even the most Progressive of southern suffragists were “hostages to the Lost Cause” and couched their arguments in terms of race, class (especially noblesse oblige), and gender norms that recalled the antebellum period. See also Chapter Five.

\textsuperscript{60} Records of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia.
The debate among historians about structure versus agency is longstanding, and as many other historians have done more recently, my project utilizes discourse theory to give equal weight to both. Certainly people are limited or empowered by specific social, political, and economic structures, but discourse theory allows for a serious consideration of individual agency within those constraints. Agency is often framed as resistance to structures of coercive forms of power and as the ability to effect self-determination. However, it need not always be defined in this way. Saba Mahmood, in her study of Muslim women’s pious orders in Egypt, argues that by striving to embody the values of their culture and religious communities—piety, modesty, and submission—these women exercise a type of agency generally not included in a secular liberal conception of agency. Rather than individual subjects striving for autonomy, these women embody the link between the individual and the community of which they are a part and strive to embody a conservative version of womanhood. In the same way, southern slaveholding women identified with class and race categories requiring them to submit to systems that also demanded their subordination. Their diaries reveal the processes by which these women exercised agency by actively cultivating thoughts and attitudes supporting those cultural expectations even in the face of challenges to them. Though Emma Holmes frequently

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62 For example, southern women upheld a social system built on hierarchies of race, gender, and class. Though these women may have chafed at their own subordination, they maintained the idea that hierarchies were reflections of God-given differences in ability and temperament. Thus, Louisa McCord could argue that southern women should accept their subordinate positions as part of God’s will (even while she broke southern gender codes by becoming a public intellectual), thereby upholding the social hierarchies that simultaneously provided white southerners with their privileges and cast women as the “weaker sex,” destined to trade autonomy for protection. Southern mistresses’ diaries show evidence that they tried to resolve these contradictions, and women diarists often chided themselves for not being able to live up to the ideal of the godly submissive lady. Louisa McCord, “Enfranchisement of Woman” in *Louisa S. McCord: Political and Social Essays*, ed. Richard C. Lounsbury (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1995); Louisa McCord, “Negro-mania” in *Louisa S. McCord: Political and Social Essays*, ed. Richard C. Lounsbury
used her diary to vent her anger and partisanship, she occasionally criticized her own unladylike heart. Soon after a passage in which she prayed that every man, woman, and child would prefer to see Charleston burned to the ground than occupied by federal troops, Holmes rebuked herself for her own “proud and rebellious heart” and lack of a “meek and childlike” piety. Though each such episode soon gave way to renewed zeal, Holmes and other women like her struggled with the disconnect between expectations for their class and gender and the lived reality of a war-torn South.

Slaveholding women diarists employed a number of discursive strategies as they attempted to resolve moments of disjuncture. While some women addressed their confusion and internal struggles directly, a close reading of diaries reveals that many others expressed these struggles through other means. For example, diarists sometimes returned a number of times to events that they found troubling, revealing that they continued to struggle to adequately resolve them. Others used their diary entries to reaffirm notions of family, the justness of the Confederate cause, and slaveholding and gender hierarchies. In the context of the Civil War and its attendant disorder, diarists sought to reaffirm those theretofore widely accepted ideas at moments in which those ideas were destabilized. A famous example of this discursive strategy is found in Mary Boykin Chesnut’s diary in a passage that simultaneously tells of violence committed by slaves against their masters, the loyalty and love of most slaves, and the troubling inscrutability of enslaved people.

63 HOLMES, THE DIARY OF MISS EMMA HOLMES, 240.
64 WOODWARD, MARY CHESTNUT’S CIVIL WAR. CHESTNUT FAMOUSLY INCLUDED STORIES OF SLAVE VIOLENCE AGAINST WHITE FAMILIES IN HER DIARY, MOST NOTABLY THE STORY OF THE MURDER OF HER COUSIN BETSEY WITHERSPOON BY HER SLAVES. DESPITE SUCH TALES, HOWEVER, SHE REFUSED TO ACKNOWLEDGE WHAT WOULD HAVE BEEN A REASONABLE FEAR OF HER OWN
These apparently contradictory ideas reveal that Chesnut struggled to maintain the notion of slavery as a positive good that resulted in mutual affection between slaveholders and slaves. She at once condemned slavery and defended the dignity and honor—even martyrdom—of slaveholders. Chesnut’s diary also reveals one psychological function of diary-writing; her unwillingness to explore the danger of slave violence is evidence of the conflicted relationship between women of the slaveholding class and the realities of slaveholding. To acknowledge the violence of slaveholders or enslaved people was to confront the reality that slavery was essentially a system rooted in coercion. The threat of slave violence also called into focus the danger that lurked within these women’s own homes and communities, a danger that they were powerless to thwart and so did their best to ignore, in part by naming the problem in the diary and then dismissing it with the standard counterarguments of the slaveholding classes.

Each of the following chapters seeks to explain how slaveholding women used their personal diaries to craft narratives that helped them to resolve moments of ideological crisis. The first chapter sets the stage for later chapters, outlining the antebellum southern social system as it operated along hierarchies of class, race, and gender, as well as delineating and highlighting wartime changes to southern social structures that resulted in challenges to the slaveholding ideology. Chapter Two examines slaveholding violence in the context of a war that made white slaveholding women responsible for mastery and discipline in new ways

In fact, she wrote that “A genuine slave-owner born and bred will not be afraid of negroes…. Here we are as mild as the moonbeams and as serene. Nothing but negroes around us—white men all gone to the army.” Ibid. 234. She included in the diary the reason for the Chesnut slaves’ apparent happiness: “The president’s man Stephen came with the Arabian. He said: ‘Why, Missis, your niggers down here are well off. I call this Mulberry place heaven. Plenty to eat, little to do, warm house to sleep in, good church… all here, right at hand.’” Ibid, 607. However, Chesnut also claimed not to be able to read the true thoughts and emotions of enslaved people, writing, “Cannot see any change in them myself. Their faces are as unreadable as the sphinx.” Ibid., 233.
and undermined their claims to benevolence. Chapter Three focuses on the psychological pressures that confronted slaveholding women on the home front as they grappled with the loss of their slaves and the encroachment of federal armies. The fourth chapter centers on questions of religious faith as slaveholding women struggled to come to terms with deeply painful personal loss and to renew their faith as a means of coping with despair. The final chapter seeks to explain how slaveholding women attempted to reconcile their faith in masculine authority and honor with evidence of male powerlessness and the tenuous nature of racial supremacy during the war.
CHAPTER 1
SYSTEMS OF POWER IN THE ANTEBELLUM AND WARTIME SOUTH

To understand how southerners approached the upheaval of the war years, it is first necessary to step back into the antebellum period and examine the society as it existed at the moment in which the conflict broke like a wave over the southern states. The antebellum South was built upon a system of strict social codes that served to maintain hierarchies of race, class, and gender. Racial slavery provided the legal and social bases for southern social hierarchies, and southerners zealously defended slavery and the other hierarchies which were built upon it. However, the South was not built on racial hierarchies alone. As southern slaveholding men and women at the time recognized, supporting the status of the slave master required that his dominance be recognized in class and gender relations as well. Elite southern women, then, were enjoined to accept their subordination to husbands and fathers and to other male kin as well. The Civil War created challenges to the antebellum social codes in a number of ways. This chapter will outline the major elements of the antebellum social system before going on to track the changes that the war brought to southern households and other social institutions.

The Antebellum Social Order

Though the image of the sprawling plantation continues to dominate our imaginings of the antebellum South, southern slaveholders were a relatively small, elite group. Even those white men and women who benefitted from the unpaid labor of an enslaved workforce were usually not of the “planter” class but instead held fewer than five slaves.¹

¹ James Oakes, The Ruling Race, xvi.
Still, the majority of white southerners supported slavery and backed its fundamental assumptions about the inferiority of people of African descent. Many southern whites who did not own slaves hoped that they would one day enter the slaveholding elite, and slaveholding remained a powerful vehicle for upward mobility during the antebellum years. In addition to these hopes for the future, aspiring smallholders often rented the labor of enslaved people, giving them a direct stake in the continuation of the system.

From the earliest years of the colonial South, the social control of enslaved people was understood by whites to be a community endeavor. Slaveholders and nonslaveholders alike were expected to comply with laws that enforced the color line—laws that prohibited the education of enslaved people, limited their mobility, and defined interracial sexual relationships as illicit—and to participate in community policing through membership in local militias and slave patrols. Southern slaveholding white men and women accepted these responsibilities as the price of membership in a privileged white community. Such membership provided both tangible and intangible benefits, especially to white men. Whites, in contrast to people of African descent, were granted membership in the political and social brotherhood of a relative elite, even as universal white male suffrage expanded the body politic in the early decades of the nineteenth century. White manhood carried with it the privileges of mastery within the home, civic identity, and economic opportunities that were closed to both people of color (increasingly, those who were free

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2 Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 229-233; Despite the diversity of views on slavery in the early nineteenth-century South, anti-slavery voices were silenced by the end of the 1830s. Joy Jordan-Lake, *Whitewashing Uncle Tom’s Cabin: Nineteenth-Century Women Novelists Respond to Stowe* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), xxv. Oakes argues that “by the mid-1830’s, slavery was the only unifying theme of southern politics.” Oakes, *Ruling Race*, 147.
as well as those who were enslaved) and white women. As white male suffrage expanded, therefore, it solidified associations between whiteness and economic and political privilege.

Because of the agricultural economy of the South, the white family constituted the basic unit of economic and political identity in the region to a greater extent than in the North. Primarily agricultural and rural, the South did not develop the ideology of “separate spheres” to the extent that northerners had. This ideology prescribed different realms of activity according to gender; middle-class men were expected to leave the home to earn a living in a marketplace while their women were to become the caretakers of hearth and home, creating a haven from the pressures of social and economic competition. While northern industrialization and urbanization increasingly drew men’s labor out of the household and into the “public sphere,” the southern household continued to serve as the primary site of production in that region. As northern women increasingly became responsible for oversight of the “domestic sphere,” southern white women remained within the realm of the white master. Northern cities and towns provided space for women’s organizations to bloom, often in response to the social needs of the cities, especially the problems of orphaned children and prostitution. However, in the primarily agrarian South, the plantation household existed as an “island,” one in which southern women lived lives defined by isolation. Historians have argued that this isolation impeded the development of potentially political bonds among women and rendered southern women especially subject to the authority of the male head of household. Indeed, as the forces of industrialization and urbanization began to reach into southern life, in the years

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5 Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 38.
leading up to the Civil War, southerners reaffirmed their commitment to the traditional southern social structure and their ties to the patriarchal family unit.

In addition to its rural nature, southern society was preoccupied with the concept of honor, which constituted an important element of the antebellum slaveholding worldview. Honor was a powerful way of organizing social relationships in the Old South, dictating who could be counted as a member of the white elite. As historians Bertram Wyatt-Brown and Kenneth Greenberg have demonstrated, honor was as much a social status as it was a personal ethic guiding behavior. A man or woman of honor must be recognized as such by the wider community, and so reputation was the basis for the status. Honor was also “inseparable from hierarchy,” and the southern honor scheme was one way in which hierarchies of race, gender, and class were established and defended. In its most rudimentary forms, honor was traced back to the ability of white men to protect and control dependent members of their families. The southern honor code placed special emphasis on the chastity of white women. Therefore, elaborate rules about chaperonage often resulted in elite women being confined within the home. Prohibited from traveling abroad—even at short distances—without the presence of a suitable male protector, southern ladies’ world was tightly circumscribed.

Honor constituted another distinction between the social codes of North and South. It had, Wyatt-Brown argues, come to mean domestic and civic virtue as well as internal judgments of one’s own character in the North, while in the South honor continued to “mediate between a rude, sometimes passionate public and a belligerent, self-regarding

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8 Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 4.
manhood.” Southerners continued to identify with more traditional elements of honor that largely faded in the northern states after the American Revolution; honor was inextricably linked to male ferocity, defense of family—including revenge for insults—and the acknowledgment of the community. Because honorable status relied on the consensus of the community, it was jealously guarded and fiercely defended in the public realm.

For southern men, honor necessitated the strict control of familial dependents. Shame befell the man who could not accomplish this task. Because southern honor was outward-looking, southern patriarchs—and would-be patriarchs—strove to live up to community standards of patriarchal control and defense of female dependents. But white women were not without honor of their own. Their claims to honorable status were primarily referential; they inherited the status of their families and male kin. A woman’s honor was measured first by how well she followed the tenets of patriarchy. She was expected to honor and obey her husband, father, and other male kin. In practice, this often meant that women gained status by being faithful, pious, and submissive. Sexual infidelity on the part of women was the greatest threat to a man’s standing, as it implied that he had lost his ability to exercise mastery within his household. But women might also besmirch male honor by being otherwise unruly, by, for example, acting as the “scold” within a marriage or gaining a reputation as a gossip. Evidence that a man could not control his female kin brought the threat of social ostracism, for both the men and women in the disordered household.

Histories of southern domestic relations emphasize the subordinate role of elite women in the family and agree that women played important roles in shoring up the

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11 Ibid., 294.
authority of the slaveholding patriarch. Catherine Clinton summarizes the mutually reinforcing relationship between slavery and gender codes this way: “Patriarchy was the bedrock upon which the slave society was founded, and slavery exaggerated the pattern of subjugation that patriarchy had established.” Elizabeth Fox-Genovese concurred, writing that southern slaveholding women’s “sense of community rested upon a psychological sense of belonging to a proper order.” Fox-Genovese goes on to describe such an order this way: “Relations among household members, like relations among family members, were not equal. Just as the family fell to the authority of the father, the household fell to that of the master, and father and master were one and the same. The man who exercised the two roles drew upon each to strengthen the other: The beneficent paternalism of the father was ever shadowed by the power of the master, just as the power of the master was tempered by the beneficent paternalism of the father.” A well-ordered slaveholding southern household, then, depended upon men and women playing complementary parts: the stern but kind patriarch and the cheerfully submissive helpmeet, respectively.

White women, along with slaves and children, were “expected to recognize their proper and subordinate place and to be obedient to the head of the family. Any tendency on the part of any of the members of the system to assert themselves against the master threatened the whole, and therefore slavery itself.” Slaveholding women complied with the rules implicit in southern household and social hierarchies, and the concept of the household “simultaneously protected, verified, and confined” these women.

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13 Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 100.
14 Ibid., 101.
women who would embody the title of “lady,” lessons regarding their proper comportment were learned early, and “by the time they arrived at their teens, most girls had absorbed the injunctions.”

Ladies were enjoined to be pious, pure, submissive, obedient, graceful, self-abnegating, and bound by duty. Learning and practicing these qualities, elite southern women and girls were assured, would lead to a life of harmony. “We owe it to our husbands, children, and friends to represent as nearly as possible the ideal which they hold so dear,” wrote one southern housewife. On the eve of her marriage, young diarist Lucy Brekenridge feared that hers would not be a happy union, confiding, “I cannot help having some misgivings about my marriage. We won’t be happy—he is too jealous and suspicious, and I too prone to play upon such feelings.” She resolved herself to do her part, however, writing, “I will strive to do my duty at any rate.” On her wedding day, Mary Fries Patterson wrote the last entry of her diary. “My earnest prayer is that I will be blessed with wisdom and strength sufficient to meet all the new cares and responsibilities and be enabled to discharge my duty faithfully.” Elite white women throughout the South confided similar hopes and made similar promises to themselves, their partners, and their communities.

In exchange for the limitations placed on the southern lady, slaveholding women of the South were promised “protection” and adoration by their men. Ladyhood was limited to well-to-do women and was also a privilege of race. Only by accepting the strictures of ladyhood could a southern white woman hope to fully receive the privileges of her racial

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17 As Scott argues, “Women made heroic efforts to live up to what was expected of them.” Scott, The Southern Lady, 7-9.
18 Ibid., 4-21.
19 Caroline Merrick, quoted in Scott, The Southern Lady, 9.
20 Breckenridge, Lucy Breckinridge of Grove Hill, 216.
21 Breckenridge, Lucy Breckinridge of Grove Hill, 218.
22 Mary Fries Patterson, Diary, Typescript, 60, University of North Carolina Special Collections
caste, and southern elite women complied, sometimes grudgingly, in the exchange of submission for privilege. The outspoken slavery defender George Fitzhugh made clear the link between racial and gender subordination, arguing that white women and all people of African descent needed protection from apparently superior white men: "The duty of protecting the weak involves the necessity of enslaving them—hence, in all countries, women and children, wards and apprentices, have been essentially slaves, controlled not by law, but by the will of a superior."²³ Fitzhugh's words highlight what other pro-slavery thinkers also argued—that an orderly society was one of superiors and subordinates. Civilization itself, they contended, rested upon the development and maintenance of certain hierarchical relations of power. As long as each person knew his or her place in social hierarchies, such a society would function smoothly. While white women were not always eager to trade the relative freedom of the belle for the confines of marriage, most ultimately embraced their subordination through marriage.

Religious instruction, as Anne Firor Scott has demonstrated, supported and reinforced the vision of household harmony that demanded women's subordination. Not only did men and society expect women's complete self-denial; God also demanded it.²⁴ In her examination of proslavery antebellum women's literature, Joy Jordan-Lake describes the southern slaveholding worldview as a “theology of whiteness,” which she defines as “a framework that manipulates religious language and ideology to support the economic interests of a white patriarchal culture, including the creation of a deity in its own image:

²³ George Fitzhugh, Cannibals All! or, Slaves Without Masters, ed. C. Vann Woodward (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1960), 28. Even though Fitzhugh was extreme in some of his views (particularly in his embrace of socialism) and was rejected by many in the South, C. Vann Woodward argued that Cannibals All! was enthusiastically received by southern thinkers. Ibid., xxviii.
²⁴ Scott, The Southern Lady, 10-14.
while, male, indifferent to injustice, and zealous in punishing transgression across the racial, gender, and class lines it has drawn.”25 Such a framework melded Biblical interpretations with strict adherence to social categories of race, class, and gender to uphold social hierarchies that demanded that white women accept their own subordination in exchange for a socio-religious understanding of racial superiority.

The years leading up to the Civil War witnessed the growth of a small but vocal minority of mostly northern abolitionists who increasingly challenged the South’s “domestic institution,” prompting newly self-conscious defenses of southern social systems on the part of southern intellectuals and slaveholders. A society beset by outside forces during the antebellum and Civil War years, the South renewed its commitment to a social order that promised stability. As the crisis of war neared, southerners circled the wagons in support of social hierarchies built on the twin foundations of slavery and female subordination.

**The Proslavery Argument, 1831-1860**

The years following the 1831 launch of William Lloyd Garrison’s anti-slavery newspaper, *The Liberator*, witnessed a rapid strengthening of the abolitionist position in the North. As abolitionists attacked the South’s “peculiar institution,” southerners responded by developing vigorous defenses of slavery based on religious and scientific reasoning. The so-called “positive good” defense of slavery replaced an older justification that has been termed the “necessary evil” defense. Proponents of the older defense reasoned that slavery was an economic necessity in the agrarian South, that abolition could

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not be carried out without the risk of “race war,” and that slavery was a “national sin” rather than a sign of southern barbarism. The positive good defense shifted the terms of debate regarding slavery. As the name implies, positive good justifications insisted that slavery was a system that benefited all it touched, including African and African-American slaves. In addition to the obvious economic incentives for slaveholders, enslaved people, went the reasoning, were given religious instruction and were introduced to civilizing influences. As historian Drew Gilpin Faust argues, few southerners expected to persuade northern abolitionists to support slavery; rather, they sought to reaffirm traditional values—stewardship, faith, and order—in the face of rapid social change and to imbue the southern way of life, including slavery, with “transcendent” religious and cultural meanings within the context of a debate about states’ rights. Pro-slavery southern intellectuals used three primary arguments to defend slavery and black subordination. These can be summed up as God, Science, and Benevolence, and they made up the foundations of the positive good defense of slavery.

Pro-slavery thinkers turned first to the Bible in an effort to prove that God sanctioned slavery. Finding evidence for slavery in the Old Testament and no refutation of it in the New, slaveholders assumed that slavery represented the will of God and Jesus Christ. Southern intellectuals favored a view of society as organic, arising from God’s design, and most of them rejected the notion of inalienable universal rights of the individual in favor of a view that men had “an equal and perfect right to the rights and privileges of the status to which they have been assigned.” The idea that each person had

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26 Faust, A Sacred Circle, 112, 131.
27 Ibid., 118.
a defined place with certain rights and liberties helped southern intellectuals maintain that slavery and liberty could, and should, coexist. The liberty of white elites depended upon inequality and was supported by the labor of unfree groups.29 Northern reformism, southerners proclaimed, threatened to undermine the divinely sanctioned social order and, in doing so, to undermine liberty. As Eugene Genovese puts it, "New doctrines dared to raise man to the place reserved for God and thereby threatened moral decay and assaulted church and state, divinely ordained family and social relations, and even God Himself."30 Southern intellectuals responded to northern reformers by reasserting the importance of racial, gender, and class hierarchies. Differentiations in wealth, opportunity, and status were divinely ordained and provided continuity and comfort in an era of rapid social, political, and economic changes. In addition, such hierarchies supported the liberties that white men and social elites reaped from the system and, to the mind of southern intellectuals, allowed for progress to advance in an orderly manner rather than threatening the overthrow of society.

The argument from design was strengthened by what Genovese calls the “historical ubiquity” of slavery.31 As other historians of the South have noted, slaveholders were well versed in ancient history as well as in modern European and American history.32 They saw slavery as a contributing factor to the rise (though not the fall) of Sparta, Greece, and Rome.33 Slavery, then, had been the foundation upon which modern law, society, and government had been founded. Slaveholders’ view of history was teleological and merged

29 Ibid., 11-17.
30 Ibid., 33.
31 Ibid., 20.
32 Fox-Genovese and Genovese, The Mind of the Master Class, 7-8, 305-28, 170-200.
33 Faust, Sacred Circle, 118-120; Genovese, Slaveholders’ Dilemma, 4-7.
with the theological basis for slavery. To their minds, the persistence of slavery from ancient times supported their claims that God approved of the institution. In addition to this line of reasoning, southern apologists looked to the experience of Africans, arguing that in spite of their “proximity to refined nations, [Africans] never even attempted to raise themselves above their present equivocal station in the great zoological chain.”34 In contrast, southern slavery elevated the slave’s “mind and morals” and provided him with “better and more certain food, better clothing, and more kind and valuable attendance when he is sick.”35 For these reasons, slaves represented in the positive good model “the most cheerful and merry people.”36

Southern slaveholders and their spokesmen also used natural science to argue for the racial inferiority of black slaves. Proslavery writer John Henry Hammond declared that “the African, if not a distinct, is an inferior, race, and never will effect, as it never has effected, as much in any other condition as in that of Slavery.”37 In their scientific arguments, proslavery thinkers like Hammond relied on ethnology but ultimately ignored scientific controversies, like that over monogenesis versus polygenesis, in favor of seeing the “natural law” as the expression of God’s divine plan.38 Scientific arguments, then, were made in support of a divine order in which each person and group had a specified “place” in a hierarchy. Ethnologists such as Josiah Nott, a friend of Hammond’s, made clear their

35 Ibid., 51-52.
36 Ibid., 52.
37 Faust, Sacred Circle, 124.
38 Ibid., 123-24.
approval of the application of their scientific work to the proslavery cause; Nott liked to describe his field of study as “niggerology.”

Finally, southern intellectuals built upon religious and scientific foundations for racial hierarchy by developing an ethic of “stewardship” in a system of benevolent “Christian slavery.” They understood northern-style free labor systems, not slavery, as the real “moral evil” in the world of labor. Proslavery writers seized on the troubles of northern workers to argue that free market ideas (of which they generally approved in relation to commodities) degraded humanity when they were applied to the market of labor. Unlike northern industrial workers, they asserted, black slaves were guaranteed a measure of support, at least as far as shelter, clothing, food, and medical care were concerned. And unlike northern capitalists, slaveholders represented an older moral order in which the wealthy assumed direct responsibility for the workers who produced their wealth. Eschewing government interference in either personal or economic affairs, slaveholders rejected northern reformism in favor of patriarchal benevolence for their families, black and white.

Southern slaveholding women played an important role in this conception of slaveholding. Mistresses were figured as the benevolent arm of the slaveholding regime. Whereas the master was to be kind but firm—to rule over household dependents with

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39 Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 76-81. Fredrickson argues that scientific thought regarding the origins of distinct races shifted during the 1840s and 1850s, following the advent of the “American school of ethnology.” Samuel G. Morton, George R. Gliddon, Josiah C. Nott, and Louis Agassiz argued that race represented differences in species rather than different variations of the same species. Slaveholders were able to argue for the permanent difference between black and white people, and they were supported by scientific authority. This new strain of argument co-existed alongside Biblical and historical arguments, despite its apparent contradiction of Christian teachings about a single Creation. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 73-75.


41 Genovese, *Slaveholders’ Dilemma*, 4-8, 17-18.
fairness but with the iron will of a wise patriarch—mistresses were to be responsible for the amelioration of slaves' condition.\textsuperscript{42} Slaveholding women often thought of themselves as caregivers to their servants, taking on the role of plantation nurse and overseeing the production and distribution of clothes and food for the labor force. Though Fanny Kemble was an unusual mistress because of her British birth and ultimate opposition to slavery, her diary provides an idea of the mistress's ameliorative function. She described the nine slaves who had visited her on one day with "their petitions and ailments."\textsuperscript{43} Kemble focused especially on the constant childbearing and poor health of female slaves. The requests that Kemble tried to fulfill ranged from a lighter load of field work, to a piece of meat, to a pair of flannel trousers.\textsuperscript{44} Ultimately, though, mistresses could only expect to act as mediators between favored slaves and the white husband and master. Their ameliorative power, therefore, was limited by the will of the master.

Female reformers such as Lucretia Mott and Angelina Grimke constituted an important part of the abolitionist trend in northern states. The specter of abolitionism combined with the threat of liberated women troubled southern patriarchs, and during the years leading up to the Civil War, plantation women's worlds contracted even tighter as slaveholding men tightened controls over both women and slaves.\textsuperscript{45} Historian Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has argued that, while southerners and northerners were alike in their dread

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{42} Marli F. Weiner, \textit{Mistresses and Slaves}, 72-88.
  \item \textsuperscript{43} Fanny Kemble, \textit{Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839} (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1864), 189.
  \item \textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 189-90.
  \item \textsuperscript{45} Clinton, \textit{Plantation Mistress}, 14. LeeAnn Whites writes that southern remarks about northern "free lovers' was thus a derisive comment alluding to the close relationship between the abolitionists and the feminists in the North and indicates that, in questioning the proper authority of the white male household head, the North threatened to transform that status of all household dependents." This threat, she argues, applied to white men who did not own slaves as well as those who did, and it helped to unite white southerners across class in defense of a brotherhood of independent white men. LeeAnn Whites, \textit{The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia 1860-1890} (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 18-19.
\end{itemize}
of independent rights for women, "southerners espoused a worldview that celebrated the positive virtues of many forms of inequality." Indeed, as historian Cynthia A. Kierner has argued, antebellum southerners created a newly self-conscious and patriarchal defense of slavery that analogized slavery and marriage in order to justify existing social hierarchies as "natural" and represented a renewed commitment to the male master's control over all dependents within the household.

Writer and intellectual Louisa S. McCord, who was extraordinary for her participation in the public discourse surrounding slavery precisely because she was a woman, wrote articles defending the "peculiar institution" largely in the same terms as male intellectuals. However, her gender made her especially effective at arguing for the social importance of hierarchies of race and gender. She explicitly and unapologetically argued that any questioning of the social order—and its racial and gender hierarchies—threatened to unleash total anarchy. In doing so, she linked female subordination to men and black subordination to whites, and warned that the twin evils of abolitionism and feminism threatened to overturn God's plan on earth and to rob white women of their privileged place in southern society. Unlike most women, McCord became a slave owner in her own right as a young unmarried women, when her great-aunt willed forty slaves to her. Slaveholding gave her a more direct stake than that of other women in the system, even before her inheritance of a plantation a decade later. Because she was unmarried, it also gave her an unusual claim to "mastery" at the same time that the definition of mastery was changing, as an element of the positive good defense, to include a stronger emphasis

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46 Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 64.
on paternalism. McCord’s special circumstances, however, did not mean that she was out of the mainstream in her political arguments. Her arguments mirrored those of southern male intellectuals and represented the consensus in the South. Though other southern women avoided the public spotlight, their thinking regarding both slavery and women’s place were in line with McCord’s.

In an article for the *Southern Quarterly Review*, McCord tackled both abolitionism and feminism, arguing that both dangerous “-isms” attempted to undermine the social order.\(^49\) She painted a picture of chaotic physical confrontations between white women and black men as they attempted to climb over each other to reach the political stump, emphasizing that “being indisputably corporeally weaker than Sambo, [ladies] would be thrust into the mud.”\(^50\) To white women who supposed themselves the political equals to men, she posed the question: “Are the ladies ready for a boxing match?”\(^51\) If women insisted on flinging themselves “from the high pedestal whereon God has placed [them],” McCord assured her female readers, they would lose all their privilege and protection and find themselves in the ring with physically stronger men, ensuring that male domination would be effected by brutality.\(^52\) White women’s privilege lay in the “protection” that white men offered them, but only as long as the social order was maintained. Mistresses’ strength, then, lay in their willing subordination to men of their race and class. In this article, McCord acknowledged that the possibility of violence underwrote the entire social order, but that each person enacting his or her god-given “place”—defined by both gender


\(^{50}\) Ibid., 115.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 115-16.

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 111.
and race—ensured the smooth operation of society without recourse to violence. She acknowledged, even celebrated, that women and slaves were tied together in subordination to white men. The implication was that slaves should embrace their proper role in the same way that southern mistresses had, and that mistresses must set the example in their willing subordination to shore up the social order that had, indeed, placed them upon a “pedestal.” Casting feminists and abolitionists as Jacobins, McCord rejected northern-style reformism in favor of the hierarchies upon which she thought all great civilizations rested.\footnote{Fox-Genovese, \textit{Within the Plantation Household}, 286-87.}

Continuing the theme of subordination to white men, McCord compared the terms of inferiority between white women and black men, arguing that women were physically weaker though superior in their own realm of nurture, sacrifice and feeling. Unsurprisingly, the intellectually precocious McCord refused to admit to more than a difference in kind rather than strength of intellect between men and women, writing that “The white man uses [intellect] to subdue his inferior, the negro. . . . Woman’s bodily frame is enough to account for her position. The differences of mind between the sexes we are, ourselves, inclined to regard rather as differences than inequalities.”\footnote{Ibid., 118.} White women were intellectually capable, but only along gendered and racialized lines, possessing such capacities in a way that was different from that of white men, but equally superior to that of slaves.

To this same end, McCord argued for black subordination in terms of intellectual inferiority.\footnote{Ibid., 118-124.} In a review of John Campbell’s \textit{Negro-Mania: Being an Examination of the
Falsely Assumed Equality of the Various Races of Men, McCord combined scientific arguments about the inferiority of people of African descent with her usual argument from design. She accepted the argument for polygenesis but did not dwell on the debate, emphasizing that the “author enters only incidentally upon the question of the origin of the races, and rather turns the force of his argument to prove their inequality.”

The importance of scientific inquiry in this matter, she wrote, was the “discovery and execution of the Almighty behests . . . to second instead of opposing the beautiful order of God’s developed thought in creation.” She made the case for the divine order by noting that while only God can know “why an ass is not a man, or a man an ass,” the fact remained that asses were not men.

Finally, McCord supported slavery by arguing that slavery was the best condition for the slaves themselves, which she looked to history to prove: “Messrs. Sambo, Cuffee, and Co. have continued perfectly satisfied [in slavery] for some four thousand years . . . and their descendants would, most undoubtedly, have so continued” but for the interference of abolitionists. Thus McCord’s essay combined the common defenses of slavery—science, racial difference, history, the amelioration of the black condition, and divine design—without recourse to notions of violence that she so clearly outlined in her essay against women’s rights. Though the threat of violence obviously undergirded southern slavery, McCord chose to ignore it. In this, she followed the lead of other proslavery thinkers who wished to convey a sense of slavery as a “positive good.”

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57 Ibid., 224.
58 Ibid., 226.
59 Ibid., 227.
60 In her public defense of slavery, Louisa McCord echoed the arguments that male intellectuals had been making since the early 1830s. Drew Faust has argued that male intellectuals, a group of five men that she calls the “Sacred Circle,” put the force of their minds behind defending slavery as a way to prove that the life of the mind had value for the South and could no longer be ignored. In defending the southern system of
is against this broader intellectual backdrop that other southern ladies articulated a defense of slavery during the difficulties of war.

Most southern women did not pen public justifications of slavery, but McCord was not alone among slaveholding women in adopting the idiom of black inferiority or in positioning slavery as a “positive good.” Most slaveholding women would have agreed with McCord’s basic assumptions about civilization, hierarchy, gender, and race, and many entered into the same discourse through their private writings. As sectional differences rose to the surface in the decade before the Civil War, southern slaveholding white women confronted northern scrutiny by elaborating on their own visions of a superior southern society. It was not by accident that they did so. Indeed, their secular and religious educations, as well as their encapsulation within elite slaveholding circles, provided the idiom through which to defend social hierarchies and to justify slavery.

Even though most “ladies” abhorred the public spotlight, they carried the discourses of their culture through their lives, as evidenced by their private writings. Susan Cornwall of Georgia took up these same arguments in her diary, arguing that history had shown that Africans had no skills in artistic or intellectual pursuits and that without strict instructions and supervision by whites, black laborers could only be “a tool without a workman, a machine without motive power.” Furthermore, Cornwall clearly outlined the tenets of the slavery, they succeeded in elevating their own place within that society. McCord may have been doing the same kind of work for the dual purposes of justifying slavery and carving out a place for female intellectuals within the public discourse. For her, then, it was especially important to defend all of the hierarchies that held up the southern social system: race, gender, and class. Her insistence that women remain in the place ordained by God allowed her to define a public role for herself without risking the disapproval of her community. McCord’s beliefs were, no doubt, common among men and women of her class, but her unique role as a public intellectual also contributed to her defense of slavery and made it different from—and possibly more effective than—that articulated by other women.

61 Susan Cornwall Diary, January 31, 1861, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.
positive good defense, writing, “If the Abolitionists desire the good of the negro they will let him alone where he can be kindly treated have the gospel preached to him in a way that he can appreciate and understand and ... it may be that in the course of centuries his mental condition will be improved, such will undoubtedly be the case if his present status is not interfered with.” 62 Though Cornwall aspired to become a published poet, she felt the need to justify her own discourse on slavery and politics, assuring anyone who might read her thoughts that “Were I writing for the public eye I would not presume to touch upon it, but I am only penning these sentiments as they occur to my mind.” 63 She condemned northern abolitionist women “who have forgotten their sex and in their immodest love of publicity, have mounted the rostrum.” 64 In this passage that touches on slavery, politics, and gender roles, Cornwall’s diary suggests that she knew well that southern society could only be preserved by the strict observance of gender and race hierarchies. Only when every person knew his or her “place” could the system be protected. McCord, Cornwall and other southern white women like them defended this social hierarchy in private as well as public forums. The rise of abolitionism and the advent of a war fought over slavery compelled white slaveholding women to craft defenses of slavery because they called into question the morality of slaveholding. Their thoughts were articulated in response to anti-slavery pressure, but they were also the result of a lifetime of instruction in the cause of their families, their class, and their race. Bound by a sense of duty in addition to self-interest, slaveholding women defended the southern way of life during the antebellum period.

62 Ibid., January 31, 1861
63 Ibid., January 31, 1861.
64 Ibid., January 31, 1861.
The Fraying of the Antebellum Social Order

In spite of southerners’ commitment to upholding strict social hierarchies, during the upheaval of the Civil War, southern gender and race relations entered a period of flux. The war was often conceived in popular renderings as a contest not only between two systems of labor but also between what constituted “appropriate” and “natural” family forms. Abolitionists seized upon the disruption of black families as a primary evil inherent in slavery, as evidenced most notably by images of slave families on the auction block and by Harriet Beecher Stowe’s emotional portrayal of a slave mother who risks everything to keep her family together. Abolitionists seized upon the disruption of black families as a primary evil inherent in slavery, as evidenced most notably by images of slave families on the auction block and by Harriet Beecher Stowe’s emotional portrayal of a slave mother who risks everything to keep her family together. Northern reformers focused their appeals on the violated bodies of black women, using images of sale and punishment that centered on their naked bodies. Such appeals undercut southern claims about the morality of slavery but also called into question southern white marital and familial relationships. Indeed, as southerners defended hierarchy by analogizing slaves and wives, northerners emphasized the difference between the two by highlighting the debasement and abuse of black women, who were not protected by legal marriage or by the protection that was supposed to attend the legal theory of coverture.

But appeals to family didn’t end with the abolitionists. Rather, in the sectional crisis that culminated in secession and war, white northerners and white southerners portrayed each other as insufficiently or incorrectly gendered. The ideology of separate spheres and female domesticity had emerged in the North along with the rise in wage labor. Free

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65 Amy Dru Stanley, From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation, 22-34.
66 Ibid. 28-34.
labor ideology was intricately tied to “proper” notions of family form, and northerners looking southward envisioned the southern family as disordered—tied to an outmoded and anti-democratic patriarchal form which not only denied women their proper roles in the home but also seemed to undermine southern men’s claims to masculinity. Southern men were imagined as lecherous, brutal, slothful, and drunken, in opposition to the claims of northern manliness, which emphasized thrift, piety, and duty. For their part, southern men imagined northern men as effeminate, cowed by wifely nagging, and lacking economic and political independence. Southerners read free labor ideology as a failure to live up to the prerogatives of white manliness; indeed, northern men were often rendered as “slaves” to an industrial regime.

Likewise, sectional differences over the meanings of “true womanhood” emerged in the antebellum period and lasted throughout the war and post-war period. Northern women inspired by abolitionist rhetoric saw slaveholding southern women as complicit in denying slaves the moral and human imperative of family formation. Northern views of southern white women during the war oscillated between pity for southern women’s subjugation to patriarchy, blame for southern women’s support for the war, and—in the post-war period—as the most arch and fiery Confederates, responsible in some real way for the bloodshed endured during wartime.\(^{68}\) Despite some antebellum changes to the southern family that reflected northern middle-class ideals of affection and

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contractualism—including freer access to divorce and married women’s property rights—at the onset of the war, the South continued to emphasize patriarchal authority and a conception of the family that was rooted in organic relationships of hierarchy. Gender relations provided one idiom by which to articulate sectional tensions. The war was, as one historian has put it, a “crisis in gender.”

Family had meanings beyond the realm of discourse as well. During the war, the white southern family endured a number of serious challenges. The ideal southern family was one modeled on the plantation household, in which a white patriarch ruled with firm benevolence over dependents—white wives and children as well as black men, women, and children, all conceived as childlike by definition of their dependent status. Ideally, elite white women were to remain within the home, though in practice the borders of the home were porous because the household was the site of agricultural business and labor management. The war further elided the realms of home and politics, and in the absence of white men, white slaveholding women became responsible for a wide array of new tasks, including facing down “Yankee invaders,” preparing provisions for soldiers, and overseeing the black labor force. Beyond these tasks, women were often called upon to demonstrate their loyalty to “the Cause,” and so they developed politicized identities that conflicted with their ideal roles. Finally, women were often uprooted by the war, literally thrown out of their homes and forced to oversee refugee flights, sometimes under conditions that resembled the heroic tales southerners were so fond of reading, and often with slaves in tow.

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69 Peter Bardaglio, Reconstructing the Household, xii-xvii.
70 Whites, The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender.
Thus, the shape of the family changed as white men were called away and white women took on new responsibilities at home. Perhaps the most fundamental challenge to the plantation household was embodied in the figure of fleeing or newly freed black men and women. Whether slaves ran away or waited out the war, their emancipation undermined the very foundations of white supremacy in the South, and dramatically changed the meaning of family. Slavery had become, according to historian LeeAnn Whites, “an organic part of the southern household” and “organic to the slaveowners’ very conception of themselves as men and as women, as mothers and as fathers.”\(^7\) The end of slavery would have important implications for the future of the southern “family, black and white.” Though the patriarchal plantation household was undermined by emancipation, southern whites still found ways to use legal mechanisms to transfer control over freed people from the master to the state during Reconstruction.\(^8\)

**Wartime Changes to the Honor Regime**

The war offered ample opportunity for southern white men and women of all classes to access honor in new ways. The martial attributes so highly prized in southern society were on display during the war, and elite white women were active supporters of their male kin during these contests. Slaveholding women also became defenders of family honor in new ways during the war. Still expected to be ladylike and sexually faithful, women also defended southern and male honor by displaying their own patriotism for the southern cause. Called upon to confront enemy soldiers at home, to carry on the work of farms and plantations, and to support southern troops through a variety of means,

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\(^7\) Quoted in Peter W. Bardaglio, *Reconstructing the Household*, p. 118.
\(^8\) Bardaglio, *Reconstructing the Household*, 126.
southern women embraced a type of honor that they were only allowed during times of war.\textsuperscript{73} Bravery replaced docility, and patriotism supplanted women’s supposed apolitical disposition during wartime.\textsuperscript{74} Though it was generally considered unladylike for women to participate in openly political discussions, wartime suspended this stricture, and even southern ladies were encouraged to demonstrate their patriotism.\textsuperscript{75} Elite southern women looked to the example of their revolutionary forbears to provide examples of female patriotism and to justify their own patriotic fervor. Emma Holmes of Charleston favorably recorded the example of “Mrs. Daniel Hall of Revolutionary memory, as staunch a Rebel as ever lived, and whose keen wits and sharp tongue made her noted and feared among the British Officers.”\textsuperscript{76} Holmes, possessing her own sharp tongue in the presence of Union officers, took pride in showing herself to be a great “rebel.”

One of the most satisfying means of patriotic expression for southern women was to treat Yankee soldiers with hostility. Some women held their tongues when confronted with Yankees that “seem to cover the whole face of the earth are like the beetles of Egypt.”\textsuperscript{77} Fannie Dickinson of Richmond recorded in her diary that her “heart rebelled so against them and my blood boiled” when Union soldiers were near, but she vented her anger in her diary rather than toward the Yankees themselves: “I feel whenever I am with any of them, it would do me good to express just what I feel, but of course prudence says, ‘keep silent.’”\textsuperscript{78} Other southern women unleashed their wrath on Federal soldiers as a welcome release.

\textsuperscript{73} Wyatt-Brown, \textit{Southern Honor}, 233-236; Kimberly Harrison, \textit{The Rhetoric of Rebel Women}, 58.
\textsuperscript{74} Wyatt-Brown, \textit{Southern Honor}, 234.
\textsuperscript{76} Holmes, \textit{The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes}, 14.
\textsuperscript{77} Catherine Broun, Diary, November 6, 1862, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.
\textsuperscript{78} Fannie Dickinson, Diary, Typescript, p. 4-5, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.
Virginian Lucy Buck recorded in her diary after one such episode, “Tis so refreshing to abuse someone when you’ve a heart fill of bitterness.” Likewise, after writing that she was so angry she could easily kill the Yankee soldiers in the neighborhood, Emilie McKinley wrote, “my indignation was unbounded . . . I almost cried I was so angry . . . My blood rose immediately to fever heat again. At the supper table we all had quite a war of words.” Even though the white overseer had “told us we would succeed in getting the house burnt,” McKinley and the other young women in the house continued to “sneer” at the soldiers. Countless incidents of such “sneering” and “abusing” transpired between Confederate women and the Union soldiers that they met in their homes, neighborhoods and churches during the war, giving rise to the stereotype of the fiery Confederate woman. This stereotype was given further credence by Union general Benjamin Butler’s famous “Woman Order,” which proclaimed that if any woman in Union-occupied New Orleans “shall by word, gesture, or movement insult or show contempt for any officer or soldier of the United States she shall be regarded and held liable to be treated as a woman of the town plying her avocation.” Butler’s order was meant to impugn Confederate women’s honor and so to prevent them from embodying their newly politicized identities.

White southern women were also expected to support their men who engaged in battle. While ladies on the home front did their part to defend and protect the honor of their families and of the Confederacy, they also energetically supported the martial honor of their kinfolk away in the war. First, women did this by offering up their male kin to the contest. Katherine Cumming was just one of many women who put on a brave face when

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80 McKinley, *From the Pen of a She-Rebel*, 52.
81 Ibid. 31
their men went off to war. Though “my heart died within me,” Cumming exhorted herself “to be brave for his sake.”82 Southern women struggled to do their part by subduing their own fear and sense of loss when their menfolk left to serve the Confederacy. Popular songs and poems with titles such as “I Would Like to Change My Name” and “I’ve kissed Him and Let Him Go” emphasized women’s duty to give up their men with a brave face rather than “unman” them with their tears.83 White southern women sometimes pushed men into war as well, stressing the duty that men must meet by serving. Susan Cornwall of Georgia wrote in her diary, “We nurse no cravens in our southern homes. If I had twenty sons I would give them cheerfully to the service of my Country.”84 Likewise, Kate Stone, saddened by the prospect of yet another brother joining the fight, insisted, “I would not trust any man now who stays at home instead of going out to fight for his country.”85

After women offered up their loved ones upon the altar of the Confederacy, they watched closely to ensure that the sons, brothers, and husbands upheld family honor. The young diarist Lucy Buck recorded her pleasure upon hearing that her brothers serving in the army were establishing reputations as honorable and courageous. She also seemed to breathe a sigh of relief when she confided to her diary that she was “Thankful that I could review the campaign upon which they entered with pleasure and pride, for not one of those we loved had proved recreant, not one fallen by the hand of the foeman. It was more than we could have thought of hoped for.”86 This passage is telling of the place that honor occupied in the elite southern worldview; Buck is first grateful that her family’s honor has

82 Katherine Cumming, quoted in Whites, Civil War as a Crisis in Gender, 31.
83 Faust, Mothers of Invention, 15-18.
84 Cornwall, Diary, January 31, 1861.
85 Stone, Brokenburn, 92.
86 Buck, Shadows on My Heart, 55.
been vouchsafed by her brothers’ conduct and then gives thanks for their continued safety. Though Buck loved her brothers fiercely, her statement is evidence that she had imbibed the lesson of “death before dishonor.” In the face of challenges to the unity of the family circle created by the war, elite white southern women drew upon the strength of traditions such as honor to shore themselves up against wrenching changes.

**Wartime Disruption of Plantation Society**

The Civil War ushered in a period of severe social, political, and economic disruption in the southern states. Social and family life were altered in serious ways. Most notably, increasingly stringent conscription laws meant that, ultimately, about three quarters of white men of military age left home to perform service for the Confederacy.\(^{87}\) When men went to war, women were left at home to carry on the functions of economic and social life. As outlined above, systems of racial and gender hierarchy required every member of society to know his or her “place.” The “one principle” that united southerners across class and race lines in defense of the Confederacy, argues LeeAnn Whites, was “the defense of a common social construction of manhood as largely autonomous and self-directing household heads.”\(^{88}\) However, as the war dragged on and more southern men were called to the front, perhaps never to return, many white southern women adopted elements of household management that had theretofore been defined as part of the male sphere. These women found themselves in positions of greater authority, though many struggled to embody the type of power that the patriarch had wielded over family and enslaved laborers.

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88 Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender*, 18.
For many elite women, financial resources gave them greater options in choosing the type of household that they would live in. Slaveholding women who found themselves left at home upon the departure of husbands sometimes moved into new household forms with other temporarily single women or returned to their parents’ homes. They did this for comfort and protection as well as to pool their financial resources. Many elite women found themselves forced to “refugee” during the course of the war, whether they did this to protect their property, including enslaved labor, by moving it away from the war front or because they were compelled to move by the destruction of their homes or the occupation of their cities. “Refugeeing” was often seen as a choice that could only be made by the well-to-do, and many older residents of refugees’ new communities resisted the pressures on food and housing that resulted from the influx of a sometimes haughty new group. Kate Stone, whose family fled northern Louisiana for Texas during the war, exemplified the refugee attitude that alienated the people in their new communities. For example, upon being invited to a community barbecue, Stone wrote, “We went out, as Mamma said, 'to see the animals feed.'”

For elite white women, little changed in terms of domestic labor during the first years of the war. Occupying a privileged position, southern ladies continued to rely on the work of enslaved people, especially black women, within the home. Their lives, though changed by the anxieties and suffering of war, remained relatively comfortable, though by the war’s end, many found themselves in dire financial circumstances. This relative comfort, according to Drew Gilpin Faust, was the cause of some unease among patriotic Confederate women who felt shut out from the glory, excitement, and purpose that soldiers

89 Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 40-45.
and statesmen enjoyed in the crisis. However, elite women found ways to try and be “useful”: they sewed uniforms, knitted socks, raised money for the troops and for the wounded, and helped to organize and operate hospitals.

In addition to patriotic labor, some elite women found themselves faced with new and difficult tasks as the war dragged on and enslaved people left the master's household behind in a search for a new life. Such women sometimes found new sources of pride in the domestic labor they took on. Eliza Frances Andrews approached domestic labor with cheerfulness. She wrote, “But I can’t say that I altogether regret the change; in fact, I had a very merry time over my work....I don’t think I shall mind working at all when I get used to it.” Not long after this optimistic diary entry, however, Andrews found herself singing a different tune: “I never was so tired in my life; every bone in my body felt as if it were ready to drop out....I don’t find doing housework quite so much of a joke as I imagined it was going to be.” Used to overseeing the labor of others, domestic work came to stand for many elite women as a sign of their own degradation. For elite women who found themselves compelled to take on wage work, teaching was the most available route open to them. Emma Holmes took work as a teacher following the destruction of the family home in a fire. At times, she seemed to take great satisfaction in the independence and purpose that work could provide, as when she wrote that “I am more than ever determined to earn my own livelihood and be independent if possible--to have something to make life worth[while], for this aimless, useless existence is dreadful to me.” At other moments,

91 Faust, Mothers of Invention, 20.
94 Holmes, The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes, 251.
however, Holmes pouted that her students did not always exhibit love and respect for her. After taking a job as a teacher in a private home, she quit the job in disgust. Judith McGuire complained about assaults on her dignity when she took a job in the Confederate Commissary Department. Subjected to the oversight of men young enough to be her sons and compelled to submit to an examination of her mathematical skills, she huffed, “This requirement may be right, but it certainly seems to me both provoking and absurd” but decided that “as it is, must submit with the best grace possible.”95 In the end, she did submit, finding that the salary of $125 per month was worth the affronts.

As the war dragged on, however, mistresses were often confronted directly with evidence that their bondspeople disliked them and would take any chance to secure freedom for themselves and their families. Many slaveholding women initially assured themselves that while neighbors’ slaves might flee to Union lines, their own would remain faithful. This was a psychologically important maneuver that simultaneously affirmed the positive good argument for slavery and warded off fears that good slaveholding families were, after all, not as magnanimous as they believed themselves to be. If slaveholding were righteous and good for all parties, why would slaves use the war as an opportunity to effect their freedom? Perhaps more troubling still, mistresses were often confronted with evidence that enslaved people not only wanted freedom, but that they felt justified in making claims on what mistresses themselves possessed. Slaveholding women’s diaries frequently attest that black women used the war-time weakening of slavery to assert their own equality with their mistresses through a range of behaviors that included donning their clothes, wearing their perfume, moving into their rooms, defying orders, refusing to

95 Judith McGuire, Diary of a Southern Refugee During the War, by a Lady of Virginia (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 144-145.
labor for the white family, and talking back. Kate Stone reported that “while hiding under Lucy's house [Captain Smith] saw her sitting there with Maria before a most comfortable fire drinking the most fragrant coffee. They were abusing Mamma, calling her 'that Woman' and talking exultantly of capering around in her clothes and taking her place as mistress and heaping scorn on her. Capt. Smith says that he never heard a lady get such a tongue-lashing and that Lucy abused the whole family in round terms.”96 Later in the diary, Stone again indicated the importance of personal possessions, both to the mistresses who felt betrayed by their slaves and to the slaves themselves, who evidently invested such possessions with meaning that was significant to casting off the role of slave. “The Negroes,” she wrote, “quarreled over the division of our clothes … Our beds are all in the quarters. Webster, our most trusted servant, claims the plantation as his own.”97

Emilie McKinley described a confrontation between Miss Mary, a slaveholder, and Mary, a slave: “Mary abused her, said she should not have the things [that she had taken], and as for the underclothes she had taken from her, she would burn them up, said she would rather jump into Big Black [River] than live with Mrs. Batchelor again.”98 Diarist Catherine Broun lamented that even her most favored “servants,” “Those their masters had put most confidence in helped save their property informed the Yanks where every thing was they get pistols, guns, and uniforms … I am beginning to lose confidence in the whole race I see a growing inclination to the Yanks in our own servants…It is hard to see them take a stand against us.”99 Slaveholding women frequently decried what they saw as both a betrayal and evidence of “ingratitude” on the part of enslaved people. Their private

97 Ibid., 193
98 McKinley, From the Pen of a She-Rebel, 42.
99 Broun, Diary, May 1, 1864.
possessions, such as clothes, had helped to mark their status as “ladies,” and the transfer of those items to enslaved people undermined such social and racial distinctions.

For women of modest means, the loss of men had immediate effects on their household labor. Such women were required to take up the physical work required to operate small farms while also caring for children and home as they had done before the war. Elite women encountered different demands. For women of the slaveholding class, the new imperatives to exert control over enslaved people—often emboldened by the war to press for new measures of independence—placed them in a difficult situation. While slaveholding women often exercised violence against slaves, especially against enslaved women and children, they usually did so in moments in which their sense of themselves as ladies—benevolent, weak, measured—was temporarily overcome by rage. These episodes of violence were a type of lashing out in moments at which mistresses felt overwhelmed and out of control. Sometimes these episodes shocked the mistresses themselves, and they struggled to maintain a distance from the violence inherent in slavery.

Such women had relied on white men, and sometimes slave men, to enact violence as discipline before the secession crisis and upheaval of war. Ladies did not have access to the authority of the master, and while violence was sanctioned—even celebrated—on the part of men, the exercise of violence threatened to “unsex” women. However, as the war disrupted mistresses’ access to white men, slaveholding women became responsible to a new degree for the management and discipline of the slave labor force. They often found this to be a profoundly stressful experience, and they struggled to maintain order on plantations and even within households. Mastery and violence were gendered male, and southern elite women found performing mastery to be an often impossible, and always
frustrating, task. “Master’s eye and voice,” in the words of Catherine Edmondston, “are much more potent than mistress.”

Southern women, to put it another way, were charged with maintaining a patriarchal system despite the widespread absence of patriarchs. Secession called up slaveholding women’s loyalty to men of their race and class “not only because they were reared to a common set of values, but also because a threat to the powers of the male household head constituted a threat to their place within the household more generally.”

Taking on the responsibility of supporting southern race and gender hierarchies sometimes compelled elite women to act in ways that contradicted their notions of themselves as proper ladies. Patriotism helped them to bridge the ideological gap between what was expected of them as ladies and what would be expected of them as patriots in wartime.

For many southern women, the responsibilities of the wartime home front did not end with the cessation of hostilities in 1865. At least one in five southern men of military age never returned from the conflict. The death toll of the Civil War outstripped anything that Americans had ever experienced. In addition to coping with the loss of life and, perhaps more trying for some women, the return of physically and psychologically broken men, thousands of southern women had to try and take the place of fathers, husbands, and sons lost to the war. For these women, there could be no comforting return to the way things had been before the war. Regional poverty affected even the most elite

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100 Faust, Mothers of Invention, 53-79.
101 Ibid., 56.
102 Whites, The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender, 31.
103 Drew Gilpin Faust, This Republic of Suffering, xi.
families, and daughters and wives struggled to keep body and soul together in the absence of productive males even as they faced uncertain political, social, and personal futures.

Despite the conservative South’s efforts to preserve a way of life that was ordered by the seemingly natural categories of race and class, the Civil War ushered in a period of profound disruption. All of the changes wrought by war—the absence of white men, the disruption of family life, the loss of wealth and status, the war’s toll in death and destruction, and the management of increasingly recalcitrant—and then freed—slaves—threw into question some of the South’s most cherished traditions and social institutions for women on the home front. The following chapters will outline how they confronted doubts about southern gender roles, the institution of slavery, questions about the righteousness of the southern cause, and about the honor of the southern people within the context of wartime upheaval.
CHAPTER 2
MASTERY AND VIOLENCE: THE DIARY OF EMMA HOLMES

Born into a slaveholding family in Charleston, South Carolina, Emma Holmes had been raised in a privileged setting, benefitting from the wealth of her family and from the labor of enslaved people. Holmes had imbibed the pro-slavery and pro-secession politics of her home state. She was twenty-two years old when she began keeping a diary as a record of the crises of secession and war. A fierce Confederate, she equaled the fiery rhetoric of her state’s politicians, and she defended the South’s right leave the Union and establish a separate nation.

On March 12, 1863, Holmes confided a startling event to her diary. Margaret, a Holmes family servant, then living with Holmes’s sister Carrie and brother-in-law Isaac, had become so “negligent” and “impertinent” that Isaac was finally forced to punish her, at Carrie’s request.

[Isaac,] always so kind and thoughtful even towards a servant, would not [punish Margaret] during the day so as not to disgrace her before the other servants but took her after dark to an extreme end of the garden, intending to reprimand her and with a light strap gave her two or three cuts across her shoulders. She tore away from him with one wrench, tore off all her clothing, which must have been previously loosened purposely, and to his astonishment sprang into the creek.¹

Margaret stood waist-deep in the waters before plunging head first into the creek and drowning. Isaac, Carrie wrote home, was disconsolate, accusing himself of “undue severity.”² After a few days, Margaret’s body was found, and Isaac insisted on an

² Ibid., 238.
examination "by physicians and other gentlemen” to prove that she had not been abused.³

“Again,” wrote Holmes, “that terrible anguish swept over [Isaac’s] soul—that the public
might think him the cause of her death. Poor fellow, to have his peace of mind destroyed by
the blind rage of such a creature is too dreadful.”⁴

Like other elite southern women, Holmes turned to her ostensibly private diary to
work through contradictions and crises in her life. In this chapter, I examine Emma
Holmes’s story of Margaret’s death and highlight moments of elision and contradiction to
demonstrate that Holmes’s account served the purpose of reassuring herself of the honor
and righteousness of the southern slaveholding classes. Her narrative was an attempt to
justify slavery and to defend the honor of her male kin and of her class when she was faced
with evidence of violence that called this honor—and slaveholding in general—into
question. Confronted with evidence that violence underwrote the system of slavery,
Holmes faced some unsettling implications. Margaret’s death and its attendant evidence of
coercion raised the possibility that Holmes’s privilege was not earned or deserved but was
stolen from the labor of people of African descent. It also suggested that slavery was a
system that promoted the abuse of these same people and so that it was not a noble
institution but an immoral one. Finally, if slavery was not the “positive good” that its
defenders claimed it to be, what could be the wisdom of fighting a war to preserve it?
These implications fostered an ideological crisis for Holmes. How could she make sense of
Margaret’s death while defending slavery and maintaining zealous support for the
Confederacy? It was this disjuncture between what Margaret’s death implied and the
ideology of southern righteousness and white supremacy that propelled Holmes to her

³ Ibid., 238.
⁴ Ibid, 237-238.
diary. In that private space, she struggled to work through that disjuncture between ideology and experience, crafting a narrative that upheld the ideologies of white supremacy and the righteousness of slaveholding in which she and her family were so invested.

White Mistresses and Slaveholding Violence

In southern slaveholding ideology, white mistresses figured as angels of mercy ministering to their enslaved people's physical and spiritual needs. In this conception, such women had to be removed from the exercises of violence that were necessary to hold a race of people in captivity. Ideologies of class, gender, and white supremacy combined to render violence all but invisible in the slaveholding ideology of the South. Mistresses were deeply uncomfortable with the exercise of quotidian violence, and these diarists did not often write about their own use of violence as discipline. An example from the diary of Sarah Morgan illustrates that violence was considered inappropriate for women. As Morgan recounted, a young mistress, Anna, slapped her slave Malvina in a fit of frustration. Soon after, Morgan observed Anna in the polite setting of the parlor, writing,

Her hands reposed so innocently in her lap, I was inclined to believe that she was not the same girl who had so unnecessarily slapped her little maid before going down....Malvina, with her cheek still tingling with the slap of her ungrateful mistress [helped Morgan get dressed].... [Malvina] would break her neck for me, while, strange to say, she would rather disobey Anna than to eat her dinner.5

In this episode, Morgan highlighted that the implicit social contract between mistress and slave—that obedience would be met with benevolence—had broken down between Anna and Malvina. Anna was unjustifiably violent with her maid, who responded with

insubordination. In pointing out that Anna’s exercise of violence was illegitimate, Morgan implied that there were other ways of exercising violence, as discipline, the would have been more acceptable, but she also juxtaposed Anna’s ladylike demeanor in the parlor with her savage manner upstairs, signifying that “ladies” controlled their tempers and did not command respect through the use of violence.

As discussed in the previous chapter, violence was considered unwomanly. This is not to say, however, that mistresses did not regularly resort to violence when faced with resistance by enslaved people. Especially within the space of the “big house,” slaveholding women often lashed out at slaves, resorting to violence, often against other women. Ida Henry’s mistress could be volatile, erupting into violence for even slight failures on the part of her slaves to anticipate and meet her needs. In one instance, the mistress’s erratic temper expressed itself when a servant undercooked the potatoes for a meal. The mistress picked up a fork and put out the cook’s eye. Mistresses often indulged fits of rage, using whatever implement was handy—a hand, a whip, a fire poker, a fork—to retaliate for perceived incalcitrance, incompetence, or “uppityness.”

**Slave Perspectives on Female Slaveholding Violence**

Former slaves’ narratives also suggest that white mistresses struggled with enacting violence, sometimes enlisting men to exercise it on their behalf and other times lashing out on their own. These narratives call into question the popular southern trope of mistresses as angels of mercy. Mattie Jackson recounted that during the war, as Union troops took over the town where she lived in slavery, her mistress became very agitated about the

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6 Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 309.
changes that Union troops brought with them. "The days of sadness for mistress were days of joy for us. We shouted and laughed to the top of our voices. My mistress was more enraged than ever." Jackson's mistress lashed out, "constantly pulling our ears, snapping us with her thimble, rapping us on the head." The mistress also, at other moments, insisted that her husband mete out violence on her behalf. Jackson noted that as the prospects for Confederate victory became increasingly dark, her mistress became more and more enraged and violent. "She, in a terrible range [sic], declared I should be punished that night. I did not know the cause, neither did she. She . . . selected a switch. She placed it in the corner of the room to await the return of her husband at night for him to whip me." In another instance shortly thereafter, the mistress "flew into a rage and told [the master] I was saucy, and to strike me, and he immediately gave me a severe blow with a stick of wood." Jackson's experience was typical, at least as far as the relationship between slave women and their mistresses was concerned. For most slaveholding women, claims to ladyhood acted as a loose rein against the worst of their tempers. Even when they removed themselves from the direct means of violence, however, slaveholding women could be cruel and brutal. Slave narratives testify that mistresses could be as mean as masters, but they also indicate that slaveholding women often preferred to enlist husbands to do the work of punishment in their stead.

Elizabeth Keckley described her mistress as a woman who had a "cold, jealous heart" and resented Keckley's presence, writing that she "seemed to be desirous to wreak

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8 Ibid., 10
9 Ibid., 15
10 Ibid., 16
vengeance on me for something,” though it was not clear what her offense had been.11

“During this time,” Keckley wrote, “my master was unusually kind to me; he was naturally a
good-hearted man, but was influenced by his wife.”12 One Saturday, to Keckley’s surprise,
one of her master’s guests announced, “Lizzie, I am going to flog you...so take down your
dress this instant.”13 “Recollect, I was eighteen years of age, was a woman fully developed,
and yet this man coolly bade me take down my dress. I drew myself up proudly, firmly, and
said: ‘No, Mr. Bingham, I shall not take down my dress before you. Moreover, you shall not
whip me unless you prove the stronger.”14 Keckley resisted as Mr. Bingham attempted to
tie her, but he eventually succeeded and tore her dress away. “With steady hand and
practiced eye he would raise the instrument of torture, nerve himself for a blow, and with
fearful force the rawhide descended upon the quivering flesh...The terrible, excruciating
agony of those moments.”15 The next week, Mr. Bingham again attempted to tie and whip
Keckley, and again she resisted, telling him she was “ready to die” rather than be
“conquered.” This time Bingham beat her with a heavy stick. “Again,” she writes, “I went
home sore and bleeding, but with pride as strong and defiant as ever. The following
Thursday, Mr. Bingham again tried to conquer me, but in vain. We struggled, and he struck
me many savage blows,” but he finally burst into tears and “declared that it would be a sin
to beat me any more”16 Hardly the story of a contented and submissive slave, Keckley’s
story emphasizes her own defiance and resilience, but it also highlights the indirect role
that mistresses sometimes played in the violence that was visited upon their bondspeople.

11 Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes, or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House* (New York:
12 Ibid., 32.
13 Ibid., 33.
14 Ibid., 33.
15 Ibid., 34.
16 Ibid., 37.
Even though the mistress didn’t whip Keckley, this story suggests that she was behind the beatings that Keckley endured. Pre-war narratives like Keckley’s gave the lie to southern ideological constructions that painted white mistresses as benevolent agents. They also highlight that violence was difficult for women to marshal on their own behalf. Given gender codes that rendered violence as a male domain, white mistresses struggled to exert control over enslaved people while also maintaining a sense of themselves as benevolent.

Like Keckley, Lucy A. Delaney emphasized her own resistance to corporal punishment, and her story also demonstrates that mistresses preferred to use the power of the master to enact violence against enslaved people. Delaney’s mistress, Mrs. Mitchell, became angry and threatened to whip Delaney severely. In response, Delaney declared, “You have no business to whip me. I don’t belong to you,” explaining in her narrative that “I always had a feeling of independence” because her mother had “so often told [her] that . . . [she] should not die a slave.” Mrs. Mitchell, however, was bound to carry out her threat of whipping me. I rebelled against such government, and would not permit her to strike me; she used shovel, tongs and broomstick in vain, as I disarmed her as fast as she picked up each weapon. Infuriated at her failure, my opposition and determination not to be whipped, Mrs. Mitchell declared she would report me to Mr. Mitchell and have him punish me.

When Mr. Mitchell refused, “the woman raved” and insisted that Delaney be sold, to which Mr. Mitchell acquiesced. In the end, though, Delaney “was just as determined not to be

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18 Ibid., 27.
19 Ibid., 28. Walter Johnson demonstrates that the threat of resale, especially into the Deep South, was used by slaveholders to control the behavior of enslaved people. Threats of sale, then, marked another kind of violence at the disposal of slaveholders. Walter Johnson, Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 23, 112.
sold as I was not to be whipped” and ran away.\textsuperscript{20} The episode between Delaney and her mistress illustrates the difficulty that mistresses often faced when attempting to punish enslaved people who refused to be subjected to punishment. Though Delaney’s mistress lashed out on her own, she ultimately sought the authority of the master to bring Delaney under control.

In his autobiography \textit{Twelve Years a Slave}, Solomon Northup recounts the double bind of a slave woman named Patsey. Forced into a sexual relationship with her master, Patsey was the object of special hatred and jealousy on the part of her mistress. Patsey, Northup wrote, “wept oftener, and suffered more, than any of her companions” because “it had fallen to her lot to be the slave of a licentious master and jealous mistress. She shrank before the lustful eye of the one, and was in danger even of her life at the hands of the other, and between the two, she was indeed accursed.”\textsuperscript{21} Patsey was in constant danger of being abused by both her master and mistress. She “walked under a cloud. If she uttered a word in opposition to her master’s will, the lash was resorted to at once, to bring her to subjection; if she was not watchful when about her cabin, or when walking in the yard, a billet of wood, or a broken bottle perhaps, hurled from her mistress’s hand, would smite her unexpectedly in the face.”\textsuperscript{22} Patsey was, truly, “the enslaved victim of lust and hate.”\textsuperscript{23}

Northup used Patsey’s experience to indict slavery by implicating both master and mistress in scenes of brutality. Patsey was in danger both when her master and mistress were on good terms and when they were not. When the mistress prevailed with her

\begin{footnotes}
\item[20] Ibid., 29.
\item[22] Ibid., 189
\item[23] Ibid., 189
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husband, Epps “would whip [Patsey], merely to gratify the mistress.” When she could not, she was likely to lash out against Patsey in her own right. Mistress Epps, “not naturally such an evil woman,” was kind to all the slaves except for Patsey, but she was driven by her jealousy, anger, and sense of helplessness to lash out at the victim of Epps’s sexual aggression because to address his infidelity with her husband was a futile venture. Northup wrote of the angry exchanges between husband and wife:

Sometimes the current of her wrath turned upon him whom she had just cause to hate. But the storm of angry words would pass over at length, and there would be a season of calm again. At such times, Patsey trembled with fear, and cried as if her heart would break, for she knew from painful experience, that if mistress should work herself to the red-hot pitch of rage, Epps would quiet her at last with a promise that Patsey should be flogged—a promise he was sure to keep.

In other cases in which the master became violent with his bondspeople, Mistress Epps made efforts to protect the enslaved people against his wrath, and so to live up to the figure of the stereotypical benevolent mistress. In one such case, Epps became drunk and stabbed a slave man and was “censured” by his wife, who “denounc[ed] his inhumanity.” However, in the case of violence against Patsey, the mistress became the silent but approving spectator of such cruelty. Distancing themselves from the direct exercise of violence allowed mistresses to maintain the fiction that they were not responsible for such violence. Instead, they continued to believe that they represented the benevolent influences of slaveholding.

24 Ibid., 197
25 Ibid., 200.
26 Ibid., 253.
Exerting Mastery Through Slaveholding Violence

Slaveholding women’s diaries reveal that for women, exercising mastery both before and during the war was a trying experience. During the crises of secession and war, with the added pressures on all members of the slaveholding household, tempers sometimes raged and erupted into violence. Keziah Brevard admitted that “the deception of my servants disheartens me—Oh it almost makes me hate them when I find out their feelings to me—with all I have done for them—they seem at times to hate me as though I had satan’s principles in me….it has been my constant desire to make my negroes happy—and I am every now and then awakened to the fact that they hate me.”27 Brevard’s anger grew at least in part from the sense that her slaves were ungrateful for the many ways she believed she demonstrated her benevolence. Like many mistresses, Brevard believed herself to be the ameliorative agent in the system of slavery. Popular southern defenses of slavery stressed the mutual love and loyalty between master and slave, but women were especially enjoined to act as the benevolent arm of slaveholding power.

In a situation of mutual hatred like that in Brevard’s home, it is hardly surprising that mistresses found discipline a perennial problem. Hampered in the exercise of violence by her gender, Brevard suggested in a later entry that she would have a male relative discipline the slave man Jim, “Ever since Jim’s daring impudence to me…I am not satisfied—I do not think I ought to let it pass without punishment…I am determined to tell James H. of it—and let him act on it—I have always thought Jim was deep in his maneuvers—cautious and cowardly—and I think would be a dangerous negro if not rightly managed”28

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28 Ibid., 89
of her conviction that Jim presented a dangerous problem for the social control of the enslaved people in her household, Brevard resisted becoming directly responsible for his discipline, passing that responsibility off to white male kin. Whether mistresses believed in the bonds of love and loyalty between slave and master, as Sarah Morgan did, or they acknowledged feelings of anger and distrust, as Keziah Brevard did, southern white women struggled to perform mastery, especially as wartime conditions increased tensions.

White women were enjoined to be the benevolent arm of the slaveholding regime, but their tempers often got the better of them, driving them to either lash out directly or to employ male kin to do the work of violence on their behalf. Such episodes of violence on the part of mistresses gave the lie to the myth of slavery as a benevolent institution and a “positive good” for both white and black. During the war itself, however, with its attendant loss of white men within the household, mistresses’ violence also created ideological conflict for slaveholding women. If slavery was coercive rather than benevolent, if mistresses and masters were cruel rather than paternalistic, how could mistresses make sense of the sacrifices of a war fought for slavery’s preservation? Some of them, as we will see, doubled down on ideological defenses of slavery during the war as a way to ward off troubling implications about the entire system. Doing so often required them to ignore evidence of violence and mistreatment on the part of the master class.

Faced with episodes of violence during the war, some women turned to their diaries to work through the implications and to reassure themselves that violence was unfortunate but necessary in the context of the war. For example, Eliza Andrews wrote about one of her sister’s enslaved men that he

refused to obey the overseer, and ran away four times. A soldier caught him and brought him in this morning with his hands tied behind him. Such sights
sicken me, and I couldn’t help crying when I saw the poor wretch, though I know discipline is necessary, especially in these turbulent times, and sister is sending him to jail more as an example to the others than to hurt him. She has sent strict orders to the sheriff not to be too severe with him, but there is no telling what brutal men who never had any negroes of their own will do; they don’t know how to feel for the poor creatures.29

In this passage, Andrews demonstrated concern for the slave man, revealing that she was troubled by the sight of force being used against him. However, she cast the blame for undue severity at the feet of “brutal men,” men who had not been raised in the elite slaveholding world and so suffered from a class-based lack of compassion or gentleness. Recording the “sickening” sight allowed Andrews to acknowledge violence but to shield herself, her family, and her class from any charges of brutality. Her account served as a means by which to acknowledge a troubling reality without taking responsibility for it.

A later entry, however, demonstrates that Andrews was less concerned about violence against enslaved people than about the loss of racial and class status that may attend their emancipation. She wrote that a white man had shot a black man for stealing but had “not hurt” him. She went on to complain that “Negroes may kill white men whenever they please, provided the white man wears not a blue coat, but woe to the white man that touches a negro!”30 This passage reveals that as the war dragged on, violence took on different meanings for Andrews. In light of the Union occupation and ensuing black freedom, violence on the part of white men became not a tragedy but a necessary and justified part of life. Andrews implied that it was the very same white men enacting violence who were actually being stripped of their rights. In her anger over the changes that the war had brought to her way of life, Andrews accepted white male violence as part

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30 Ibid., 123
of the price of the war and of southern defeat. Andrews’ diary allowed her to work through the potentially troubling knowledge of violence against enslaved people, first by proclaiming her own innocence and that of her family and class and then by turning the tables, so that violence visited by white upon black could actually be rendered as a form of self-defense when Yankee law refused to protect the white inhabitants of the South.

**Wartime Defenses of Slaveholding Ideology**

In addition to the challenges of trying to control an increasingly unruly labor force, southern mistresses felt compelled to craft newly self-conscious ideological defenses of slavery as the “domestic institution” during the war. Susan Cornwall’s pre-war mentions of slavery in her diary touched on her daily routine and frustrations. One such entry reads, “Antony and Jack have been sticking my peas...I left off writing to see to it and found it done very carelessly, so I made them do all over again. –had to scold a little as usual...May I have patience with my children and servants and all else.”

During the secession crisis, however, Cornwall shifted from the quotidian aspects of slave management to philosophical justifications that elaborated the positive good defense of slavery, arguing that slaves were “the happiest laboring people on the globe” under the kind guidance of their masters. She argued that history had shown that Africans had no skills in artistic or intellectual pursuits and that without strict instructions and supervision by whites, black laborers could only be “a tool without a workman, a machine without motive power.”

Furthermore, Cornwall clearly outlined the tenets of the positive good defense, writing, “If the Abolitionists desire the good of the negro they will let him alone where he can be kindly

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31 Cornwall, Diary, March 7, 1857.
32 Ibid., February 12, 1861.
treated have the gospel preached to him in a way that he can appreciate and understand and ... it may be that in the course of centuries his mental condition will be improved, such will undoubtedly be the case if his present status is not interfered with.”

Cornwall, like other slaveholding women, became increasingly self-conscious about slavery during secession and war, and crafted defenses that placed benevolence at the heart of the system of slavery. Elite, white slaveholding women had only rarely defended slavery in such explicit terms before the war forced the issue into the nation’s consciousness in more sustained ways. It was the crisis of secession and war that pushed women to pick up their pens and craft justifications of slavery in such explicit terms.

Cornwall engaged in an ongoing dialogue between North and South, one in which southerners responded to northern critiques of slavery by developing positive good justifications. She used her diary to craft a rebuttal to “Black Republican” and abolitionist indictments of slavery, but other women of her class often turned to their diaries to pen reassurances about slaves’ love and loyalty, especially as evidence mounted that enslaved people were anxious to claim their freedom through work stoppages, defiance, and simply leaving their mistresses. Diaries reveal, then, two distinct reasons that diarists reiterated the positive good defense of slavery that stressed benevolence and loyalty: first, such a defense provided justification for what was a frightening and often emotional break from the Union; second, reassurances about the reciprocal affections between masters and slaves served to mitigate fears of slave violence and abandonment in the midst of war, fears such as the one Keziah Brevard confided to her diary, writing, “I wish I could feel as free from fear at all times as I do tonight—it is dreadful to dwell on insurrections—many an

33 Ibid., January 31, 1861.
hour have I laid awake in my life thinking of our danger.” 34 When slaves did seek freedom away from the families of their masters, mistresses often blamed northern abolitionists and Republicans for turning enslaved people’s heads with false promises about what freedom would mean, as did Eliza Andrews when she wrote, “Mammy has always been more like a member of the white family than a negro. Except Uncle Osborne, Big Henry is the most shining instance of fidelity that has come under my observation…. ‘Well done, good and faithful ones.’” 35 In addition to praising loyal slaves, Andrews wished to cast blame on abolitionists, writing, “In black contrast to Big Henry’s shining example, is the rascality of Aunty’s . . . old Uncle Lewis . . . But now see the debasing effects of the new regime in destroying all that was most good and beautiful in these simple-hearted folk . . . [Lewis] runs off to the Yankees with a pack of lies against his mistress.” 36 Likewise, Keziah Brevard’s diary suggested both confidence in enslaved people and the fear that they would be corrupted into seeking their freedom when she wrote,

Amy Adams thinks our slaves will be faithful to us in the crisis should it come—I think we all have some, the fewest in No., who would not butcher us—but I am sure most of them would aim at freedom....O that God would take them out of bondage in a peaceable way—let no blood flow—we are attached to our slaves—they are as our own family and would to day have been a happy people if Northern fanaticism had not warred against us. 37

Slaveholding white women used their diaries to try to come to terms with troubling new realities during the war, which included the possibility that enslaved people would seek their freedom from their supposedly benevolent mistresses. Such an idea not only enraged some of these mistresses, but undermined their ability to buy

34 Brevard, A Plantation Mistress on the Eve of the Civil War, 54.
36 Ibid., 114-115.
37 Brevard, A Plantation Mistress on the Eve of the Civil War, 70.
into an idea such as the positive good defense of slavery. Diaries provided space in which slaveholding women could name their fears and then attempt to rationalize them away.

Another example is found in the diary of Emma Holmes. At the beginning of the diary, enslaved people were very rarely mentioned, reflecting Holmes’s feelings of security regarding slavery at the start of the war. As long as slavery was not in jeopardy, enslaved people represented part of the background, or landscape, of Holmes’s mental environment. When slaves did appear, they were generally nameless, referred to only in a generic way, as in a March 1862 entry: “The only thing we had to break the quiet of the evening was Hattie’s horse, throwing him [the unnamed servant]. He flew into the air, took a somersault and rolled over on his back in a pool of water till his head went under. The scene was so comical we laughed till we cried, and the woods rung [sic] with our merriment.”38 In this scene, the slave man was unnamed, and Holmes and her friends were concerned with him only insofar as he provided a bit of entertainment.

However, the presence of slaves in the diary increased—and their roles in Holmes’s narrative changed—as Holmes became more sensitive to critiques of slavery and to the possibility that the system might be destroyed. Enslaved people became more visible to Holmes not only as slavery itself was increasingly insecure but also as African Americans took on new roles in southern life. During the war, Holmes and other diarists of her class were increasingly forced to grapple with new forms of labor as slaves ran away or families were forced into tighter living arrangements upon becoming refugees. In addition, the

38 Holmes, The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes, 140.
presence of armed black soldiers was felt by white southerners as a direct threat not only to slavery but to personal safety.

In response to growing anxiety over slavery itself, Holmes used some entries to affirm the honor and benevolence of slaveholders in the face of conflicting evidence. In others, she exalted certain enslaved people as particularly affectionate and loyal. After the Holmes’ house in Charleston was burned and the family was forced to move into more cramped quarters in Camden, South Carolina, Holmes turned her attention to slaves in a more sustained way. Instead of nameless “servants,” enslaved people took on individual characteristics, and some of them actually earned her praise for faithful and loyal service to their masters:

Yesterday Caesar, the faithful servant of Lieut. Pringle...came round....He is quite an intelligent man, very respectful and perfectly devoted to Hugh. [Pringle] died the next day in Caesar’s arms as quietly as an infant going to sleep; so gently that Caesar could not believe it...He always speaks of [the Confederate Army] as 'our mess, our battery, our division, etc.' as if he was a soldier himself, yet so respectful and so entirely without that pomposity which is so apt to characterize the negroes who have been traveling and to the wars....Would that we had many more Caesars...He also observed 'that there was as much difference between those Union people, who called themselves ladies, and our Southern ladies, as if they were of another color.'

Even though this story marked a point at which Holmes’ handwriting became smaller to conserve her dwindling paper resources, she devoted considerable space to this story. Caesar became important to her sense of slavery in a positive way, acting as proof of the efficacy of benevolence in creating a stable and exceedingly positive social relationship between master and slave. Caesar represented the ideal slave to Emma because his loyalty and even love had been proven. She even attributed qualities such as intelligence to him

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39 Ibid., 237-239.
40 Ibid., 203-205.
because he so adeptly played his role as adoring servant, one who knew his place and was content to remain in it. Finally, Caesar’s reassurance that “ladyhood” was exclusive to southern women suited Holmes’ sense of the social order and reaffirmed her place in it.

Caesar’s deference to his master and to the master class in general supported Holmes’ sense of slavery as a benevolent institution. Testaments to loyal slaves served a dual purpose in Holmes’s diary: by reaffirming lasting affective bonds between enslaved people and slaveholders, these stories both refuted antislavery critiques and served to soothe Holmes’s own fears about an increasingly unmanageable slave population.

Confronted with evidence of slave recalcitrance and running-away as the Union Army made deeper inroads into the South, Holmes responded by affirming for herself that enslaved people would truly act as members of the family, black and white.

Both types of entries—those about both benevolent masters and loyal slaves—served to vindicate the system of slavery but also reveal that mistresses struggled to make sense of evidence that slavery may not have been the benevolent social order that its defenders proclaimed it to be and also that its security was not assured. These reflections and affirmations were important to mistresses, who drew their identity in large part from the class and race privilege that grew from slaveholding. Questioning the righteousness of slavery as a system also risked raising questions about the wisdom of fighting a war to protect it. Because elite southern women’s lives were repeatedly touched by the tragedy of losing friends, family members, and property in the war, this type of questioning contained the possibility that such death and destruction were for nothing. I suggest that mistresses avoided this line of inquiry because the psychological toll would have been too difficult to bear.
Southern women, then, used their diaries to reassure themselves of their own benevolence, the love and loyalty of at least some slaves, and the hopes that slavery could be maintained if the influence of abolitionists could be confined to the northern states. Their diaries reflect both important ideological trends in southern thought during the war and the psychological needs of the writers themselves. Faced with serious wartime threats to slavery, southern women used their diaries to work through their fears and to reaffirm what they had been taught to believe about the system of slavery and about their own place within it. The slaveholding classes of the South were deeply invested in fighting a war to preserve slavery. Evidence that slavery was a system rooted in violence and coercion rather than in reciprocal relations of affection and obedience threatened to undermine support for the war and confidence in the righteousness of the Confederacy. In this context, diaries became important tools for slaveholding women who struggled with new realities during the war.

Revisiting Margaret’s Death

In the story that began this chapter, Emma Holmes used her diary to work though the troubling events surrounding Margaret’s death. She wrote,

Margaret had become so excessively negligent and indifferent to her duties and withal so impertinent that Carrie asked Isaac to punish her. He, who is always so kind and thoughtful even towards a servant, would not do so during the day so as not to disgrace her before the other servants but took her after dark to an extreme end of the garden, intending to reprimand her and with a light strap gave her two or three cuts across her shoulders. She tore away from him with one wrench, tore off all her clothing, which must have been previously loosened purposely, and to his astonishment sprang into the creek. He called to her to come out, for she stood waist deep, and [then he] stepped behind a tree. Without answering she plunged head foremost and he only saw her head rise . . . None dreamed of such a demoniac temper, for as long as we had had her about us, often punishing her
necessarily in various ways, it had never been shown to any of us. It put poor Isaac nearly crazy, for he blamed himself as the cause of her suicide, accusing himself of undue severity. Carrie says she hopes never to spend such another awful night—to see a strong man bowed with fearful anguish, weeping like a little child and accusing himself almost as a murderer—[it] was too terrible . . . Her body was not found for two or three days, then Isaac had it examined by physicians and other gentlemen to prove that there was no mark of violence, then staid [sic] himself to see her buried. But it was too much for him. Again that terrible anguish swept over his soul—that the public might think him the cause of her death. Poor fellow, to have his peace of mind destroyed by the blind rage of such a creature is too dreadful . . . the shock has been so dreadful to Isaac and Carrie—poor fellow, my heart aches for his suffering. The more I think of it, the more extraordinary the whole thing is—it seems like a nightmare.41

The circumstances of Margaret’s death called into question the benevolence of slaveholders and the honor of Holmes’s male kin. Her narrative raises a number of questions for the historian, as the story seems suspicious for several reasons. Why did Isaac want to punish Margaret away from the prying eyes of black and white members of the household when whippings were often used as reminders to other slaves of masters’ power? Was Isaac’s anguish a sign of a gentle spirit, a guilty conscience, or a fear of public censure? Why would Margaret have loosened her clothes prior to the encounter? If she had, indeed, loosened her clothes, did Margaret expect the encounter to be sexual? The most obvious question, then, is whether Isaac was engaged in some kind of coercive sexual relationship with the slave woman. Was the incident at the river more than the crazed overreaction of an “impertinent” slave woman? Had Margaret become so disturbed by Isaac’s sexual predations that she preferred suicide over submission, or could this be a case of homicide?

Holmes apparently had some concerns about the story herself, writing, “The more I think of it, the more extraordinary the whole thing is—it seems like a nightmare.”42

41 Ibid., 237-38.
42 Ibid., 239.
never admitted to the diary that she doubted Isaac’s account, but she turned to other
slaves, even Margaret’s mother, for reassurances that Margaret was “rude, rough, and
headstrong . . . impudent to all . . . [and] had a wicked heart.”43 She also received assurances
from other Holmes family slaves that “[Margaret] had plenty to eat and to wear, had little to
do, and was kindly treated, as all the servants bore witness.”44 Holmes noted that the white
family “never saw an outbreak [of temper], therefore, never guessed it . . . [Margaret] had
often taken whippings with utmost indifference, either physically or mentally. . . . Poor
[Isaac],” Holmes wrote, “my heart aches for his suffering.”45 Even though Holmes
noticeably did not express a sense of sadness about Margaret’s death, the story clearly
troubled her.

What can a story like Margaret’s, and Holmes’s account of it, reveal about the
moments of crisis or internal conflict that Confederate women faced and worked out in
their private writings? Southern women used their diaries to work through such moments
of disjuncture through a number of different rhetorical strategies. In the case of Emma
Holmes, diary-writing provided a safe space to question, and ultimately reaffirm (or
convince herself of), the righteousness of southern slaveholding and family honor. That
she needed to do so suggests cracks in the slaveholding consensus. Holmes’ diary reveals
how slaveholding women were at once confronted with the violence inherent to slavery
and struggled to maintain family honor and a pro-slavery worldview. This examination of
Holmes’ story will highlight some of the moments of interpretation in her narrative,

moments at which Holmes fell back upon the slaveholding ideology in an effort to explain

43 Ibid., 238.
44 Ibid., 237.
this "nightmare" event and to hold at bay thoughts that would undermine this same ideology. Her story, then, illustrates the ways in which the slaveholding ideology provided Holmes with the tools to make sense of a troubling event that called into question the concept of slavery as a positive good and the honor of slaveholders.

Holmes recorded the “dreadful news” about the incident between Isaac and Margaret by first explaining that Margaret’s punishment was only undertaken at her mistress’s request and was not initiated by Isaac himself. This framework shielded Isaac from charges of undue severity, portraying him as a party who was removed from the kind of anger that would lend itself to a violent encounter. By framing the story this way, Holmes lay Margaret’s punishment at the feet of a supposedly benevolent mistress. This detail also sheds light on the problem of mastery for women both before and during the war. As evidenced above, slaveholding mistresses could be anything but benevolent in their efforts to control enslaved people, but Carrie’s role in Holmes’ narrative is an important detail. For Holmes and anybody who might hear the story of Margaret’s death, punishment initiated by the mistress signaled that such punishment was imbued with the kindness and benevolence of the household’s white angel of mercy. The class, gender, and racial idiom of slaveholding righteousness provided the ready trope of the benevolent mistress and rendered what happened in the garden as punishment rather than as cruelty.

Like many other couples in the Confederacy, Isaac and Carrie were often separated during the war. Though they had grown up in the same circles of Charleston’s elite, at the time of Margaret’s death, the couple had been married for only four months.46 Carrie had

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46 Ibid., 59. Upon learning of Carrie’s engagement, Emma Holmes wrote, “I have so long expected this that it did not in the least surprise me; he has been fond of her since she was a child….His qualities are not showy,
become pregnant almost immediately after their wedding, and she would give birth to her first child six months after Margaret's death. Carrie was, then, newly responsible for managing a household as a married woman, often without the help of her new husband. Her situation was not uncommon during the war, as men were called away to serve the Confederacy and white women were often left in charge of an increasingly unmanageable slave population. Isaac had insisted on Carrie moving closer to him in the month following their wedding, taking her away from the support system of her natal family in the upcountry and bringing her once again close to Charleston where he worked. Margaret had been a Holmes family slave and apparently accompanied Carrie when she took on the role of Isaac's wife. Margaret and Carrie were, then, familiar to each other, having lived together not only in the large family home in Charleston but also in the significantly smaller quarters that made up refugee life in upcountry Camden, South Carolina. However, it seems from Holmes’s story that Carrie was unable or perhaps unwilling to enact effective discipline against Margaret, asking Isaac to take on the task when he was at home. As a new mistress in her own right, Carrie may have had trouble exerting authority within her household.

Such punishment, according to Emma's account, had been deemed necessary only after the “excessively negligent and indifferent” performance of duties on Margaret’s part. This was not the way that Holmes had previously described Margaret’s temperament and abilities in the diary. On June 12, 1861, when Margaret had been “promoted” to the

but solid, and he makes such a good son and brother that I am sure he will make a devoted husband.” They were married November 12, 1862

47 Though Holmes did not note Margaret’s departure from the family household, it is clear from a June 13, 1861 entry that Margaret had been with the family for some time. Holmes noted that Margaret had been “promoted” to “the honor of being our maid.” Ibid., 57.
position of the young ladies’ maid, Holmes described her this way: “though her appearance is not very prepossing [sic], I find her not only willing but much more capable than I expected and really very ‘handy’ in her new vocation. I have undertaken to train her.” It is possible that Margaret’s demeanor had changed in response to an unwelcome transfer to Carrie’s new home, but it is also possible that Holmes was engaging in a type of revisionism. The shocking circumstances of Margaret’s death necessitated that she be rewritten as a difficult and slovenly servant.

Holmes effectively set the scene—kind patriarch, exasperated but permissive mistress, and recalcitrant slave woman. This scenario has all the markings of the “positive good” justification of slavery. Holmes then went on to explain in more detail that Isaac, “always so kind and thoughtful even towards a servant,” attempted to shield Margaret from “disgrace” by taking her “after dark” to an “extreme end” of the garden. These details have the possibility of establishing Isaac as benevolent, as Holmes frames them. But they also certainly hold the potential for another reading: that Isaac was attempting something sinister, possibly a sexual encounter, with Margaret under the cover of darkness and away from the prying eyes of his pregnant wife and other members of the household. Holmes avoids such questions, but the details themselves must have raised at least the possibility of untoward contact between master and slave woman, even if Holmes would likely have placed the blame for such an encounter on Margaret’s shoulders. Other slaveholding mistresses did just that, insisting that enslaved women were, as diarist Mary Chesnut famously wrote, “prostitutes.” Chesnut also criticized white mistresses for their willful ignorance of the sexual relationships between white men in their own families and the

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48 Ibid., 57.
49 See Chapter One.
enslaved women in their households.\textsuperscript{50} If, as Chesnut suggested, such willful blindness was widespread among white women of the slaveholding classes, it is not beyond the scope of possibility that Emma Holmes was practicing a common feminized lack of insight in her diary—about sex in general and sex between white men and black women in particular. Holmes clearly could not say in the diary what she did not allow herself to see.

After just “two or three cuts” with a “light strap” on Margaret’s shoulders, the bondwoman “tore away...with one wrench, tore off all her clothing, which must have been previously loosened purposely and...sprang into the creek.”\textsuperscript{51} A number of issues arise in this brief description. For example, if Holmes’s account is to be believed and punishment provided the reason for Isaac and Margaret to be in the garden alone, it is likely that Margaret’s dress was lowered or removed in order to expose her shoulders for the whipping. Rather than acknowledge Isaac’s role in undressing the enslaved woman, Holmes suggested that Margaret herself loosened her clothes as part of her plot to commit suicide or at least to escape into the river. That Holmes refused to acknowledge the possibility that Isaac had instructed Margaret to undress suggests that she was attempting to defend against any connection between Isaac and Margaret’s nakedness. After Margaret plunged into the creek and then stood waist-deep in the water, Holmes wrote that Isaac “called to her to come out, for she stood waist deep, and [then he] stepped behind a tree” before Margaret plunged into the creek headfirst.\textsuperscript{52} The detail about stepping behind the tree is a difficult one to read because it is not clear why Isaac would do this. It is possible

\textsuperscript{50} Chesnut wrote, “Under slavery, we live surrounded by prostitutes ... Any lady is ready to tell you who is the father of all the mulatto children in everybody’s household, but her own. Those, she seems to think, drop from the sky.” C. Vann Woodward, \textit{Mary Chesnut’s Civil War}, 29; Joshua Rothman, \textit{Notorious in the Neighborhood: Sex and Families Across the Color Line in Virginia, 1787-1861} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

\textsuperscript{51} Holmes, \textit{Diary of Miss Emma Holmes}, 237.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 237.
that this element of the narrative was meant to demonstrate that Isaac was trying to avoid looking upon Margaret’s nakedness. In any case, the tree serves to separate Isaac from Margaret and so to convey that he had no part in the violence she visited upon herself. Despite this detail that distances Isaac from Margaret, Holmes may have been troubled by Margaret’s nakedness for reasons that she did not explore explicitly in the diary. Was it possible that Isaac had demanded sex? Or that Margaret engaged in a sexual relationship consensually, at far as consent was possible in the context of a master-slave relationship? There are a number of scenarios that would explain Margaret’s nakedness, and despite her familiarity with such things—through gossip at least—Holmes refused to explore them.

After Isaac searched and found no trace of Margaret, a neighboring planter, Mr. Bull, was called to have the creek dragged, but still no body appeared. It was only “two or three days later” that Margaret’s body turned up. At that point, Isaac “had it examined by physicians and other gentlemen to prove that there was no mark of violence.” Holmes was unclear about how many of these “gentlemen” and “physicians” attended, and she did not name them in the diary. It is clear here, though, that Holmes meant to prove to her diary, and quite possibly to herself, that Isaac had been proven innocent and had committed no wrong against Margaret. It is telling that Margaret’s body was found to be free of any signs of violence, as she had escaped a lashing only after “two or three cuts.” Her body would surely have borne some signs of abuse, though in Holmes’ mind, a whipping was not equated with violence. Perhaps by “signs of violence” Holmes means excessive violence. It is also possible that she merely leaves unexamined the thought in the shadows of her mind: that Margaret’s body had been examined for signs of sexual violence.

53 Ibid., 238.
54 Ibid., 237.
It seems unlikely that the physicians did such a thorough investigation on a slave woman’s body, but Holmes might have been troubled—perhaps unconsciously—by the link between violence and sex in this strange nighttime scene. In any case, this description serves to erase evidence of any kind of violence on Isaac’s part. It is a clear reimagining of what happened in the garden that night, and it serves as evidence that Holmes was either consciously or unconsciously rewriting the story in order to excuse or exonerate Isaac and slaveholders in general.

Even though the underlying question of sexual impropriety is never raised in the diary, the fact that Holmes felt the need to exonerate Isaac suggests that the diary served as a space in which to address this very question. In this telling entry, Holmes worked to justify slaveholder violence, to uphold Isaac’s (and the family’s) honor, and to reassert the benevolence of slaveholding generally. In the context of a southern social system in which reputation was vital to social, economic, and political life, this incident threatened to undermine the reputations of Isaac and the Holmes family, which could have had serious negative ramifications in the public realm as well as within the marriage between Isaac and Holmes’s beloved sister Carrie. 55 While sexual relationships were common between white men and enslaved black women, propriety demanded that they be entirely discreet in order to avoid public humiliation. This discretion shielded a family from shame, but also allowed southern women to ignore the existence of interracial sexual relationships, at least, as Mary Chesnut suggested in her diary, within their own households, if not in everyone

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else’s.56 The public rituals of discretion upheld the fantasy of chivalric men and pure women, which supposedly positioned southern society as distinct from and superior to northern society.57 The dramatic story of Margaret’s death not only threatened the family’s public standing, but also had the potential to throw into question the validity of the gender regime that shaped social and domestic relations. Acknowledgement of untoward actions on the part of southern white men risked exploding this system and calling into question the basic foundations upon which southern and personal identities were founded.

Another important element of Holmes’s unusually long entry about Isaac and Margaret is her repeated assertion that Margaret had a sullen temperament and violent temper. What is most astonishing about this aspect of the story is that Holmes turned to household servants, including Margaret’s mother, to affirm that it was Margaret’s own flaws that resulted in her death. In the time between reading her sister’s account and writing the entry—all occurring within the same day—Holmes and her family spoke to Nina, Judy, Ann, “the servants” and “all the servants” about Margaret’s apparent suicide. In each instance, the family was assured that Margaret had a temper that was “rude, rough and headstrong as possible, and as impudent to all,” had a “wicked heart,” was “a great deal of trouble,” “careless and slovenly,” and “sullen” when punished.58 These traits all explain Margaret’s behavior for Holmes. That the evidence was provided by enslaved people themselves seemed to confirm for Holmes that what they said about Margaret was true. By

56 Chesnut, quoted above. C. Vann Woodward, Mary Chesnut’s Civil War, 29; Rothman, Notorious in the Neighborhood.
57 For more on how gender relations and ideas about social order organized sectional difference, see Scott, The Southern Lady; Greenberg, Honor and Slavery; Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor; Silber, The Romance of Reunion; McCurry, Masters of Small Worlds; Whites, The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender; Faust, Mothers of Invention; Stanley, From Bondage to Contract; Wood, Masterful Women; Fox-Genovese, Within the Plantation Household; Jabour, Scarlett’s Sisters; Nina Silber Gender and the Sectional Conflict (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008).
58 Holmes, The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes, 237-238.
asking the family’s slaves about Margaret’s temperament, Holmes acknowledged that she had but limited insight into the private lives of the enslaved people around her. But asking the other slaves about Margaret also signaled that Holmes was unsure about her own—and Isaac’s and Carrie’s—reading of the incident. Indeed, she actively sought reassurances that her own interpretation was the correct one, a sign that she felt at least a little unsure about it.

Beyond the evidence that Holmes garnered, the most exceptional element of this account is that Holmes turned to bondspeople to reassure her at all. She sought input not just from a single person with whom she might have had a close relationship, but from “all the servants,” including Margaret’s mother. Tellingly, she did not include details about distress or sadness on the part of Margaret’s family. Indeed, their only role in the narrative was to reassure Holmes. Through this erasure, Holmes made clear that the story was about her family, not about Margaret’s. At the heart of these interrogations lay Holmes’ fear that Isaac may not have been entirely innocent in the exchange that led to Margaret’s death. Indeed, if Isaac’s story had not raised doubts in Holmes’s mind, why would she have felt the need to conduct her own investigation, garnering evidence in defense of her brother-in-law?

The most important piece of evidence, however, came not from a slave in Holmes’s household but from one in Isaac’s. According to Holmes, the enslaved man Marcus told Isaac that Margaret had told him but a few days before the incident that “if she was ever touched again she would drown or kill herself” even though “she confessed she had plenty to eat and to wear, had little to do, and was kindly treated, as all the servants bore
witness.”59 In this single sentence about Marcus’s testimony, Holmes defended the benevolence of slaveholders as a class and of Isaac and Carrie in particular. Again, we see the elements of the positive good defense of slavery: a benevolent master and mistress, a light workload, and the appreciation of loyal and obedient slaves who provide a foil for Margaret’s own ingratitude. But this sentence does something else: first, it suggests that Margaret was the frequent recipient of corporal punishment, despite Holmes’ own insistence that Margaret had an easy life and was generally tolerated despite bad behavior. But the word “touched” also raises questions about exactly what type of “touch” Margaret referred to. Margaret may have been declaring the end of a sexual relationship or her unwillingness to be punished. Because it seems that Margaret took Isaac’s punishment with particular rage, it is also possible that she resented it because she felt that a relationship between them should have protected her against punishment by the master, especially punishment initiated at the insistence of the mistress. Because white women were subordinate to white men within their own households, slaveholding mistresses often took out their frustrations and jealousies against enslaved women rather than confronting their husbands directly.60 Holmes quickly followed news of Margaret’s threat with her reassertion that paternalistic care defined the master-slave relationship: “she had plenty to eat and to wear, had little to do, and was kindly treated.” Her need to assert that Margaret had an easy life suggests that she was aware of, and possibly concerned about, criticisms of slaveholders’ asserted benevolence.

Two more elements of Holmes’s story require more discussion. First, Holmes was intensely concerned about Isaac’s reputation and about the anguish that he apparently felt

59 Ibid., 237-238.
60 Fox-Genovese, Within the Plantation Household, 380.
over Margaret’s death. Holmes was careful to begin her story with the assertion that Isaac was “always so kind and thoughtful,” even to enslaved people. She developed a scene in which Isaac punished Margaret with gentleness and the care of a father, and only when compelled to do so by Margaret’s own recalcitrance. After Margaret’s death, Holmes wrote that “It put poor Isaac nearly crazy, for he blamed himself as the cause of her suicide, accusing himself of undue severity,” and that Isaac was “bowed with fearful anguish, weeping like a little child and accusing himself almost as a murderer...[it] was too terrible.” It becomes clear, however, that to Holmes, much of Isaac’s anguish grew from the fear that the episode would damage his reputation. Holmes wrote, “Again that terrible anguish swept over his soul—that the public might think him the cause of her death. Poor fellow, to have his peace of mind destroyed by the blind rage of such a creature is too dreadful.” Despite the fact that slave discipline was an accepted part of mastery and that a slaveholder’s word was virtually unquestioned, Isaac was concerned about his status in the community. It’s quite possible that both Isaac and Holmes worried that the circumstances of Margaret’s death—her naked body, the remote nighttime setting, and Margaret’s apparent rage—would raise the specter of illicit, even coerced, sex, and so damage Isaac’s standing in the community. Whether or not Holmes was concerned about a sexual relationship between Isaac and Margaret, she steered clear of any suggestion that Isaac actually was a murderer. Turning the story into one about damage to Isaac’s reputation allowed Holmes to deflect anxieties about the possibility of excessive violence or even murder. Her worry over Isaac’s reputation rather than about what did or did not really happen in the garden signaled that Holmes did not put any stock in the idea of Isaac

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61 Holmes, *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes*, 238.
62 Ibid., 238.
as a killer. Again, creating a framework that assumed Isaac’s innocence allowed Holmes to avoid the obvious question: if Isaac accused himself “almost as a murderer,” might Holmes—and others—be reasonable in doing the same?

As other historians have noted, it was not the sexual relationship itself, but indiscretion that threatened a slaveholder’s reputation as honorable.\(^{63}\) Margaret’s death had certainly become a public spectacle, one to which community men—those responsible for dragging the creek and examining the body—had become witnesses. In a society in which status, credit, and opportunity were strongly linked to perceptions of honor, Margaret’s death could potentially disrupt Isaac’s life in important ways.\(^{64}\) Beyond his fear for his reputation, however, Isaac’s anguish and guilt don’t make much sense. If Margaret responded to mild punishment with such rage, then surely it was her disposition—not Isaac’s own behavior—that defined the response. Holmes did not look deeper into Isaac’s guilt, but we may spend a moment doing so. As Holmes wrote, Margaret often took punishment with no outward signs of hostility. Why would she suddenly respond to it with suicide? It seems more likely that her response would be triggered by sexual abuse or attempted rape. Isaac’s feelings of guilt also raise other questions about his culpability. As the only living witness to the event, Isaac went unchallenged in asserting his innocence. But suicide by drowning is not easily achieved, especially not in waist-deep water. And why would Margaret have stripped her clothes off if she intended to die? Is this a case of sexual homicide? Did Isaac kill her for her resistance or for an attempt to flee? Did he then put the body into the water, or might he have held her under the water and forcibly drowned her? Holmes took Isaac’s hysteria as a sign of his kind heart and Margaret’s

\(^{63}\) Rothman *Notorious in the Neighborhood*, 1-11.

\(^{64}\) Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery*; BertramWyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*;
wickedness, but she refused to explore the questions raised by Isaac’s story and his demeanor in the wake of Margaret’s death.

Holmes further supported and defended the honor of the family by writing that nobody had ever suspected Margaret's poor disposition or the lengths she would go to in order to torment her master's family. She repeatedly asserted that “we never saw,” “never guessed” and so it was “no wonder, then that with our knowledge of her disposition, the shock has been so dreadful to Isaac...Poor fellow, my heart aches for his suffering.”65 In this passage, Holmes not only asserted a measure of ignorance about Margaret’s temperament but also claimed that the person truly suffering was not Margaret or her mother, but Isaac himself. Her interpretation of who had been wronged developed out of a long tradition of presenting slavery as a positive good. This idea—that slaveholders demonstrated their benevolence by lifting slaves out of ignorance and barbarism—made slaveholders the heroes of a story, in spite of the fact that slavery was underwritten by the very types of violence that Margaret suffered. Holmes’ repeated assertions that the family had not witnessed Margaret’s terrible temper may represent another moment of doubt for Holmes. If Margaret had grown up in the same household as Holmes herself, Holmes and the other family members should have been on relatively intimate terms with her. That they did not see Margaret’s character traits may have suggested to Holmes that they did not actually exist. She glossed over this moment of doubt by reiterating Isaac’s victimization at Margaret’s hands. Indeed, in an effort to document Margaret’s depraved personal traits and the family’s lack of knowledge about them, Holmes retreated from earlier assertions that Margaret was treated with benevolence, instead stating that the enslaved woman had

65 Ibid., 238-39.
“often taken whippings with utmost indifference.” Holmes seemed unaware of the contradictions in her narrative, but through her writing she assured herself that Isaac, as a decent master, was the victim in the story. She reasserted the benevolence and honor of southern slaveholders and blamed slaves themselves for the trials and hardships of slaveholding.

**Moments of Silence in Holmes’ Diary**

The role of silence in Holmes’s diary also bears examination. Most notably, Holmes never directly addressed the issue of sexual or even physical violence. Indeed, she skirted it at a number of moments in her story. Despite the fact that Margaret and Isaac were alone in a remote corner of the garden late at night, and that Margaret’s body was found completely naked, Holmes never raised questions about Isaac’s intentions in her diary. Though other diarists, such as Mary Boykin Chesnut, spoke explicitly about slaveholders’ sexual relationships with slave women, Holmes wrote as if she was completely unaware of the possibility. Perhaps the issue was too delicate to raise, even in her private writings, but it seems more likely that the prospect of a relationship between Isaac and Margaret, whether consensual or coerced, was too frightening for Holmes to discuss. Such a sexual relationship, especially if it painted Isaac as a predator, not only undermined personal and family honor but also called into question the benevolence of slaveholding more generally.

Two years into a bloody contest over slavery, one in which Holmes had lost family and friends as well as her home in Charleston, the idea that slavery was a system rooted in

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66 Ibid., 239.
67 At other points in the diary, Holmes discusses inter-racial sexual relationships in an effort to impugn northerners and abolitionists, charging that they frequently engaged in “miscegenation.” Charging northerners with interracial sex was meant to convey their total lack of ethics and decency.
violence, coercion, and exploitation risked exploding Holmes’ view of herself and her family, as well as of the Confederate cause. She simply could not face the psychological hardship of exploring this possibility.

Another scenario that Holmes avoided completely is the prospect that Margaret’s death was not a suicide at all, but a murder. This was, she explains, Isaac’s concern: that the community would condemn him as a brutal, murderous man. Despite the fact that Isaac accused “himself almost as a murderer,” Holmes absolutely refused to acknowledge that his guilty conscience might itself be evidence that his story about Margaret was not entirely true. Instead, she reiterated several times that Isaac was the true victim in the whole affair. She left Isaac’s guilt aside in favor of descriptions—provided by slaves—that represented Margaret as a crazed, vindictive woman, the type to commit suicide even under only slight provocation.

Through Holmes’ telling of Margaret’s death, we can see that Holmes used the diary to work through a troubling event. The story she told, as well as the possibilities that she could not raise, point to her use of the diary as a way to reassure herself of family honor, black wickedness and irrationality, and slaveholding in general. Through writing, Holmes reasserted a hegemonic slaveholding worldview that upheld slavery as a “positive good” and justified a war to perpetuate it. The silences in her narrative are glaring. That she did not address them also suggests that she used her diary to perform a social role, one which would have been undermined by raising the questions that I point to in this analysis.

While the exact circumstances of Margaret’s death remain unknown to historians today, it is clear that the encounter with Isaac led to her death. Holmes wrote a narrative that not only made Margaret responsible for her own demise but also blamed Margaret for
the repercussions that Isaac faced (or feared). Telling the story in this way removed for Holmes any doubts that Isaac could have been the cause of Margaret’s death, whether it was suicide, homicide, or an accident. If, as is clear, Holmes refused to raise any questions about Isaac’s conduct, somebody must be held accountable for what was an unseemly, if not—in this accounting—tragic event, and so the blame was laid upon Margaret. Isaac was represented on the one hand as simply a spectator to Margaret’s depravity and on the other as the victim of her irrationality and raging temper. In both roles, he was absolved of any wrongdoing by Holmes’ account.

Even though Emma Holmes wrote her narrative in an ostensibly private diary, her purpose was both personal and political. She wanted, perhaps had a psychological need for, absolution for the slaveholding classes and for her family in particular. She wrote a story that shares many of the hallmarks of the positive good defense. During a war that had already demanded great sacrifices of her social circle and herself, it is perhaps unsurprising that she could not interrogate Isaac’s story but that she enlisted herself as his defender and the defender of slaveholding and of the southern war effort in general. But Holmes’ narrative is also able to shed light on the inner workings of women of the slaveholding classes in the Civil War South. She did not, at least demonstrably, write for a public audience. Therefore, the diary entry about Margaret’s death signals that the person most in need of convincing—about Isaac’s innocence, Margaret’s wickedness, slaveholding goodness, black debasement, and the righteousness of a war fought to preserve the “peculiar institution”—was Emma Holmes herself.

The moment of Margaret’s death created a crisis of doubt for Holmes, even in the face of a lifetime of reassurances and justifications. The war itself raised the stakes for such
a personal moment of disjuncture, when Holmes’ own experience seemed to fly in the face of all she had been raised to believe. Acknowledging doubt at such a moment was unthinkable to a woman who had built her sense of herself not just on her status as a member of a prominent slaveholding family but also on the zealfulness of her Confederate patriotism. Holmes used her diary as a space to work through this moment of disjuncture and to discipline her own thinking, to ward off dark thoughts and to renew her well of confidence in the Confederacy. That she needed to do so suggests that historians oversimplify things when we portray the slaveholding classes as thinking with one united mind during the war and about slavery. Even though it appears that Holmes was successful in reassuring herself, the moment of doubt itself indicates that cracks—however small—existed in the slaveholding worldview during the war. Such cracks opened up around the issue of slaveholding violence for many mistresses who turned to their diaries to work through such moments of disjuncture. The war demanded that southern slaveholding women defend southern honor and institutions even in the face of mounting evidence that these very institutions—those at the heart of the Confederate cause, including southern honor and the right to own people as property—were rotten at their core. Women like Emma Holmes turned to exercises of private reflection to bring their thinking into line with that of their class and region. This required that they create new stories to explain gaps between the slaveholding ideology and their own experiences. Rewriting slaveholding violence as benevolence allowed them to continue to see themselves as the guardians of southern civilization and to defend slaveholding, even as slavery and the world as they knew it crumbled around them. They would continue the work of rewriting slaveholding in the post-war period as they mythologized the Old South and offered themselves as
justifications for the violence that rebuilt white supremacy in the aftermath of emancipation.
CHAPTER 3
HOPE AND DESPAIR ON THE HOME FRONT:
THE DIARY OF JULIA LEGRAND

Julia Legrand kept her wartime diary while she lived in Union-occupied New Orleans, Louisiana. She was in her early thirties when the Civil War began. Born in Maryland, she had lived in New Orleans, Louisiana since childhood. As a staunch Confederate, Legrand suffered humiliations borne of Maryland’s refusal to join the Confederacy and of the surrender of New Orleans in April of 1862. She remained in New Orleans during the war, living with her sister Ginnie while one of her brothers served in the military and the rest of her family resided in Texas. LeGrand was born into a wealthy slaveholding family and held slaves herself while living in New Orleans. She clearly thought of herself as a benevolent mistress, and when a slave girl was accused of stealing money from her, she complained, “Punishment of no matter how great a criminal afflicts me.”¹ She went on, however, to reveal her changing philosophy toward mastery, writing, “It is our habit to be gentle with dependents though we are proud and exacting with our equals. I begin to think that this is bad policy. The world will not let us be what we wish...I have always practiced this, both from impulse and principle, but I must admit that I have always suffered for it.”² LeGrand mourned when her favorite slave, Julie Ann ran away in the summer of 1862. “The day she ran away,” she wrote, “was as unhappy a one as I ever passed, though I tried to conceal my feelings from the other servants.”³ But the experience was not without its lessons for LeGrand: “I have learned this lesson both from experience

² Ibid., 71-72.
³ Ibid., 56.
and observation that negroes only respect those they fear.”

In fact, LeGrand’s feelings toward enslaved people underwent a significant transformation during the war years, though she continued to feel that she behaved as a southern lady should in relation to enslaved people. Early in 1863, roughly a month after LeGrand first wrote of Julie Ann’s summertime disappearance, LeGrand penned a long entry about African Americans that revealed her conversion from concerned and permissive mistress to overtly racist Confederate.

To-day tried to do up my collars and other fineries—failed and felt anything but spiritual-minded. I got angry with my irons which would smut my muslins, and then got angry with myself for having been angry—finally divided the blame, giving a part to Julie Ann for running away and leaving me to do her work, and by her thefts, with less money wherewithal to procure others to do for me. If Julie’s condition was bettered, if she had been made a higher being by the sort of freedom she has chosen, I could not find it in my conscience to regret her absence; but I hear of her, she is a degraded creature, living a vicious life, and we tried so hard to make her good and honest. I once was as great an abolitionist as any in the North—that was when my unthinking fancy placed black and white upon the same plane. My sympathies blinded me, and race and character were undisturbed mysteries to me. But my experience with negroes has altered my way of thinking and reasoning. As an earnest of sincerity given even to my own mind, it was when we owned them in numbers that I thought they ought to be free, and now that we have none, I think they are not fit for freedom.

LeGrand then went on to detail the “deficiencies” and “overpluses” of African Americans, revealing her racist set of assumptions about black people in general.

White men, left free from degrading cares, generally struggle up to something higher—not so the black man. They have no cares but physical ones and will not have for generations to come, if ever . . . He does not love or respect the social ties . . . His wild instincts are yet moving his coarse blood; he is servile if mastered, and brutal if licensed . . . He can not, either by force or persuasion, be imbued with a reverence for truth . . . Slavery indeed can not be considered a good school for the white man, but it should be remembered by the fanatic that we found these people mere animals, and that physically

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4 Ibid., 57.
5 Ibid., 99-100.
and mentally our slaves are superior to their African progenitors... These creatures whom fanatics are pitying, neglectful of the poor at their doors, and for whose possible benefit it is pretended that Federal soldiers are sent to die. America seems perishing of madness.6

This chapter examines the internal struggles that slaveholding white women faced in mustering continued support for the Confederacy and for a war fought to preserve slavery. Faced with deprivation, sacrifice, and new forms of labor, including new calls to mastery, white elite women of the South worked consciously and unconsciously to conjure up enthusiasm for the war effort. Their diaries reveal that they sometimes faltered in their efforts to maintain faith in southern military and civil leadership and to embrace continued sacrifice as the home front became the war front. Especially in those bitterly contested areas of divided loyalties between the Union and Confederacy, such as eastern Tennessee, women often found themselves surrounded by both warring armies and faced with raids, counterraids, and demands on food and shelter both by the “foreign foe” and by Confederate soldiers.

Their diaries reveal that exhaustion with the war and with continued loss and sacrifice pushed some women to the limits of their ability to support the South. Slaveholding women in general supported the war effort, yet they expressed criticism of southern leadership and even sometimes of southern soldiers, but they renewed their commitment by creating heroes that they could celebrate and believe in, such as Generals Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson and Robert E. Lee. Diaries like Julia LeGrand’s reveal that elite southern women were exhausted and depressed by the war, but that they struggled to maintain proper attitudes about patriotism and the goal of a separate southern nation. They not only created heroes, but also villains. They expended the energy of their

6 Ibid., 100-102.
frustration in hating the Yankees and the newly freed people who abandoned their mistresses. Indeed, African Americans who claimed their freedom loom large in the diaries of white slaveholding women. They figure as symbols of the South's crumbling social system and the dislocations that the war created in southern homes.

As for other southern mistresses, the events surrounding black freedom were traumatic for Julia LeGrand. Enslaved people who left their mistresses behind in search of their own freedom were routinely described as “ungrateful” and deceptive. For mistresses who thought they had treated slaves gently and benevolently, the disappearance of enslaved people was often felt as a personal betrayal. It also indicated, as did violence in the master-slave relationship, that something was very wrong with slavery, something deep in its core. Furthermore, during a war fought to preserve slavery, the departure of slaves left southern slaveholding white women severely demoralized. These women turned to their diaries to make sense of these events while struggling to maintain their faith in the South’s cause. Julia LeGrand is representative of the ways in which slaveholding women tried to justify and defend slavery even as it disintegrated around them. When these justifications failed—when slaves proved that they would take the opportunity to seize their freedom—benevolence gave way to anger and overt anti-black racism.

**Class and Patriotism**

The question of whether, and to what degree, southern white women supported the Confederate war effort has been the subject of some debate among historians. Taking wartime and postwar declarations of men and women, North and South, at face value, some historians have accepted the notion that southern women made the “hottest” rebels and
pushed their men not only to enlist but to continue to fight for southern independence and especially for “home and hearth.” Certainly, Confederate women often wrote with pride in their diaries about their confrontations with Federal soldiers and their undying support for the war. Catherine Broun thought that some of the Yankees near her home “looked sad when I told them of the firm determination of the south that if they killed all the gentlemen that the women would take it up...I said many grotesque things.”

As Nina Silber points out, the image of the fiery female rebel gave way during Reconstruction in favor of a return to the antebellum southern belle ideal. However, this image has remained a potent one in imagining the Civil War. Drew Faust and Victoria Bynum, looking at different populations of southern women, have argued that women facing hardship on the home front encouraged male Confederates to give up the fight and return home, where they could help to support their families. These women ultimately lost faith in the Confederate cause and in the prosecution of the war. Certainly, there were southern women in both camps. The answer to the question of women’s support for the war seems to lie in class divisions. Though all southern classes met with financial hardship during the war, poor and yeomen families suffered the greatest deprivation. It was among these classes that support for the war effort steadily declined and even disappeared. More and more, it seemed, poorer southerners were dying in a war that benefited the wealthy.

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7 Drew Faust devotes a chapter in Mothers of Invention to exploring elite women’s belligerence and vituperation. She argues that elite women’s speech was protected by shared social codes that caused Union soldiers to recognize their class and gender positions. Faust, Mothers of Invention, 196-219. Jacqueline Glass Campbell argues that, while northern soldiers in general refrained from abusing elite white women, these same women felt confident in asserting their hatred of Union soldiers because the southern gender code provided a space for female passion and the protection of family (and sectional) honor. Northern men, Campbell argues, were shocked by southern women’s overt hostility and partisanship, but avoided victimizing southern women because of racial and gender considerations. Campbell, When Sherman Marched North from the Sea, 11-16.
8 Broun, Diary, Nov 6, 1862.
9 Silber, The Romance of Reunion. 1-38.
10 Victoria Bynum, Unruly Women, 111-150; Faust, Mothers of Invention, 234-247.
With hardship at home and growing class divisions in military as well as civilian life, non-elite southerners increasingly viewed the conflict as a rich man’s war, but a poor man’s fight.

Victoria Bynum’s study of “unruly women” in North Carolina suggests that many southern women, especially those who were not counted among the planter classes (poorer whites and free blacks) did not support the Confederacy or a war fought to preserve slavery. Looking at these populations, Bynum argues that they defied the Confederate leadership’s dictates in order to support their families, including their menfolk as well as their children. Pushed to the very brink of starvation, non-elite southern women hid and cared for deserters, rioted for food and other necessities, and demanded that authorities help them to make ends meet as prices skyrocketed. They resented the lost labor of their men as successive waves of conscription laws drew white men into military service. Such women risked the ire of Home Guards and state authorities, risking not just their reputations as “respectable” women but also their personal safety. Harassed, beaten, and sometimes tortured by vigilantes, deserters, militia troops, and Home Guard patrols, these women were cast out of the community of respectable Confederates and so denied the “protection” that white southern women were supposedly entitled to. It was their very concern over “woman’s sphere”—the care of family and home—that drove such women to defy authority and risk their own livelihoods and persons.\textsuperscript{11}

The women that Bynum study belie the notion of a “solid South” united behind the efforts of the Confederate governments. For most elite white southern women, however, the pressures of class and race dictated that they stand firmly with the men of their class in

\textsuperscript{11} Bynum, \textit{Unruly Women}, 138.
supporting the war effort, and they offered themselves as legitimation for a war in defense of "hearth and home." Repeatedly assured—through direct appeals as well as through verse and song—that the war was fought on their behalf, elite white women did their best to continue to support the war effort.\footnote{Drew Faust, "Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War," \textit{The Journal of American History} 76, no. 4 (1990): 1209-1213.}

The war disrupted the economy of the southern states almost immediately, leading to shortages of basic goods and to high prices for what could be found. Runaway inflation resulted from the issuance of paper money on the part of southern states, counties, cities, and even private businesses.\footnote{James McPherson, \textit{Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 439.} "By the beginning of 1863," writes historian James McPherson, "it took seven dollars to buy what a dollar had bought two years earlier."\footnote{Ibid., 440.} The burden of such inflation fell most heavily on the poor, and exacerbated class tensions by the second year of the war. Yeomen and poor families who could not afford wheat, salt, or coffee—to say nothing of fabric and shoes—turned to more elite neighbors and the Confederate state governments to help ease their poverty. However, state governments were slow to act and could not provide enough assistance to lift families out of the dire poverty created by the war.

George Rable, like other historians, has identified a trend among certain classes of southern women that indicates that by mid-1863 and on to the end of the war, yeomen women and their poorer neighbors "had little to lose by tacitly encouraging their men to desert."\footnote{Ibid., 89.} "Patriotism," Rable continues, "could hardly flourish among ragged, barefoot, and
hungry women.”16 Such waning enthusiasm for the war was brought on not just by economic hardship but also by the mounting loss of life among the men who served.

Taught that masculine honor lived in men’s ability to provide for, as well as control their dependents, white southern women of all classes struggled to reconcile a war fought to preserve a conservative southern way of life with the overwhelming changes wrought by the war itself. However, an examination of elite white women in the South suggests that they did, in fact, continue to support the war. Though economic hardship affected even wealthy families, the wives and daughters of elite families did not suffer the kind of dire poverty that yeomen and poor women experienced during the war. These women also identified with the interests of the men of their class, and these men became the civil and military leadership of the Confederacy. In short, elite women struggled to bear up under the pressures of war—including loss, deprivation, and anxiety—but they ultimately continued in their support for the war effort. This was not always a straightforward or simple task, and elite women turned to their diaries to work through their ambivalence and to renew their belief in the righteousness of the Confederate cause. Being members of slaveholding families sometimes aided in this task, as women saw the Union’s armed forces as threats to the South’s “way of life,” including its “peculiar institution.” The determination to continue holding slaves as property provided elite women the impetus to continue to support the war, in contrast to their poorer neighbors.

16 George C. Rable, Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 111.
Despair on the Home Front

Elite white women supported the Confederacy in a number of ways. First, as outlined in Chapter One, they offered up their male kin to service in the Confederate military, which was often a wrenching event in their lives. This sacrifice not only put their loved ones—brothers, sons, fathers, and husbands—in harm’s way, but it also meant that women of all classes had to take on greater responsibilities for the family’s well-being in the absence of these men. In addition to their willingness to send their men off to war, elite white women supported the war effort through their labor. They founded soldiers’ aid societies whose mission it was to outfit men for camp life by manufacturing uniforms and other types of clothing, collecting subscriptions for the economic benefit of the fighting men, and preparing goods for the care of wounded soldiers. Finally, though nursing was a less respectable undertaking for elite southern women than for their northern counterparts, slaveholding women also undertook the work of nursing in private homes and hospitals throughout the South.

As the war dragged on, however, southern slaveholding women’s enthusiasm for this kind of work often waned. Their fatigue showed itself in their diaries. Cornelia Peake McDonald “wanted to be useful, and tried [her] best” to serve in the hospital, but upon seeing a man who had been shot in the eye, she thought she might faint and fled the room. On her way out, her “dress brushed against a pile of amputated limbs heaped up near the door,” and she had to catch herself on the door to keep from falling, so faint was she at the sight. Many elite women—especially younger ones—simply were unused to doing much manual labor, and as the war continued to loosen the bonds of slavery, they found fewer opportunities to do so.

17 Cornelia McDonald, A Woman’s Civil War: A Diary, with Reminiscences of the War, from March 1862, ed. Minrose C. Gwin (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 38.
hands at home to help them with their own domestic work. For many young elite women, the war threatened to disrupt an important part of their lives because it rendered beaux few and far between. Whenever possible, many such young women chose to live their lives as much in keeping with pre-war notions of youthful engagements as possible. These young women, then, found little time to labor for the care of soldiers, spending time instead in endless rounds of visiting, reading, practicing music, and taking exercise. Diaries also reveal that women preferred to do work that they knew would benefit the men of their families and social circles. They knitted socks for brothers but took less interest in joining organized activities such as soldiers’ aid societies. Kate Stone expressed a desire to do more for the soldiers but in the end did not. She explained, “I came home feeling ashamed of myself for having done so little [for the soldiers] and begged Mamma to send to the camp for some of the clothes to make. Mamma refused, saying that we have enough to do already, and really we have.” Stone’s mother had a point: in a household with seven children, three of whom were serving in the army, the women in the family had plenty of sewing to do already.

War fatigue eventually set in for many southern ladies. Their enthusiasm for southern success found itself mired in the exhaustion and deprivation that the war introduced into their lives. For women who built their sense of identity in large part on being members of a privileged caste, the war threatened a loss of class status. Material deprivation of varying degrees undermined their sense of themselves as ladies. As prices in the Confederacy soared after 1861, even elite families learned to do without the class trappings that had set them apart from their neighbors before the war. Silk fabrics became

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18 Stone, Brokenburn, 162.
almost impossible to obtain, as did more mundane pleasures such as coffee and white sugar. Women complained of monotonous diets from which sweets and meat had all but disappeared. “Cornfield peas,” complained Eliza Andrews, “have been our staple diet for the last ten days”19 The ladies of the Confederacy took these deprivations with a grain of salt (though salt was very hard to come by), often reminding themselves of the considerably worse suffering of soldiers and especially of men taken prisoner. What provoked their ire, though, was the knowledge that speculation was a primary reason for the exorbitant prices that they faced. Though material deprivation was a hard pill to swallow, women worked to maintain their enthusiasm for the war, blaming speculators and Yankees for their plight.

What was more difficult to cope with was the constant struggle to get reliable news about the prosecution of the war and the movements of the South’s armies. Particularly for women who found themselves within Yankee lines, mail routes were inconsistent, letters were seized by Union officials, and southern newspapers were confiscated, leaving these women in the dark about how the war was going. Even when newspapers could be had, they often contained contradictory or unclear information, and women’s diaries are replete with complaints about the lack of trustworthy news. In occupied New Orleans, Julia LeGrand lamented, “Thousands of rumors fill the city. The newspapers are a dead waste; they tell nothing.”20 In the absence of reliable news, of course, conjecture and rumor abounded. Judith McGuire, like many other diarists, wrote of her determination to dismiss unfavorable rumors, but her diary reveals that civilians at home were susceptible to the power of such rumors. “Rumors are abundant to-day,” she wrote, “We are not at all credulous of the flying reports with which our ears are daily pained, and yet they make us

restless and uneasy.” Julia LeGrand made clear the effect of rumors on the people of New Orleans, where Confederate news was especially difficult to get, writing, “The most tantalizing rumors reach us daily....Sometimes we are elated, but most generally depressed.” While Confederate women often railed against the lack of reliable news, they sometimes also admitted that they dreaded confirmation of their worst fears. Mary Gray Caldwell lamented a “dearth of news” but admitted to her diary that, “I will be afraid to read the paper when I see it for fear of seeing the names [of the dead and wounded.]” Kate Stone also noted that she had “such a fear of bad news. The sight of a letter turns me sick with apprehension.” Stone reflected in her diary, “What credulous mortals we be, believing all the good reports and distrusting all the bad until the truth is forced upon us.” Judging by southern women’s diaries, Stone was not alone in her credulity. Indeed, women across the South routinely recorded favorable rumors as truth and negative rumors as falsehoods. Sarah Morgan admitted, “It would be absurd to record all the rumors that have reached us, since we can rely on none,” but she went on to record them in her diary nonetheless. News, whether accessible or not, held the potential to elate women on the home front or to send them into the depths of despair.

In addition to the deprivation and enlarged workload on the home front, there is also evidence that many women began to question the South’s military leadership as “unmerciful disaster follows fast and follows faster,” as diarist Lucy Buck described the

21 McGuire, Diary of a Southern Refugee, 30.
23 Mary Gray Caldwell, “It Does Appear as if Our Soldiers Were Made Altogether of Patriotism,” 56.
24 Stone, Brokenburn, 256.
25 Ibid., 253.
26 Morgan, Civil War Diary, 193.
situation in the South. Though they often resisted penning condemnations of southern military authorities, elite southern women wrote in such a way as to make clear that they had their own disappointments in the South’s leading men. Eliza Frances Andrews noted in her diary, “It begins to look as if the Yankees can do whatever they please and go wherever the wish—except to heaven.” Catherine Broun complained, “We can not see one of our men are all gone [sic].” Lucy Buck grumbled, “It seems every day that our desertion by our army seems more and more inevitable, but we must trust to Providence and under Him to our Generals.” She practiced this trust in her diary, writing, “As for [General P.G.T.] Beauregard—Whatever he does he has a reason for and we shall soon see if it isn’t for the best.” She again stopped short of criticizing male leadership when she wrote, “General Early has an object in it [retreat], no doubt, and fully understands all he intends to do.” But, she added, “Wish I did too.” Kate Carney wrote anxiously, “I can’t see how we can live through so much suffering. I wish if the Southern Army was coming it would hasten on.” Ellen Renshaw House marveled at southern retreat, writing, “I think it is outrageous. The Yankees are here. Just think, here—in Knoxville. Walked in without the least resistance on our part. [General Simon] Buckner evacuated it last week.” The 1862 surrender of New Orleans outraged Julia LeGrand, causing her to comment, “A pitiful affair it has been. In the first place, [General Mansfield] Lovell, a most worthless creature, was sent here by Davis to superintend the defense of this city. He did little or nothing and the

27 Buck, Shadows on My Heart, 249.
29 Broun, Diary, June 25, 1863.
30 Buck, Shadows on My Heart, 51.
31 Ibid., 100.
32 Ibid., 290.
33 Kate Carney, Diary, July 7, 1862.
little he did was all wrong.” LeGrand women in the South thus turned to their diaries to record their growing frustrations with the South’s leadership, but they continued to believe in the righteousness of the southern cause.

Emma LeConte, often scathing in her depiction of southern military leadership, complained to her diary, “If Joe Johnston is put in command, we had as well pack up and prepare to run. He will certainly execute one of his ‘masterly retreats’ from the coast back to Virginia, and leave us at Sherman’s mercy.” Later in the diary, she again groused, “Sherman marched through Georgia, Savannah fell—I thought he would be opposed here—the President promised to defend South Carolina, Sherman swept on unresisted, devastating, burning.” She also labeled General William Hardee a “scoundrel” for not sending timely aid to Beauregard and called Joseph Johnston an “arch-retreater.” Sarah Lois Wadley, writing in Louisiana, used strident language in condemning southern military leadership, complaining, “Our own contemptible General Blanchard was shivering with fright in Monroe...If we only had a man for a General instead of the effeminate creature we have, these raids might be prevented.” Wadley also found fault in Confederate leadership for the loss of Vicksburg: “I do not know what is true, but it is all the fault of Gen’l Pemberton and his subordinates.” Mary Caldwell vented her frustrations against the
Confederate soldiers retreating from her neighborhood: “There seems to be no rest for the people of Fredericksburg, for our soldiers have left us again to the tender mercies of the Yankees...I ran them pretty hard about leaving us...It made me feel right sad to see all of our brave soldiers leaving.”

Julia LeGrand groused, “Much dissatisfaction was felt here for a time over President Davis’ speech at Jackson...I have always felt that Davis was a partisan, rather than a father of his country; a politician rather than a statesman...I can never learn to love him as I do Washington or Lee, ‘Stonewall’ Jackson, or the two Ashbys even.”

Judith McGuire, in spite of her efforts to trust in the South’s leadership, also complained, writing, “Nothing equal to the demands of these trying times has yet been done by any of the authorities. Oh that they would strain every nerve to put a stop to this bold and desolating invader!!”

Elite southern diarists chafed against their inability to change the course of the war. Waiting, as they must, on the home front, these women became frustrated by the seeming inability of southern military leadership to protect them and to win the war.

While some Confederate women blamed military leadership for Confederate failure, many diarists used their private writings to reassure themselves that the war was progressing better for the Confederates than it seemed. Mary Gray Caldwell, an optimistic diarist, tried to make sense of the loss of Jackson, Mississippi, writing, “We heard a day or two ago that Jackson, Mississippi was taken by the Yankees. I suppose Johnston let them have it on purpose.”

Even though the fall of Vicksburg was a major loss for the

under Confederate control. After a lengthy siege of the city, Union forces under the command of Ulysses S. Grant succeeded in taking Vicksburg on July 4, 1863.

41 Caldwell, “It Does Appear as if Our Soldiers Were Made Altogether of Patriotism,” 67.
43 McGuire, Diary of a Southern Refugee, 317.
44 Caldwell, “It Does Appear as if Our Soldiers Were Made Altogether of Patriotism,” 41.
Confederacy and a severe blow to southern morale, Caldwell again assured herself, "I hold out to the last that it is no so and that, if it is given up, it is a strategic movement on the part of Pemberton or Johnston, for I can hardly believe that Johnston would have let them take Vicksburg." Caldwell first performed what may be called “patriotic disbelief,” or wishful thinking, that Vicksburg had not actually fallen to the Union forces. However, she provided herself with a buffer against potential sinking morale by claiming that if such were really the case, then it must have been a strategic move which southern civilians simply lacked the military intelligence to understand. Sarah Wadley practiced the same kind of wishful thinking when she wrote, “As yet we have heard of nothing … nothing certainly except that the Yankees are advancing and our troops retiring, it is hinted that [they are] only enticing the enemy forward, I hope it is so.” However, she went on to express her frustration, both at her own uncertainty and at Confederate setbacks: “I cannot be sure of anything except that I would rather die than see our armies humiliated by flight, our country ruined by submission; submission! Why do I speak that disgraceful word, why do I think it for a moment; victory, or death is our only alternative, worse than death would be our conquest by the Yankees, that is not the most hateful word in our language.” General Johnston disappointed, as did Pemberton, though many southern women tried to excuse their failures. Judith McGuire obviously tried to talk herself into having faith in civil and military leadership when she wrote, “I know that we ought to feel that whatever General Lee and the President deem right for the cause must be right, and that we should be satisfied that

45 Ibid., 58.
46 Wadley, Diary, March 2, 1862.
47 Ibid., March 2, 1862.
all will be well.”\textsuperscript{48} McGuire was disciplining her own thinking, as her phrasing—\textit{ought to feel, should be satisfied}—makes clear.

Though slaveholding women clearly followed news of the military’s successes and defeats with avid interest, they sometimes claimed a female lack of understanding about troop movements and political maneuvers. Indeed, their diaries demonstrate that they resisted making overtly negative judgments about military and political matters. Some women felt that they had been abandoned, or “wholly deserted” to the “Yankee hordes.”\textsuperscript{49} Other women showed considerable anxiety over the loss of specific forts, towns, and waterways. The 1862 loss of New Orleans came as the first shock, followed the next year by the fall of Vicksburg after a lengthy siege. Across the South, slaveholding women confided their fears for the little city on the Mississippi. Finally, the loss of Richmond, the Confederacy’s capital, shook many women’s faith, even in heroes such as Robert E. Lee. Upon receiving news of Lee’s defeat at Richmond, Fannie Dickinson penned a lament, wailing, “O sorrowful day, O day of sorrows! Today we hear that Lee...has surrendered.”\textsuperscript{50} In spite of the evidence to the contrary, Dickinson assured herself, “It cannot be true, and yet we do not blame General Lee, such confidence we have in his bravery and plans.”\textsuperscript{51} Emma LeConte wrote, “The more I think of Lee’s surrender, the harder it is to bear. That army—that General—we idolized Stonewall Jackson, worshipped Lee...I cannot feel hopeless...Dark as everything is, we must hope.”\textsuperscript{52} In the context of repeated Confederate losses, slaveholding women struggled to maintain their faith in the South’s ultimate

\textsuperscript{48} McGuire, \textit{Diary of a Southern Refugee}, 334. \\
\textsuperscript{49} Buck, \textit{Shadows on My Heart}, 195. \\
\textsuperscript{50} Dickinson, Diary, April 10, 1865. \\
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., April 10, 1865. \\
\textsuperscript{52} LeConte, \textit{When the World Ended}, 95-97.
success. They turned to their diaries to work through their disappointment, sadness, and fatigue and to remind themselves of their duty to keep hope alive.

Though some women wrote incisively about military failures, many also made excuses for these failures. The relative size of Union and Confederate armies was the evidence most often offered to excuse southern losses. Judith McGuire sighed, “Our brave men have yielded to overpowering numbers” and expressed grief that “Our sad deficiency in numbers is always in our way.” Eliza Andrews concurred that the war was a numbers game and that the South was at a disadvantage. “We fought nobly and fell bravely,” she insisted, “overwhelmed by numbers and resources, with never a hand held out to save us. I hate all the world when I think of it.” Kate Stone also blamed the numbers, writing, “Yankees reported advancing in large force—destroying, burning, and murdering as they come!! Capt. Lee with his small band of guerrillas contesting every mile of the way but being steadily forced back by superior numbers!” Sarah Wadley blamed Confederate losses on the North’s “superior numbers” and celebrated Confederate gains by pointing out, “we gained a complete victory, although their numbers were superior to ours.” Kate Stone hoped, as did many southerners, that the martial skill of southern men could overcome the discrepancy in the size of northern and southern armies. “Our only hope,” she wrote anxiously, “is in desperate fighting. We are so outnumbered.” Pauline Heyward

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53 McGuire, Diary of a Southern Refugee, 93, 267.
54 Andrews, War-Time Journal, April 21, 1865.
55 Stone, Brokenburn, 296.
56 Wadley Diary, November 15, 1861.
57 Stone, Brokenburn, 108.
concurred with the common wisdom, writing, “So far we are only outnumbered, in every fair fight we have been victorious for four years.”\(^{58}\)

In this context, it is not surprising that slaveholding women often heard and found comfort in the biblical story of David and Goliath.\(^{59}\) Though blaming the relative size of the armies for southern defeat couldn’t change the situation on the ground, it did provide balm for women’s disappointments in the way the war progressed. Southern women also often insisted that northern soldiers were deserting in droves. Their supposed desertion helped slaveholding women to continue to believe that even the numbers could be overcome and the South could be victorious. In other words, it offered these diarists something to pin their hopes on. In the meantime, women consoled themselves with platitudes such as “My trust is in One who can save by many or by few”; “There is a Ruler in the skies who can save by many or be few”; and “the battles [are] not always to the strong.”\(^{60}\) Such platitudes, and fantasies of God’s intervention, provided welcome hope to women who wanted to believe that the South could be victorious.

Though southern slaveholding women struggled to maintain their faith in the ultimate success of the South’s cause, they often admitted to feelings of despair. Sometimes these feelings so overwhelmed them that women became listless, depressed, and even physically ill. Martha Abernathy moaned in the last entry of her diary, “The picture is dark, and things present now, I cannot find a ray to lighten it. Hopeful ones say all will right soon, while those less sanguine believe the worst must come. God help us and save us from

\(^{59}\) Buck, *Shadows on My Heart*, 39.
\(^{60}\) McGuire, *Diary of a Southern Refugee*, 104; Early, Diary, April 4, 1865; Broun, Diary, Nov. 6, 1862.
utter destruction.” Sarah Morgan also looked in vain for a ray of light in the darkness, confiding to her diary, “I am so tired, that I feel it is too great an exertion even to live. I hardly know what is the matter, and care still less. This life is killing me . . . What,” she asked, “is the use of looking forward? I dare not; all is too uncertain for anticipation.” Lucy Buck despaired upon hearing of Lee's surrender, exclaiming in her diary, “‘Such a day as this has been! A few more would, I believe, kill me . . . God only knows how nearly mad I must have been . . . I was too near crazy to know much of what they said or did. Oh! me I’m almost tempted to envy poor aunt Bettie lying cold and still in death...I’m desperate and wicked tonight.”

Elite women’s depression often expressed itself as a lack of interest in the daily affairs of their lives. Sarah Morgan expressed this apathy and listlessness, writing, “I have no heart any more; no spirit to do anything. Anxiety, sickness and grief have sapped the last remnant of merriment or interest in me.” This feeling of depression did not lift, leaving Morgan to wonder that she was “So depressed in spirits that I find no diversion in anything.” Lucy Breckinridge found that even looking forward to peace resulted in feelings of hopelessness. Fatigued by loss and depression, she wrote, “I feel so hopeless tonight. If I could only believe, as some, that peace may be declared in a few months, there would be some light in the darkness, but I can see no prospect for it. So many hearths will be desolate when we do have peace that many a heart’s bitter cry will be, ‘The light hath

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62 Morgan, *Civil War Diary*, 152.
63 Buck, *Shadows on my Heart*, 319.
64 Morgan, *Civil War Diary*, 296.
65 Ibid., 301.
risen but shineth not on me.” Lucy Buck expressed her feeling that life had become surreal when she wrote, “I am utterly worn down—this existence of passion and excitement is wearing away my strength like a consuming fever. When the day closes, I feel as if it had been lived in a perfect delusion.” Emma LeConte used her diary to actively affirm her hopefulness, even when “All looks so dark and gloomy. I do not despair as many do, but I feel very sad and bitter when I think of the condition of our country. The South will not give up—I can not think that—but I look forward to years of suffering and grief.” Julia LeGrand found that when hope for southern victory gave way, she was left believing in nothing at all: “It seems to me I have no longer any faith in civilization, learning, religion—anything good.” Such feelings of despair haunted elite women who lived in an almost constant state of anxiety about the war.

Despite these feelings, one of the cruel realities of life in Dixie was that newspapers, speeches, and political exhortations impelled women to keep the faith, regardless of how the war itself was progressing. Julia LeGrand acknowledged in her private diary that professing hope was not the same as possessing it when she wrote, “Should Port Hudson fall, or Vicksburg, thousands of hearts would lose hope to struggle, though we all say, ‘Nothing can make us give up.’” Confederate women were reminded to send only cheerful letters to soldiers, to greet them with smiles and kisses when the soldiers came home on furlough, and to do their best to remain cheerful and optimistic. A lot was riding, it seemed, on women’s ability to maintain a positive attitude. Many women practiced this positive

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66 Breckinridge, Lucy Breckinridge of Grove Hill, 191.
67 Buck, Shadows on My Heart, 60.
68 LeConte, When the World Ended, 85.
70 Ibid., 246.
thinking in their diaries, though their diaries often reflect wild fluctuations between hope and despair. Slaveholding women attempted to talk themselves into the cheerful support for the war that was expected of them. And many, no doubt, actually held out hope to the bitter end. Taught, as they were, to trust in male leadership, women had few other options. Giving in to fear and despair would do “no good,” as Emilie McKinley put it. Even though Judith McGuire sometimes pleaded with God over the state of the country, asking, “Lord, how long shall our enemies prosper?” she also insisted after Lee’s surrender, “We must hope, though our prospects should be as dark as the sky of this stormy night.” Finally, when Johnston surrendered in North Carolina and the war was undeniably over, McGuire ended her diary, “General Johnston surrendered on the 26th of April. ’My native land, good-night!’” Depressed and finally left without any hope, McGuire imposed silence on herself rather than record the dark thoughts that must have filled her mind.

Grace Elmore also clung to hope, not just as her duty to the South and its men but also because it supported her through the trials of war. Though she lamented, “Our hope in man has failed and we can look alone to God,” she later reminded herself that she “must not give up hope.” However, she eventually admitted that “This is too bitter, I could bear bravely so long as there was hope, but now—.” In the end, defeat often came as a severe shock to women who had spent four years working hard to convince themselves that it was not a possibility. Catherine Broun cried that defeat “is a terrible disappointment so

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71 McKinley, From the Pen of a She-Rebel, 13.
72 McGuire, Diary of a Southern Refugee, 102, 353.
73 Ibid., 360.
74 Grace Brown Elmore, Diary, December 24, 1864, December 31, 1864, May 1, 1865, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.
unlooked for.”75 In the face of repeated setbacks, Kate Carney wrote, “I can’t conceive of defeat being possible. What would I do if the last spark of hope was extinct?”76 Indeed, as long as they suffered for a noble purpose, the women of the slaveholding southern elite did their best to maintain hope, for themselves and for their country. Once that hope was extinguished, how would they cope with the devastation—of property, status, and life—that the war had visited upon the Confederate states?

One of the ways that Confederate women proved their desire to maintain hope, even when all hope seemed lost, was by continuing to believe in the possibility of foreign intervention on the side of the South. Time and time again, European powers were rumored to have recognized the Confederacy and entered into a war with the United States. Emilie McKinley was elated when she “heard this morning that France has certainly recognized us.”77 Sarah Morgan also exulted over foreign intervention, exclaiming in her diary, “These last few days, since the news arrived of the intervention of the English and French, I have alternately risen and fallen from the depth of despair to the height of delight and expectation.”78 “Our pet rumor,” wrote Kate Stone, “is again in the air that France, Spain, and England have recognized the Confederacy.”79 French, Spanish, or English intervention offered, for many Confederate women, the last hope for southern independence. Weeks after Lee’s surrender, Grace Elmore found herself caught up in a flurry of war news and rumor, writing, “Lee’s surrender, the Armistice, recognition of us by France, and declaration of war between the United States and France, the assassination of

75 Broun, Diary, May 2 1865.
76 Carney, Diary, May 21, 1862.
77 McKinley, From the Pen of a She-Rebel, 55.
78 Morgan, Civil War Diary, 127.
79 Stone, Brokenburn, 239.
Lincoln and propositions of peace, are the great facts compressed in this short past week.”  

Mary Early consoled herself after the fall of Richmond, proclaiming, “The Lord may conduct us by other avenues to peace and victory . . . My hope is that Louis Napoleon [III] may yet prove in God’s hands, the instrument of our deliverance.” A week later, her hope in French intervention continued: “French rumors . . . wild and extravagant . . . Having the finest army and navy in the world [Napoleon III] will no doubt humble the Federal power to the dust.” Like Early, most southern women who harbored hopes of foreign intervention engaged not just in wishful thinking and self-delusion but also in fantasies of revenge against the “northern aggressor.” Early could hardly contain her excitement at the thought of Napoleon’s armies humbling “the Federal power to the dust.” Maintaining hope in foreign intervention allowed southern women to remain faithful to the southern cause in which they had invested so much over the course of four years. It also helped them to channel their anger and frustration at southern setbacks and ultimate defeat. When it became clear that foreign intervention was not coming to aid the Confederacy, Emma LeConte wrote bitterly, “I will never believe another French rumor nor any other rumor that means hope to this unhappy land . . . The only question now is not ‘What hope?’, but ‘What new bitterness?’” However, she returned to the diary only days later to write, “I think I have given up hope at last, at least for the present. We will be conquered. Only in the future can we still hope, either for a foreign war . . . [or that the South will] renew the struggle and throw off the hated yoke.”

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80 Elmore, Diary, April 27, 1865.
81 Early, Diary, April 11, 1865
82 Ibid., April 18, 1865.
83 LeConte, When the World Ended, 97.
84 Ibid., 103.
that the war was lost, giving up hope entirely became difficult for women who had come to rely on it like a well-exercised muscle.

**Heroes and Villains**

Ultimately, both during the war and after, elite southern women found ways to renew their faith in the Confederate cause: they identified heroes whom they could rally around and villains whom they could rally against. The most celebrated heroes for southern women were undoubtedly Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee. Jackson represented the Christian soldier, while Lee was the gentleman commander. Even Jefferson Davis was sometimes held up as a competent statesman and the father of the southern confederacy. On the other side of the coin lurked shadowy scoundrels such as Yankees, black soldiers, and freed slaves. These villains played an equally important role in the ways that women imagined war and defeat. The melodrama that women constructed to make sense of their experiences during the war would continue to be important well after the war had ended, as women helped to shape the legacy of the conflict and to inflect its history with white slaveholding values.

Many women chose to criticize southern male leadership, but they came short of indicting the men of the South overall. Instead, when they were disappointed in military leadership, they often looked to the common enlisted man as the hope of the South. Kate Stone exulted in the sight of southern troops, writing, "Bravely, cheerily they go, willing to meet death in defense of the South, the land we love so well, the fairest land and the most gallant men the sun shines on."\(^{85}\) In spite of Eliza Andrews’ frustration that Federal armies

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\(^{85}\) *Stone, Brokenburn*, 14.
seemed to continue unmolested through the South, she found cause to hope, sighing with relief as she wrote, “I was glad to learn that our poor little handful of Confederates had made a brave fight before surrendering.”\textsuperscript{86} “We were in a way cut off from Richmond, I believe,” wrote Mary Caldwell, “but I daresay our troops are doing right.”\textsuperscript{87} Caldwell became even more enthusiastic about the army when she bragged, “It does appear as if our soldiers were made altogether of patriotism.”\textsuperscript{88} Judith McGuire penned an entry that reads as a southern affirmation, fending off criticisms and thoughts of defeat: “One common sentiment animated us all; no doubts, no fears were felt. We all have such entire reliance in the justice of our cause and the valor of our men, and, above all, on the blessing of Heaven!”\textsuperscript{89}

Even in defeat, Mary Early found cause to celebrate southern soldiers. As soldiers from Lee’s disbanded army passed her home, Early described them as “an interesting, noble looking set, their hearts even broken, yet their bearing is so firm and manly.”\textsuperscript{90} Sarah Wadley assured herself that “Our country soldiers are many of them accomplished gentlemen, and all are men of humanity and honesty.”\textsuperscript{91} Wadley looked to the future, when memorializing the dead would become the special mission of southern women, as she promised herself, "If they [southern soldiers] die in body, their names shall live in our memory, and when in after days the stains of blood have been obliterated from the figure of Freedom, we shall remember and generations after us shall bless those who died for their

\textsuperscript{86} Andrews, \textit{War-Time Journal}, 51.
\textsuperscript{87} Caldwell, “It Does Appear as if Our Soldiers Were Made Altogether of Patriotism,” 53.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 85.
\textsuperscript{89} McGuire, \textit{Diary of a Southern Refugee}, 12.
\textsuperscript{90} Early, Diary, April 9, 1865.
\textsuperscript{91} Wadley, Diary, September 15, 1861.
country.” Celebrating Confederate soldiers’ martial masculinity and devotion to “the cause” provided elite southern women with a means by which they could maintain hope, even in the face of devastating setbacks. These women often looked eagerly for opportunities to help southern soldiers as they passed through their neighborhoods. Their diaries are full of instances in which they offered what they could to these ragged armies—whether it was bread and milk, bouquets of flowers, or cheers for Jeff Davis and the South.

As the war dragged on, elite southern women followed news from the battlefield and found heroes in whom they could place their faith. These heroes played an important function in women’s diaries; they acted as focus points on which southern women—doing their best to remain optimistic—could concentrate all of their hopes and dreams for southern success and for peace on southern terms. As already mentioned, elite women’s favorites, judging by their diaries, were Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson and Robert E. Lee. These commanders, with their impressive military maneuvering, worked their way into the hearts of southern women across the Confederate states. Julia LeGrand summed up these two men’s place in her heart this way: “Our magnificent Lee and Jackson...these two heroes have long ago captured my imagination.” She went on to write, “If Stonewall, our dear hero, who realizes every one’s ideas of a true knight, ‘tender and true,’ is not near at hand for our deliverance, I fear many of us will die broken-hearted. We are determined to believe that he is hovering near our lines. Lee is enough for Virginia and a dozen Hookers.” Sarah Morgan practiced the common hero-worship of Jackson as well, while dismissing the efforts of P.G.T. Beauregard. She wrote, “There is one thing in which Sophy and I agree, and

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92 Wadley, Diary, April 13, 1862.
94 Ibid., 251.
that is in making Stonewall Jackson our hero. Talk of Beauregard! he never had my adoration; but Stonewall is the greatest man of the age, decidedly.”95 Pauline Heyward rejected the notion that “Johnston is universally believed to be our greatest General, not excepting even Lee.” “However,” she enthused, “Lee has never lost a battle; give me that kind of man for my Hero General.”96

Even when the heroes disappointed, Confederate women kept the faith, as did Lucy Buck when she lamented, “It does grieve me so to think that we are to be left unprotected again so soon just as we had begun to feel secure once more too—,” but she consoled herself with the thought that “if Gen. Lee so orders it, of course ’tis all right and we’ve nothing to do but await results.”97 As Kate Stone put it after Jackson’s 1863 death, “He was worthy to be idolized by all classes as he is.”98 Though dashing Jackson and solid Lee became women’s shorthand for all that was admirable and for the South’s best hopes, other commanders also received praise. Kate Stone dismissed Pemberton but insisted, “With Beauregard and Johnston leading against Grant, we must win.”99 Ellen Renshaw House chose General Longstreet as deserving of southerners’ faith, writing confidently, “I believe Longstreet knows what he is doing, and am perfectly satisfied to trust all to him.”100 Confederate women’s hearts swelled when they thought of the daring deeds of their favorite generals. Especially for Confederate women within Union lines, hero-worship increased their hope that their area would soon be liberated from the “vandal hordes.”101

And while many found cause for complaint with the civilian government, some women

95 Morgan, Civil War Diary, 260.
96 Heyward, A Confederate Lady Comes of Age, 15.
97 Buck, Shadows on My Heart, 234.
98 Stone, Brokenburn, 313.
99 Ibid., 211.
100 House, A Very Violent Rebel, 62.
101 Wadley, Diary, February 17, 1861; Stone, Brokenburn, 297.
even looked for heroes there. Such was the case for Sarah Wadley, who described Confederate President Jefferson Davis as “Wise, moderate, and just in council, cool, brave and gallant in battle; firm, energetic and instant in the performance of his executive duties. Truly we have in him,” she exclaimed, “a second Washington.”

Turning real men into idols and saviors could be risky business, but women across the South put all their faith into men such as Lee and Jackson. Ellen Renshaw House worried that defeat was a result of the South’s willingness to depend “too much on Gen Lee too little on God, and I believe God has suffered his surrender to show us he can use other means than Gen Lee to affect his ends,” by which she meant the independence of the South. For most elite southern women, however, placing complete faith in the likes of Robert E. Lee was a psychological necessity. This hero-worship gave them the opportunity to focus their hopes and their dreams of success. It also added to the romance of a war that was primarily experienced by women on the home front as anxiety, dread, fear, and drudgery—anything but romantic. But the most important feature of women’s idolization of military leadership was that it helped them to maintain faith that the South really was a land of knights and their ladies, of chivalry and bravery. They were thus able to construct a romance of their own in which the South and its men battled for right against might, for home and hearth against cruel invaders. This vision of the Confederacy’s cause would become even more important after the war had ended, as women began the process of mythologizing the Old South. When Lucy Buck declared, “Thank God! And next to Him, blessing be to our blessed Beauregard,” she was doing something more than just engaging in the hero worship of the war years; she was expressing the common sentiment that God

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102 Wadley, Diary, July 28, 1861.
103 House, A Very Violent Rebel, 162.
was on the side of the South.\textsuperscript{104} She was also foreshadowing the hagiographic tone of much of the post-war memorialization efforts of southern women.

The counterpoint to the noble southern knight was found in the person of the vile Yankee. Women across the South excoriated federal soldiers in their diaries, finding fault with most of the northerners that they met. Men like Benjamin “the Beast” Butler represented the “tyranny” of the United States government, and in their disrespect of southern women’s homes, the antithesis to the southern man fighting for home and hearth. In their diaries, elite southern women freely vented their fear of and hatred for Union soldiers who “seem to cover the whole face of the earth.”\textsuperscript{105}

Though women in the South often claimed that they felt no fear in the presence of Union soldiers, their diaries reveal that they moved back and forth between feelings of courage and fear. Kate Carney insisted, “We are sitting up until three or four o’clock, as they have threatened to burn our house tonight, but seeing no prospect of a fire, went to bed and slept very comfortably.”\textsuperscript{106} Eliza Andrews admitted, “I used to feel very brave about Yankees, but since I have passed over Sherman’s track and seen what devastation they make, I am so afraid of them that I believe I should drop down dead if one of the wretches should come into my presence.”\textsuperscript{107} Though rumors of “outrages” committed by northern soldiers often proved untrue, southern women had good cause to fear the Yankees. Union soldiers often tramped into women’s homes, rifling through private belongings in supposed searches for men and arms. Margaret Gwyn was appalled that, “Today we have had another crowd of foraging federals they do treat the people very bad

\textsuperscript{104} Buck, \textit{Shadows on My Heart}, 195.
\textsuperscript{105} Broun, Diary, Nov 6, 1862.
\textsuperscript{106} Carney, Diary, May 7, 1862.
just come and take any thing we have got before our eyes. [sic]" 108  Federals, frustrated by the taunts and sneers of red-hot rebel women, could also be maddeningly “impudent,” something that elite ladies were unaccustomed to having to endure, especially from social inferiors, as elite women usually described their northern antagonists. Diarist Mary Stribling recorded a story in which Union soldiers wrote “low pieces of obscenity” to the ladies of Front Royal, Virginia on the walls of the town’s buildings and signed the “letters” with Jefferson Davis’ name. 109  Soldiers undeniably also stole from rebel women, seizing horses, food, and valuables, sometimes leaving women to wonder how they would continue to feed their families. Finally, women could be pushed out of their homes to make room for Union headquarters, hospitals, or officers’ living quarters. But that was far preferable to the treatment that Priscilla Bond’s home received; her house and several outbuildings were destroyed when federal soldiers set fire to them in retaliation for the deeds of Bond’s husband and brother-in-law. 110

However, elite women feared even worse, especially those who were encountering soldiers for the first time. Elite white women, taught that their virtue rested in their sexual purity, understandably feared rape most of all. Though historians agree that the sexual assault of elite white women by soldiers was rare, white women believed that they may be forced to choose between “outrage”—a loss of honor considered worse than death—and suicide. 111  Grace Elmore made just such a calculation, “Oh well they know how to avenge themselves, on women, what she values more than all things, the loss of which would be

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108 Margaret Gwyn, Diary, August 16, 1862, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.
109 Mary Cary Ambler Stribling diary, May [?] 19, 1862, Library of Virginia, Accession 25390, Richmond, VA.
111 Rable, Civil Wars, 160-162; Campbell, When Sherman Marched North from the Sea, 120 n. 27.
living death. God forgive me, if I had to choose between death and dishonor, I could not live." Many women concealed weapons—knives and pistols—on their persons in preparation for meeting the hostile enemy, as did Kate Carney and Sarah Morgan. Violence could and did occur when Confederate women encountered Federals in uniform. Soldiers sometimes pointed firearms at women’s heads during raids and searches. They also insulted them, sometimes in barely-veiled sexual terms. Emilie McKinley reported that one soldier told a neighboring woman, “‘When I next see you I hope you will have a thick-lipped negro for your husband.’ . . . When they cannot whip our men,” she reasoned, “they take their spite out on our poor women and children.” Union soldiers also countered Confederate ladies’ haughty demeanor with jabs of their own. “When some of the nasty things said they would marry Southern girls,” wrote Lucy Breckinridge, “I felt so tempted to tell them that I had heard it was their plan to marry our negroes and that they were the only Southern girls they would ever get.”

In addition to fearing Yankees, many Confederate women admitted to hating them, which sometimes caused them to experience a crisis of conscience. Union soldiers were regularly referred to as savages, poltroons, vermin, demons, blue devils, cowards, wretches, and thieves. Eliza Andrews cried out for new words to describe the Federals, “Yankee, Yankee, is the one detestable word always ringing in Southern ears. If all the words of hatred in every language under heaven were lumped together into one huge epithet of

112 Elmore, Diary, November 26, 1864.
113 Kate Carney wrote, “I’m glad Ma left her pistol here, as I shall try and use it, if I find it necessary.” Carney Diary, June 14, 1862; When preparing her “running bag,” Sarah Morgan included both a dagger and a pistol. Morgan, Civil War Diary, 150.
114 McKinley, From the Pen of a She- Rebel, 70.
115 Breckinridge, Lucy Breckinridge of Grove Hill, 195.
detestation, they could never tell how I hate Yankees.”

Keziah Brevard was fierce in her hatred of Abolitionists, which she imagined all northerners to be. “I do hate a Northern Abolitionist—Lord forgive me,” she wrote, going on to call them “selfish and envious sons of Satan.”

Eliza Andrews admitted, “I was so angry that I felt as if I would like to run a knitting needle into the rascal” after federal soldiers cursed her aunt and threatened to burn down the house.

Sallie Armstrong described soldiers in blue as “savages” and “tormentors,” but she penned a serious understatement when she declared simply, “I really dislike them.”

Lucy Buck “was angry enough to shoot” the “impudent churl” who tried to steal her father’s corn.

Kate Foster struggled to describe her feelings about Federal soldiers, writing, “I don’t love them and never shall but my feelings are indescribable towards them now they are here. I know I hate them.”

Ellen Renshaw House concurred, spilling her hatred onto the pages of her diary: “Some of their men were brought in wounded….They have my best wishes to die.”

Priscilla Bond reserved her most heated comments until a Union soldier searched and then burned her house. She wrote, “O, how I wish I had been a rattle-snake and could have bit him then!”

Such sentiments were commonplace among elite Confederate women, who often felt stifled by a rage that had no outlet. However, many women also insisted that only the actions of the “vandal hordes” drove them to such unladylike feelings of rage and revenge.

“We have suffered till we feel savage,” wrote Emma LeConte after cheering the

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118 Andrews, 81.
119 Sallie Armstrong, Diary, April 28, Aug 12, 1863 Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.
120 Buck, _Shadows on My Heart_, 273.
121 Kate Foster, Diary, July 14 1863.
122 House, _A Very Violent Rebel_, 12.
assassination of Lincoln. Mary Caldwell rationalized, “No one that has a heart would wish the Yankees any harm if they would keep to their own homes and firesides, but, as it is, everything we can wish them is hardly too bad for have they not come to desolate our homes by killing our friends and relatives, burning and confiscating all our property, our fields turned up to be made graves of.” Kate Carney likewise justified her vengeful feelings, writing, “I’m glad so many of their men were killed and wounded. If they would return home and not interfere with us and our government, I would not wish them so much evil, but as long as they stay here, I am going to wish them all the harm I can.” Sarah Wadley reflected on how the war upset her notions of woman’s “merciful heart,” writing, “We hear that the Yankees are dying by hundreds in New Orleans, this last is an awful thing to rejoice over, and yet such the fate of a bloody war and such are the feelings which it engenders, even in the merciful heart of a woman.” “How,” she asked, “can I but hate the Yankees.”

In spite of women’s fear and anger over real and imagined outrages, they reserved their greatest vituperation for federal soldiers who fraternized with or “enticed” away enslaved people. This interference with the “domestic institution” drove elite women to fits of rage and disgust. “A yankee guard,” spat Fannie Dickinson, “who, as each Negro woman and child passed by, were stopped and shaken hands with most vigorously, taking the little ones into the lap and treating all to whiskey. T’was indeed a disgusting sight.” Eliza Andrews revealed her disgust when she wrote, “They strut about the streets of

124 LeConte, When the World Ended, 91-93.
125 Caldwell, “It Does Appear as if Our Soldiers Were Made Altogether of Patriotism,” 81.
126 Carney, Diary, June 8, 1862.
127 Wadley, Diary, September 18, 1862.
128 Ibid., February 3, 1865.
129 Dickinson, Diary, April 4, 1865.
Washington with negro women on their arms and sneak around into people’s kitchens, tampering with the servants and setting them against the white people.” 130 Lucy Buck was so disturbed by the sight of “one of the vermin on the street with his arms about the neck of a strapping ‘colored gemmun’ and his lips in loving proximity to the lips of ebony,” that she could not pay attention in church. 131 Kate Stone vented her mix of outrage and fear upon the arrival of black troops in her neighborhood. “The Yankees,” she wrote, “know they make it ten times worse for us by sending Negroes to commit these atrocities…[The US Government] has done all in its power to incite a general insurrection throughout the South, in the hopes of thus getting rid of the women and children in one grand holocaust.” 132 She also thought that Union officers who commanded black soldiers ought to be hanged. 133 As slaves left their masters and mistresses behind, frustrated mistresses blamed the “detestable” Yankees for their flight. “Poor darkeys,” reasoned Eliza Andrews, “they are the real victims of the war, after all. The Yankees have turned their poor ignorant heads and driven them wild with false notions of freedom.” 134 Elite women’s diaries reveal that they constantly blamed Union soldiers for the flight of enslaved people, often explicitly arguing that, as beings ruled by passion rather than intellect, slaves did not have the mental capacity to be held responsible for seeking freedom, as did Julia LeGrand when she wrote, “I would hate them [former slaves] if I considered them responsible and developed beings. They are not quite men and women yet.” 135 In short, women crafted their personal narratives around the evil deeds of the Yankee/free black combination.

131 Buck, Shadows on My Heart, 56.
132 Stone, Brokenburn, 297-98.
133 Ibid., 239.
Despite frequent assertions that enslaved African Americans were too infantile to appreciate the meanings of hard work and freedom, southern mistresses did, in fact, blame slaves for leaving them. Indeed, the flight of their slaves represented for these women a breach of the contract that they believed rendered slavery a mutually beneficial relationship between slaveholder and slave. For decades, elite women had been taught to believe that slavery should be conceived of as a “positive good.” Women’s role, as discussed already, was to be the benevolent arm of the institution, and their diaries reveal that most women thought that they and their families lived up to this admonition. This belief on the part of slaveholding women helps to explain why mistresses had such a difficult time imagining that slaves and slaveholders had separate interests. Because they believed in the self-serving concept of “my family, black and white,” slaveholding women experienced slaves’ departures as deeply personal betrayals. In the context of the war, slaves who left their masters and mistresses were often depicted as siding with the enemy, as when Eliza Andrews wrote, “I can't help feeling as if they are deserting us for the enemy.”\footnote{Andrews, War-Time Journal, 114-115.} In many cases, enslaved people did leave their homes in the company of soldiers in blue, but they sought their own conceptions of a life of freedom. Leaving old masters behind was often an important psychological step toward autonomy and self-determination.\footnote{Tera W. Hunter, To 'Joy My Freedom, 4-20.} For mistresses, however, trusted slaves’ decisions to leave them behind was a sign of “ingratitude,” even proof of their unfitness for freedom. Because the departure of slaves angered and humiliated white mistresses, freedmen and women became villains in slaveholding women’s stories.
In the first years of the war, slaveholding women’s diaries were filled with assertions that their slaves were particularly loyal. A representative example comes from the diary of Grace Elmore. Elmore repeatedly praised the “faithful” behavior of the family’s slaves, writing, “Cynthia and Horace acted splendidly, so smart and so faithful,” and, “Horace, Nelly, and Cynthia have been most faithful. Horace so pleasant, so considerate that I feel towards him as though he were a friend more than servant.”138 Acknowledging that some slaves may want to leave their mistresses behind, Elmore decided, “All might go who wished to, and I would not care except where I am personally attached, but those who remain must understand they belong to me now as ever.”139 Elmore’s determination to retain control melded with her desire to continue to place her faith in those slaves to whom she was “personally attached.”

However, only nine days later, she was singing a different tune in her diary, complaining, “This doubt in our servants is very disagreeable, when the most faithful cannot be wholly trusted.”140 Shortly after this entry, Elmore noted that the first of the “servants” had deserted their mistress. Though she claimed relief at being free of troublesome slaves, she was clearly annoyed, writing “Who would worry with the lazy, self indulgent race, unless held as property….Poor, miserable, deluded creatures, we who have known and owned you, and who therefore must feel a deep interest in your future, do most heartily pity and pray for you.”141 Finally, Elmore revised her position on the close mutual bonds of affection that bound slave and master together, opining that, “Both parties are very indifferent...In most instances there is I think a bitter feeling and a sharp antagonism

138 Elmore, Diary, February 21, 1865.
139 Ibid., March 6, 1865.
140 Ibid., March 15, 1865.
141 Ibid., May 24, 1865.
between the two races. I almost believe they are natural enemies and that only their relative positions bound them in affection as well as law together.” Progressions such as Elmore’s—from confidence that the system would hold to resentment at the “almost universal tale of ingratitude” on the part of enslaved people—were acted out in diaries across the South as slaves left their mistresses behind. Fannie Dickinson wrote of slaves’ leaving, “This is indeed the unkindest cut of all. I cannot write about it.” Indeed, women believed so deeply in the mutual affection between slave and mistress that they were deeply injured by what they understood as rejection. Dickinson admitted her own hurt feelings, but she ultimately chose silence over writing about her feelings of betrayal.

Other historians have noted, “as slavery disintegrated, racism intensified.” George Rable describes the ideological double bind that mistresses created for enslaved and freed people: to mistresses, ‘the blacks’ wartime behavior reflected inherent racial characteristics: loyal slaves proved how little blacks valued freedom; runaways showed how most Negroes were ungrateful brutes.” “I am beginning to lose confidence in the whole race,” wrote Catherine Broun, “I see a growing inclination to the Yanks in our own servants . . . it is hard to see them take a stand against us.” For Broun, as for LeGrand, a slave’s attempt to gain freedom was seen as a direct rejection of the master and mistress. Slaveholding women were incapable of acknowledging the independent motives that animated enslaved people and the disparate interests between slave and mistress. Grace Elmore wrote disparagingly about black ideas of freedom: “these [people] love or desire

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142 Ibid., June 25, 1865.
143 Ibid., June 25, 1865.
144 Dickinson, Diary, April 16, 1865.
145 Rable, Civil Wars, 119; Weiner, Mistresses and Slaves, 181-183.
146 Rable, Civil Wars, 119.
147 Broun, Diary, May 1, 1864.
Freedom for itself, none think of it as a principle for which they are willing to suffer and die, but all take a sensual view.”\textsuperscript{148} Elmore, committed to ideas of black inferiority, was blind to the many ways that slaves risked suffering and death in their quest for freedom. On the other hand, Julia LeGrand wrote that, despite Yankees encouraging slaves to rise up and slay their masters, slaves were so inferior that they could not fathom the meanings of liberty enough to act: “If they were not negroes we would have had another bloody revolution among us, but the African must shed several skins and pass through various stages before his red tide can mount at the words, ‘Give me liberty or give me death.’”\textsuperscript{149} In the minds of mistresses, enslaved people were incapable of appreciating the meanings of freedom, even at the moment when they risked everything to achieve it for themselves and their families. For LeGrand, nothing short of armed revolution could prove African Americans’ thirst for liberty. If slaves had risen against their masters en masse, however, LeGrand would have felt justified in depicting them as bloodthirsty savages. In short, mistresses simply refused to understand the human needs and social constraints at work on their bondspeople, preferring instead to find fault both with their desires for freedom and with continued loyalty and service to white families.

Many mistresses responded with anger to the epiphany that their slaves had the capacity and the will to abandon the master’s house and strike out on their own, as evidenced by the racist screeds they penned in their diaries. Eliza Andrews revealed her anger when she wrote, “I hope the Yankees will get their fill of the blessed nigger before they are done with him.”\textsuperscript{150} Always careful to comport themselves as ladies, southern

\textsuperscript{148} Elmore, Diary, May 24, 1865.
\textsuperscript{149} LeGrand, \textit{The Journal of Julia LeGrand}, 94.
\textsuperscript{150} Andrews, \textit{War-Time Journal}, 110.
mistresses studiously avoided words like “nigger.” Genteel ladies simply did not use such terms, preferring the more appealing fiction that they loved their slaves and would not degrade themselves or their slaves by using such an ugly epithet. They even refused to call slaves “slaves,” preferring “servants” as a more dignified (and euphemistic) term. Andrews’ angry use of the word “nigger” reveals a rage-induced lapse in respectability, but she used the term to dismiss African Americans and their Yankee friends as the lowest sorts of being.

While many slaveholding women kept the faith throughout the war, others questioned the wisdom of leading men and showed signs of emotional and physical exhaustion. Maintaining faith in the Confederacy and its men became its own kind of ideological and emotional labor for these women. However, they came short of overtly criticizing the war and preferred to pen laudatory tributes to those commanders and leaders in whom they continued to have faith, rather than launching full-blown critiques against those in whom they did not. Elite slaveholding women’s private writings, then, demonstrate the ways these women tried to bring their own thinking into line with the propaganda and ethos of the South. In doing so, they laid the groundwork for women’s leading roles in the post-war Lost Cause tradition. The mental work that these women did during the war itself allowed them to rewrite their own personal histories and the history of their region in terms that denied their wartime frustrations and lack of confidence. In the post-war period, they agreed to serve symbolically as the delicate sex in need of protection during the war (from Yankee invaders and abolitionist zealots) and after the war (from the mythical black rapist).
In their efforts to support the Confederacy and defend a southern “way of life,” southern white slaveholding women employed a number of strategies to combat the loss of hope and its attendant feelings of despair. They wrote narratives in their diaries that emphasized the villainy of Yankees, newly free people of color, and black soldiers. Like all good romances, their stories also turned on the heroism of true men and patriots, men like Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson. Despite their best efforts, however, women on the home front were subject to wild mood swings, moving from elation to despair and back again. Such emotional turmoil took its toll on women, and they struggled against depression as the war dragged on. However, their emotional work laid the foundations for the post-war myth-making that would occur around the characters that figured most prominently in their own romances: the South’s military leadership and the freedman. Elite women’s diaries provided the space to both vent their frustrations and reassure themselves of the righteousness of the Confederate cause. They also served as spaces for slaveholding white women to rehearse a revisionist interpretation of the war, its causes, and the reasons for defeat. This revisionism was rooted in new expressions of overt anti-black racism and explicit white supremacy.

**Julia LeGrand’s Story**

When Julia LeGrand turned to her diary to complain about Julie Ann’s departure, she was working within the context of the double bind that Rable describes. She wrote,

> To-day tried to do up my collars and other fineries—failed and felt anything but spiritual-minded. I got angry with my irons which would smut my muslins, and then got angry with myself for having been angry—finally divided the blame, giving a part to Julie Ann for running away and leaving me to do her work, and by her thefts, with less money wherewithal to procure others to do for me. If Julie’s condition was bettered, if she had been made a
higher being by the sort of freedom she has chosen, I could not find it in my conscience to regret her absence; but I hear of her, she is a degraded creature, living a vicious life, and we tried so hard to make her good and honest. I once was as great an abolitionist as any in the North—that was when my unthinking fancy placed black and white upon the same plane. My sympathies blinded me, and race and character were undisturbed mysteries to me. But my experience with negroes has altered my way of thinking and reasoning. As an earnest of sincerity given even to my own mind, it was when we owned them in numbers that I thought they ought to be free, and now that we have none, I think they are not fit for freedom.\textsuperscript{151}

In reading LeGrand’s diary entry about the loss of her slaves and her resulting shift away from her “abolitionist” tendencies, it becomes clear that her narrative was important in helping her to understand her experiences and in regaining some control over her situation. Like other slaveholding women across the South, LeGrand blamed her “servants” for leaving her. When she became angry because she stained her clothes with the iron, she redirected her rage, deciding that the real culprit was the former slave woman Julie Ann. LeGrand says she “divided the blame,” but the passage demonstrates that she did not, in fact, do this. Instead, she placed all the blame squarely on Julie Ann, first for leaving LeGrand, and second for her apparent “thefts” that left her mistress without the means to buy the services of some other black woman.

Julie Ann’s departure not only forced LeGrand to take on unpleasant and unaccustomed tasks but also revealed to LeGrand her own incompetence in performing them. Like other slaveholding women, LeGrand became responsible for herself in new ways when slaves sought their freedom. And like other women, she resented the new forms of labor—ironing, cleaning, cooking—that accompanied this shift. It is hardly surprising, then, that each new frustration of this sort compounded mistresses’ anger at departing slaves. As Drew Faust has written, “White women’s dependence on their slaves

grew simultaneously with slaves’ independence of their owners, creating a troubling situation of confusion and ambivalence for mistresses compelled to constantly reassess, to interrogate, and to revise their assumptions as they struggled to reconcile need with fear.”152 Enslaved men and women sought their freedom at the very moment in which slaveholding women felt the greatest material need for their service and the greatest psychological need for their loyalty. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that mistresses felt abandoned and betrayed by slaves’ departures.

Julie Ann was not the only slave that left LeGrand during the war, a fact that LeGrand alluded to when she wrote, “It was when we owned them in numbers that I thought they ought to be free, and now that we have none, I think they are not fit for freedom.”153 Why, then, was LeGrand particularly perturbed at losing this one slave? The answer lies in the close relationship that LeGrand and Julie Ann shared. “She had been with us,” LeGrand wrote in an earlier diary entry, “ever since an infant—about our person—and was consequently associated with much that is past and dear.”154 LeGrand went on to explain that she had always been extremely gentle with Julie Ann, despite her assessment that Julie Ann “preferred lying to confidence, stealing to asking, and a life of vagrancy to a respectable and comfortable one.”155 In the end, though, LeGrand decided, “negroes only respect those they fear.”156 Her anger and sense of betrayal were palpable when she wrote about her former slaves.

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152 Faust, Mothers of Invention, 61.
154 Ibid., 56.
155 Ibid., 57.
156 Ibid., 57.
When a friend’s slave woman Mary ran away, LeGrand wrote, “The Yankees have undermined every good feeling which at one time existed between these poor people and their owners....So many people have been betrayed by pet servants.\footnote{Ibid., 261-63.} As Mary did for her mistress, Julie Ann represented for LeGrand the deeply-felt sense of personal betrayal that slaveholding women across the South felt when ‘pet’ slaves abandoned them. Believing, as they did, that they had provided for their slaves in a way that went beyond the call of duty, mistresses saw ‘ingratitude’ when slaves left them behind to take care of themselves. Slaveholding white women were suddenly confronted with this question: was the apparently reciprocal love and affection between mistress and slave a sham? Had it been merely a performance on the part of enslaved people in whom mistresses placed a great deal of faith? If this was the case, slaveholding women were forced to confront the possibility that the institution of slavery was coercive rather than mutual. This notion undercut women’s sense of themselves as angels of mercy ministering to a grateful population of African Americans, those who would have been “mere animals” had they been raised in Africa.\footnote{Ibid., 102.} When slaves who had developed close personal relationships with their mistresses left slaveholding women behind, they held a mirror up to mistresses who did not like how they saw themselves reflected. Not only did slaves’ departure signal that enslaved people were not content under slavery—as the slaveholding ideology insisted—but it also suggested that slaveholding women had been duped into believing that they had built meaningful ties with favorite slaves. The perception of such bonds of love and affection had been immensely important to slaveholding women’s sense of themselves as
ladies and mistresses. These women suddenly had to grapple with intense feelings of betrayal, which rendered them both embarrassed and defensive.

What did elite white women do with the feelings engendered by such a revelation? With some exceptions, these women coped by deflecting the implicit criticism of themselves, by resorting to anger and outrage against black people who sought their freedom. This method of coping, evident in LeGrand’s diary, allowed slaveholding women to redirect feelings of pain, fear of the future, and humiliation into the more manageable and outwardly-directed emotions of anger and hatred. Immediately after describing Julie Ann’s departure, LeGrand went on to assert, “These people would be savages again if free.”159 Had LeGrand genuinely felt a deep affection and personal responsibility for Julie Ann? It’s entirely possible that she did. She confided to her diary that “the day she [Julie Ann] ran away was as unhappy a one as I ever passed, though I tried to conceal my feelings from the other servants.”160 Suddenly, she was faced with the fact that this relationship had been one-sided, and she likely felt foolish for having believed in its authenticity. She concealed her feelings from the other slaves because she was newly self-conscious, suddenly aware that they might all recognize her foolish credulousness. Turning the struggle for freedom into a moral deficiency on the part of enslaved people permitted LeGrand to avoid acknowledging it as a criticism of herself.

Julie Ann’s and others’ departures were such a deep cut to LeGrand’s sense of herself as benevolent mistress that she lashed out in her diary against a whole race of people. Though she claimed to have been “as great an abolitionist as any in the North,” she claimed that her attitudes toward black people changed during the course of the war. She

159 Ibid., 57.
160 Ibid., 57
explicitly acknowledged, “now that we have none [no slaves], I think they are not fit for freedom.” This thought was telling of the ways in which white slaveholding women absolved themselves of responsibility for the cruelties of slavery and for its breakdown. Indeed, many women claimed to have abolitionist tendencies while they held slaves. This assertion reaffirmed for these women that they truly were kind, benevolent mistresses who held slaves as part of a moralizing mission, or “school” as LeGrand put it. It also reveals the shift in attitude that many slaveholding women experienced during and after the war: once slaves left their mistresses, the contract was broken and white women owed nothing to former slaves. Indeed, they were sure that they were actually the injured parties. In spite of the admission that it was only the loss of her slaves that caused her to think them “not fit for freedom,” LeGrand continued to blame African Americans’ “race and character” for her change in feeling, rather than the crisis engendered by her slaves’ rejection of her. She went on to declare that African Americans “have no cares but physical ones and will not have for generations to come.” LeGrand deflected criticisms of herself by falling back on pseudo-scientific notions of the “law of progress” that rendered all people of African descent as savages, far behind whites in mental and moral development.

LeGrand’s diary demonstrated that slaveholding women turned their despair at the breakdown of interpersonal relationships with individual slave people into castigations of an entire race. The entry above shows clearly that LeGrand moved from a description of Julie Ann’s supposed treachery to ruminations on the personal and racial failings of all African Americans. Indeed, Julie Ann and LeGrand were each replaced by the generic

161 Ibid., 101.
162 Ibid., 168.
white and black man in her entry: “White men, left free from degrading cares, generally struggle up to something higher—not so the black man.”\textsuperscript{163} This move to the generic and universal painted whites and blacks as distinct, existing on separate planes of evolutionary development. It replaced difficult and intimate relationships such as that between Julia and Julie Ann with unassailable axioms about racial difference. This shift reflected LeGrand’s discomfort discussing the pain of the dissolution of her relationship with Julie Ann and the shift toward anger and overt racism as a coping mechanism. Her diary allowed her to write through her disappointment and to replace it with a narrative of black depravity. Such a narrative allowed LeGrand to project her own feelings of failure onto African Americans as a whole. Such a transference colored the reactions of slaveholding women across the South and exemplifies Rable’s assertion that as slavery disintegrated, racism intensified.

LeGrand repeatedly asserted her belief that all black people shared the same deficiencies, writing, “Never yet have I met with one instance to prove the contrary,” and “never have I met with one instance which encouraged me to think differently [about black inferiority].”\textsuperscript{164} In spite of the clear contradiction with her earlier statement that “My experience with negroes has altered my way of thinking and reasoning,” a statement that suggested that only black freedom caused LeGrand to turn away from her “abolitionist” sympathies, LeGrand here insisted that all African Americans, in all of her experience, shared the same “deficiencies and overpluses.”\textsuperscript{165} This shift to overt anti-black racism also signaled that, contrary to her assertion that, “If Julie’s condition was bettered, if she had been made a higher being by the sort of freedom she has chosen, I could not find it in my

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{163}{Ibid., 101.}
\footnotetext{164}{Ibid., 101-102.}
\footnotetext{165}{Ibid., 100.}
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conscience to regret her absence,” LeGrand was incapable of imagining black freedom as legitimate or virtuous. According to LeGrand’s assertions about the debasement of all black people, Julie Ann could not ever be expected to become a “higher being” by the experience of freedom because she was scientifically unable to rise up without further tutelage in the “school” of slavery (which would be accomplished, according to LeGrand, in “the far generations”). LeGrand admitted, though not apparently aware that she did so, that she believed black people were not fit for freedom. It is impossible, then, that she would ever celebrate Julie Ann’s freedom, no matter what shape it took.

In the first diary entry in which LeGrand mentioned Julie Ann’s departure, she claimed that Julie Ann had been “persuaded off by a policeman’s wife.” As discussed above, slaveholding women frequently asserted that their slaves had been duped, tricked into leaving by meddling northern whites who had no business interfering with the bonds between slaveholder and slave. LeGrand, like other diarists, found psychological refuge in the thought that their slaves would not have made the independent choice to leave their mistresses. However, apparently unaware of the contradiction, LeGrand then wrote that Julie Ann had been arrested and had been brought to LeGrand’s home for the sum of ten dollars. Only three days later, Julie Ann again claimed her freedom, leaving LeGrand and her sister Ginnie. It seems that Julie Ann was perfectly capable of making her own decisions, and LeGrand did not repeat the enticement story, perhaps because she was embarrassed by Julie Ann’s repeated running away.

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166 Ibid., 100.
167 Ibid., 100.
168 Ibid., 56.
169 Ibid., 56.
Immediately after this explanation of Julia Ann’s departure, LeGrand launched into a description of slave religion in New Orleans, claiming,

Naked men and women dance around a huge snake and the room is suddenly filled with lizards and other reptiles. The snake represents the devil which these creatures worship and fear . . . The thing is a living fact. The police have broken up such dens, but their belief and forms of worship are a secret. These people would be savages again if free. I find that no negroes discredit the power of the snake; those who do not join the society abstain from fear and not from want of faith.\(^{170}\)

This description served a number of functions in LeGrand’s narrative. First, it suggested that every single African American person in New Orleans worshipped the devil and was probably connected to potent witchcraft, as their ability to call forth lizards and other reptiles suggested. These people were, as LeGrand envisioned them, anti-Christian and so probably also anti-white. Any disobedience or disharmony between the races could, then, be blamed on African Americans’ allegiance to the devil. Their strange religious rituals also proved a link between African Americans in New Orleans and the “savagery” of Africa. Their apparent assimilation, their education in the “school” of slavery was, therefore, a lie, a performance meant to fool white people. LeGrand’s own misfortune with enslaved people was rendered as a moral failure on the part of slaves rather than a reflection of their mistress’s shortcomings. Because of these factors, African Americans could not ever be trusted. The secret societies organized around these rituals—at least in LeGrand’s understanding—were based on complete secrecy from whites, “on pain of death,” as LeGrand asserted. The members of such societies were, as LeGrand imagined it, engaged in sinister plotting. Not only that, but every black person was a believer, whether they joined the society or not. Every black person in LeGrand’s world was implicated in the secrecy,

\(^{170}\) Ibid., 56-58.
the masking, the devil worship and witchcraft. This entry conveys LeGrand’s sense that she was unsafe and that her faith in her former slaves had completely evaporated. She moved quickly from describing Julie Ann as a helpless dupe of the policeman’s wife to insisting that all African Americans were deceitful, savage, and dangerous. When she described Julie Ann as an innocent, LeGrand shielded herself from the scrutiny that Julie Ann’s departure invited; others had interfered and meddled with a good thing. LeGrand’s insistence on the dark secret life of New Orleans’ black community further shielded mistresses from blame; all black people were simply bad and untrustworthy. In spite of their contradictions, these two passages in the same entry show LeGrand’s efforts to deflect blame for the disintegration of the slave-mistress relationship by falling back on racist assumptions.

LeGrand went on the describe real abolitionists as “fanatics...neglectful of the poor at their doors.” Using a staple proslavery argument—that northern abolitionists were hypocrites for treating the northern working classes poorly while trying to destroy an institution that offered support from cradle to grave—belied LeGrand’s assertion that she had ever been an abolitionist at heart. Her abolitionist sensibilities extended to enslaved people only as long as they continued to serve her. Upon their refusal to serve her any longer, black people were transformed from beloved family members into ungrateful savages. Even while blaming northern abolitionists for the war, LeGrand denied that the war was being fought for the benefit of enslaved people, writing that it was only “pretended that Federal soldiers are sent to die” for black freedom.

LeGrand thus cast about for scapegoats to blame for the unraveling relationships between mistress and slave. Women across the South used the same strategy for fending

171 Ibid., 102.
172 Ibid., 102.
off criticism of themselves as slaveholders, often insisting that Yankees had beguiled or tempted slaves to break real bonds of affection in search of lives of idleness. LeGrand wrote, "This poor, silly race has been made a tool of—enticed from their good homes and induced to insult their masters. They now lie about, destitute and miserable, without refuge and without hope. They die in numbers."\(^{173}\) "Who but devils," wrote South Carolina diarist Grace Brown Elmore, "would seek to destroy the pleasant relations existing between Master and servant. None but the slaveholder can know the tender affection that there is between owner and slave."\(^{174}\) Judith McGuire of Virginia also looked back to happier times when she had believed in the sincere relationships of mutual affection between slaveholders and their bondspeople: "The change is very depressing. We miss the respectful and respectable servants, born in the family and brought up with an affection for the household which seemed a part of their nature, and which so largely contributed to the happiness both of master and servant."\(^{175}\) Clinging to the image of "the happiness both of master and servant," slaveholding women naturally blamed northerners for destroying such domestic bliss. That these women sometimes continued to cherish the apparent fiction of reciprocal ties of affection between white and black suggests how strongly their sense of themselves was tied up in this image. It also intensified a longing for pre-war days when such relationships bolstered slaveholding women's sense of themselves as ladies and as benevolent women.

Once slaves abandoned their mistresses, they became "vicious creatures," unprincipled "wretches," and the pathetic dupes of Yankees who would only mistreat them.

\(^{173}\) Ibid., 60.

\(^{174}\) Elmore, Diary, December 9, 1861.

in the end. Slaveholding women often claimed to pity former slaves for the hardships that they must necessarily endure once the benevolent hand of the master or mistress had been withdrawn. However, they also seemed to take pleasure in imagining the helplessness and ultimate demise of former slaves. Julia LeGrand did just this in a later entry, when she wrote, “I pity poor Julie Ann; I wonder what death she will die! She has never known real hardship.” Similarly, Emilie McKinley felt sympathy for her neighbor, Mrs. Downs, who regretted the loss of her servants, especially one named Amanda. “Mrs. Downs says she feels as if she had lost some of her children, she had taken so much pain with them, taught them to read and sing. I declare it is too bad. Amanda will not live long.” Kate Stone wrote, with an air of vindication, “Mr. Curry says that Jane and her two children were drowned while crossing the break. A short space of freedom for them.” Stone also noted, “Numbers of Negroes, placed by their friends in the forefront of the battles, have been slain. Poor things,” she continued, “I am sorry for them.” Lucy Buck fantasized, “Miserable creatures—there’s no doubt but they wished themselves back in their comfortable home many times ere this.” In spite of African Americans’ successful efforts to gain their freedom, elite white women consoled themselves with the thought that former slaves would find only misery in their new lives. This tendency on the part of former mistresses permitted them to continue to imagine the pre-war plantation world as an idyll, an image that they would carry forward as they worked to mythologize the slaveholder’s world in the post-war period.

177 McKinley, *From the Pen of a She-Rebel*, 44.
179 Ibid., 155.
180 Buck, *Shadows on My Heart*, 211.
In the end, the breakdown of relationships between slaves and their mistresses was apparent everywhere mistresses looked. They listened with horror to tales of physical altercations and of angry words that enslaved people spat at their mistresses upon leaving.

Emilie McKinley recorded a story in which,

On Friday while Mr. McG had gone to draw his rations (he left a young Mr. Brick with his family) his negroes came to the house to whip Mrs. McG. Mr. Brick defended her as long as he could, but finding himself overpowered, he told her to run for her life… When they got Mr. Brick down, they whipped him and made him call them Master and Mistress.\(^{181}\)

She also noted that “Kezziah attacked her mistress and said ‘You have had me beat enough,’ or something to that effect. Her mistress asked her why she did not go with the Yanks. She said she was not going, she wasn’t going to leave her property.”\(^{182}\) Kate Stone recounted an incident in which,

Jane, Aunt Laura’s cook, and Aunt Lucy had a terrible row Tuesday night. Jane cut a great gash in Lucy’s face with a blow from a chair and hurt her severely. Mamma had Jane called up to interview her on the subject, and she came with a big carving knife in her hand and fire in her eyes. She scared me. She is nearly six feet tall and powerful in proportion, as black as night and with a fearful temper.\(^{183}\)

Ellen House recorded, “The negroes are getting pretty high. Mrs. Strong’s [sic] man threatened last night to shoot her.”\(^{184}\) Incidents like these turned the world upside down for mistresses. Pauline Heyward expressed this sensation when she wrote, “No one can live here now, in any peace, with our slaves over us for masters.”\(^{185}\) As slavery came apart at the seams, mistresses were shocked to find that their slaves were full of anger, even hatred for their masters and mistresses and that enslaved people sought chances to assert

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\(^{181}\) McKinley, *From the Pen of a She-Rebel*, 24.

\(^{182}\) Ibid., 12.

\(^{183}\) Stone, *Brokenburn*, 170-72.


\(^{185}\) Heyward, *Confederate Lady Comes of Age*, 79.
agency in their own lives. They turned to their diaries to try and make sense of the dissolution of slavery and the changed relations between black and white. They coped with disorienting transformations by exchanging terror and emotional pain with rage and overt racism.
Eighteen-year-old Lucy Breckinridge spent the Civil War in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, an area repeatedly contested by Union and Confederate forces. Born into a wealthy family, Breckinridge had been raised in the traditions of the southern plantation. Her father owned 149 slaves at the time of the 1860 census and was the largest slaveholder in the county.1 Lucy’s family was deeply committed to the Confederate cause, and all five of her brothers served in the Confederate military. Only two of them returned from their service at the war’s end. Like other Americans of her time, Breckinridge worked to develop a deeply felt religious ethic, putting her faith in the active interventions of a merciful and omnipotent God.2 However, the war worked on southerners’ faith in two contradictory directions. On one hand, faith became ever more important to sustain southerners who were forced to deal with the destruction and chaos of wartime. On the other hand, however, the war itself could weaken the fibers of southerners’ faith, rendering more tenuous their ability to believe in a benevolent and merciful God.3 Many white southerners believed that God would be on the side of the South if only southern men and women proved strong in their faith and established a government that upheld biblical principles (including, in their minds, their own “Christian” form of slavery and slave management).

On July 3, 1864, Breckinridge penned a troubling confession in her diary:

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2 In this chapter, I will refer to God using male pronouns, as Lucy Breckinridge and most other Americans of faith would have in her time. I will also capitalize "God." This is, again, with respect to how most nineteenth-century believers would have conceived of their deity—as a singular and unique entity.
My mind has been so full of doubts of God’s goodness and mercy today. I have been so sinful. I read my Bible and prayed, but the light of God’s countenance was withdrawn from me….Sorrows are too apt to harden my heart against God, yet, I must reconcile myself to a life of hardship and sorrow. We are born to suffer and to die. The gloomy state of the country depresses me so terribly I cannot see the dawn of peace that I hear some people talk about. They cry ‘Peace, peace, when there is no peace.’ But I will try to believe that ‘He doeth all things well.’… I have been sick in bed all day.4

This confession helps to highlight the struggles that many southern slaveholding women faced in maintaining their sense of faith and hope. Their loss of faith could be rendered as a loss of religious faith, faith in the southern cause,5 faith in the superiority of the southern social order, faith in themselves as true women, and/or faith in the white men of the South to live up to elite standards of masculinity. A loss of faith threatened to shake the perceptions that these women had of themselves and of the world in which they had been reared. Southern ladies had been raised to embrace their duties cheerfully; indeed, many diarists approached cheerfulness itself as a woman’s duty. As historian Anne Firor Scott has written, “Southern women sought diligently to live up to the prescriptions, to attain the perfection and the submissiveness demanded of them by God and man,” among which was the duty of cheerfulness.6 Wavering convictions about the righteousness of the war and the mercifulness of God, however, undermined their ability to see themselves as dutiful and properly submissive. The war, then, not only destabilized external conditions but also threatened to chip away at women’s sense of themselves as “true women” and even to imperil their very souls.

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4 Breckinridge, Lucy Breckinridge of Grove Hill, 197.
5 In this chapter, the context for my discussion of southern nationalism is the feeling of being without faith in contrast to the previous chapter, which deals with southern nationalism in the context of women questioning the wisdom of the war and the competence of the Confederacy’s military leadership. Diarists worried what a loss of faith implied about their honor and their commitment to family as well as to section.
6 Scott, Southern Lady, 8.
In this chapter, I will examine Breckinridge’s lapse of religious faith and others like it in order to demonstrate that the war had repercussions far beyond the field of battle, not only shaping slaveholding women’s lives but also threatening their very sense of themselves and what it meant to be a lady, a southerner, a Christian, and a patriot. Elite southern women turned to their diaries to examine the meanings attached to such a loss of faith and to strengthen their resolve to face the material and psychological challenges that the war posed.

**Religion in the South**

Southerners like Breckenridge shared in a tradition of evangelical Protestantism, which became, by the antebellum period, “the dominant religious impulse of the South.”7 During the period from 1810 to 1830, the Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches of the South overcame the revolutionary potential of evangelical practices—the potential for social leveling that accompanied a largely uneducated clergy and the early churches’ focus on the spiritual equality of all believers, regardless of race, class, or gender—by taking a more conciliatory approach to the social inequities inherent in southern hierarchies. Well before the crisis of secession gripped the country, southern churches had made their peace with slavery and had committed themselves to promoting the interests of the ruling race and class.8 Schisms between northern and southern wings of the Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian denominations signaled the willingness of the southern clergy and congregation to break with their northern brethren over political issues. Foremost among these was slavery.

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Southern evangelicalism was marked not just by conciliation with the ruling class; it was also influenced by the geography and rural nature of southern life. Southern men and women often came together to worship in churches regardless of their denominational affiliation. In rural areas, which relied heavily on an itinerant clergy, southerners thirsted for the spiritual and social gift of a well-delivered sermon, not to mention the entertainment that church services offered to isolated yeoman farmers and their poorer and more elite neighbors alike. Southern religious tradition, then, can largely be described as an interdenominational Protestantism. As long as the tenets of southern social categories were upheld, southerners could overlook relatively minor doctrinal differences. Southern evangelicalism, therefore, helped to unite rather than to divide white southerners across lines of class and specific religious affiliation.

Evangelical religion offered its adherents the psychological and spiritual benefits of belonging to a community of like-minded seekers of Christ. Southern churches reaffirmed social hierarchies, including those that placed men above women, rich above poor, and white above black. Even though, as other historians have noted, southern women sought membership in churches in much greater numbers than their male counterparts, the evangelical church remained a bulwark of patriarchy, and female communicants worshiped and served under the direction and control of male clergy and church elders.9

Southern churches also generally supported secession, and once the Confederacy became a fact, they overwhelmingly supported the southern cause, claiming God’s support for southern rights.10 Sarah Wadley noted her pleasure at the pro-Confederate sermon delivered by a prominent southern clergyman, effusing that the minister “deems it the duty

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10 Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples*, 63.
of every one who can influence the public mind to speak boldly for the rights; he then goes on to show by uncontrovertible [sic] arguments that slavery is providential and right.”¹¹

But the war itself threatened to undermine southerners’ faith in an omnipotent and merciful God. During the secession crisis, less than a month before shots were fired at Fort Sumter, Wadley struggled to keep her focus on higher things, musing, “Whenever I for a moment lose sight of the bible [sic] and of religion, my mind becomes involved in mazy labyrinths of doubt ’till I almost question the fact of my existence...Without Faith and confidence in something life is a desert and the grave is a terrible doom.”¹² For many Confederate women, confident assurances such as, “I trust the Lord is on our side in this national strife” gave way, over time, to frustration with the limits of prayer, as when Keziah Brevard fuzzed in her diary, “I know not how to pray—or what to pray for, at times I am so worn with anxiety.”¹³ Finally, exhaustion with war and the psychological toll it exacted caused southerners to turn to desperate appeals as Confederates began to ask, “When will this unholy war be closed . . . God Grant that its end may be soon.”¹⁴ Especially after the blind optimism and furious patriotism of 1861 gave way to dark realizations of the scope and intensity of suffering that would visit the South before the end, southerners increasingly pleaded with God. For most, their initial pleas for victory gave way to desperate bargaining, in the hopes of saving their remaining loved ones.¹⁵

¹¹ Wadley, Diary, December 4, 1860. Rable, God’s Almost Chosen Peoples, 62.
¹² Wadley, Diary, March 17, 1861.
¹⁴ Armstrong, Diary, July 24, 1863.
¹⁵ Rable, Civil Wars, 202-220.
Suffering and Coping

Even in the face of the material and psychological challenges that Confederate women faced during the war, southern ladies were expected to keep up a cheerful demeanor. Cheerfulness and cheerful submission had long been elements of the ideal southern lady’s character. As historian George Rable has argued, “Evangelical religion also stressed obligations over rights, and pious women learned to tolerate what they could not change.” Cheerfulness and submission were framed as women’s duties before and during the war, but during the conflict they took on even greater meaning as they became tied to patriotism. Newspapers and oratory routinely valorized women’s sacrifice during the war and exhorted them to remain cheerful—or at least stoic—through their sufferings. As historian Catherine Clinton has argued, “even as difficulties mounted, plantation women were expected to carry on with total restraint and without complaint.” Women, though often depicted as passive sufferers on the home front, were to cultivate an attitude of cheerful sacrifice in the service of “the cause.” Confederate ideology rendered the suffering of Confederate women “not as an incidental by-product of men’s wartime activities, but as an important and honored undertaking” and placed the responsibility for wartime morale at women’s feet.

Not surprisingly, as the war made suffering on the home front a tangible and ever-present reality, such cheer was increasingly difficult to muster, as evidenced in women’s diaries. Depressed moods were contagious, and women struggled to shore up their men.

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16 Scott, The Southern Lady; Faust, “Altars of Sacrifice.”
17 Rable, Civil Wars, 10-11.
Kate Carney worried, “Poor Pa looks so sad and is growing so sad, I feel so sorry to see him look that way.” Catherine Broun wrote that her husband, Edwin, was “Completely broken down” in body and soul following his imprisonment by the Union Army, continuing, “It distresses me to look at him.” As depression claimed their male kin, slaveholding women felt doubly compelled to a cheerful attitude. As Judith McGuire wrote of this imperative of cheerfulness, “It is my duty to give at least the meed [sic] of cheerfulness to our kind friends.”

After being forced to leave her home early in the war, McGuire wrote of her obligation this way: “we are determined to take every thing cheerfully.” Later, she wrote proudly of how she had overcome the malaise of refugee life in conversation with another woman. Saddened by an anecdote about suffering in the South, “we soon recovered, and went on our way in cheerful, hopeful conversation.” Sarah Wadley reflected in her diary, “To me there is nothing in life more worthy of striving for than a complete renunciation of self, nothing more beautiful than a steady, constant cheerfulness . . . I pray God to help me to bear with cheerfulness.” However, it was clear that she struggled, “Amid all these duties I have succeeded by God’s grace in subduing my bitter and complaining feelings. I still feel sad very often, but am yet cheerful.” Sadness, which was inevitable, was a legitimate internal emotion, but cheerfulness was conceived of as an external, social duty. Diarists acknowledged that they often felt sad, but they exhorted themselves to performances of cheerfulness for the good of others. Priscilla Bond, on contemplating

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20 Kate Carney, Diary, May 21, 1862.
21 Broun, Diary, September 27, November 10.
22 McGuire, Diary of a Southern Refugee During the War, 67.
23 Ibid., 168.
24 Ibid., 259.
25 Wadley, Diary, November 19, 1864.
26 Ibid., October 20, 1863.
marriage and separation from her family, wrote, “I try and feel cheerful, and believe it’s all for the best.”

Mary Early conjured cheerfulness when her fiancé, Dick, was “so oppressed with forebodings of never seeing me again that he was overwhelmed with despondency. I with my dauntless hope and cheerfulness tried to console him.”

In each of these cases, cheerfulness was rendered not just as womanly virtue but also as patriotic duty. It is evident, however, that women turned to their diaries to remind themselves of the importance of a bright attitude. Whether cheerfulness was employed to buoy up despondent men or to remind women of their own blessings in spite of suffering, it was a godly and gendered undertaking that was especially required in the crisis of wartime. It was also a politically important mandate. Confederate propaganda exhorted women to cheerfulness even in suffering and blamed them for rising desertion rates when they failed and became despondent.

Confederate women, in order to do their duty, had to find ways to cope with loss. Diarists often resorted to scripture and prayer to help them overcome their feelings of desperate grief. One passage shows up time and time again in the diaries of slaveholding women; women prayed to God to “Give us strength as our day.”

A variation that many women resorted to in efforts to ward off crippling anxiety was, “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” Slaveholding women turned to the Bible for assurances that God would grant them the strength to survive. These women prayed for strength and faith as often as they prayed for victory. Assuring themselves that God would give them the strength to

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28 Early, Diary, March 11, 1865.
30 Buck, *Shadows on My Heart*, 27; Bond, 287; Fannie Page Hume, Diary, July 31, 1862, Bagby Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond. This quote comes from the Bible: “The bolts of your gates will be iron and bronze, and your strength will equal your days.” Deuteronomy 33:25, New International Version.
31 Buck, *Shadows on My Heart*, 43; Matthew 6:34, King James Version.
endure the “evil” of each day, elite white women substituted biblical language for their own in moments in which worldly events overwhelmed them and they were unable to do more than pray for fortitude to get by each day. This substitution suggests that they were unable to cope with events on their own and even that they distrusted their ability to speak in their own voices in moments of intense suffering or anxiety. Quoting scripture and speaking in platitudes allowed women to substitute biblical injunctions for their own experiences. It also enabled them to rhetorically distance themselves from their own immediate experiences of suffering and to fall back on biblical absolutes instead. Even though God often seemed to withhold strength from them, they relied on the words of the Bible to shore up their faith that he would do so in the future.

Slaveholding women’s diaries also suggest that southern women constantly strove to renew their wells of strength, and they often did so through communication with other women who dealt with similar hardships. Lucy Buck spent at least one day “trying to inspire Ma with hopes that I could not cherish myself” and feared that the war was itself “too much for human endurance.” However, elite white women’s diaries reveal that they were not at all sure that they could continue under the weight of wartime suffering.

Some elite women turned to revelry—parties and amusements—to alleviate their feelings of helplessness and despair, but this strategy sometimes backfired by causing them to feel guilty. Ellen Renshaw House confided to her diary that she felt helpless and unmoored: “I have fooled away today . . . It seems very wrong to waste time so, and yet I

32 Ibid., 78, 95.
33 Faust, Mothers of Invention, 234-247. Faust writes, “A rising sense of personal desperation, an eroding confidence in those on whom they had relied for protection, and an emerging doubt about their own ability to endure prompted women to reconsider the most fundamental assumptions about their world.” 234.
34 Rable, Civil Wars, 181-201.
might as well play chess and cards as well as any thing else. I lead a very useless life any how ... It is almost without aim or object."35 After a night of dancing and playing cards, House chided herself, “How heartless it seems to pass so much time so when hundreds of our noble men are lying dead and dying on the gory battle field, but what can I do. The only thing I like about it is I never have a moment to think, and that certainly appears to me like a blessing now.”36 Grace Brown Elmore likewise spent a moment reflecting on the attraction of revelry, “I can now in some measure understand the spirit that pervaded the aristocracy of France during their sojourn in the Bastille, that philosophical rather than reckless spirit that accepted and used everything cheerful or bright... when one could laugh and chat with gayety though they knew in the next twenty four hours they would be headless.”37 She later mused, “None but those who have lived in times like ours can understand the strange varieties of this life. The gay and the tragic so closely intertwined, the utter abandonment of ones self to the pleasure of the present.”38 Elmore’s diary suggests that for women who found relief in parties and cards and dancing, such relief was only partial and temporary. In the midst of war, tragedy lurked close at hand even in moments of pleasure.

Kate Stone, on the other hand, could not contemplate revelry and gaiety during the war and complained, “I feel out of place with a party of gay young people. Their mirth jars my heart. Life seems too sad a thing to spend in talking nonsense. I feel fifty years old.”39 Likewise, Judith McGuire found herself disgusted at the escapist merry-making of some of

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36 Ibid., 152.
37 Elmore, Diary, January 4, 1865.
38 Ibid., February 7, 1865.
her fellow Confederates, writing, "Some persons in this beleaguered city seem crazed on the subject of gayety . . . I am mortified to say that there are gay parties given in the city. When returning from the hospital, after witnessing the dying scene of a brother, whose young sister hung over him in agony, with my heart full of the sorrows of hospital-life, I passed a house where there were music and dancing. The revulsion of feeling was sickening." While revelry became an escape for some slaveholding women from the emotional burdens of war, others found it to be empty, even shameful.

As elite women cast about for a measure of emotional relief from the hardships of the war and the feelings of loss created by the war's destruction of life, some of them feared for their sanity, often feeling that they had reached the limits of forbearance and would give way to hysteria and madness. Diarists repeatedly confided their fears of giving in to madness under the strain of the war. Though this may have been to some extent hyperbolic, it also reveals that slaveholding women feared that their resources of emotional strength would be depleted and that, in dark moments, they looked in vain for emotional support. Even if they did not fear literal madness, their use of the language of mental disorder demonstrates that they felt completely overwhelmed, unable to process the dramatic shifts in their experience. Ellen Renshaw House worried about her soldier brothers, writing that thinking about their suffering "almost crazes me." She also chafed under Union occupation of her East Tennessee town, writing, "I am afraid I shall go crazy," and, "Were I to think much I would go crazy." In some cases, diarists avoided directly acknowledging fears for their own sanity by identifying others who gave in to hysteria.

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Emma LeConte wrote of a “panic-stricken crowd of women and children who seemed crazy” upon the arrival of the Yankees. LeConte noted her own sense of “strangeness and unreality” that attended the war, but she stopped short of writing her own fears, if indeed she felt trepidation about her own mental and emotional fortitude. Kate Stone likewise recorded that it was feared her neighbor would “lose his mind” over the imprisonment of his son and noted, “People do not mourn their dead as they used to. Everyone seems to live only in the present—just from day to day—otherwise I fancy many would go crazy.” Kate Carney confided to her diary, “I don’t know what I should do if deprived of shedding tears, I believe go crazy . . . I can’t see how we can live through so much suffering.” In a society that distrusted women’s emotions and found female “hysteria” lurking in every shadow, it is not surprising that Confederate women monitored their own, and others’, emotional states for evidence of pathology during the immensely stressful years of the war.

The surrender of Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia marked a very low emotional point in the lives of many elite southern women across the South. Lucy Buck described her reaction as “nearly mad . . . too near crazy . . . desperate and wicked.” Emma LeConte wrote that she was “so overwhelmed by the thought of Lee’s surrender that there seemed no ground under my feet.” Sarah Wadley declared that she was “too sorrowful to weep, all seems dull and cold except when a sudden rush of angry grief comes over me . . . I can no longer see one ray of hope.” Devout Judith McGuire reacted to Lee’s surrender by trying mightily not to believe the news: “We cannot believe it, but my heart
became dull and heavy, and every nerve and muscle of my frame seems heavy too. I cannot even now shake it off . . . I know not how we live at all . . . God help us!—we must take refuge in unbelief.”  

Kate Stone poured out her despair into her diary, noting, “There is great gloom over the town. All think that Lee and his army have surrendered . . . We know not what to believe. All are fearfully depressed. Lee’s defeat is a crushing blow hard to recover from.”

Ellen Renshaw House was one of relatively few southerners who refused to equate Lee’s surrender with defeat, writing, “There is no help for it. I must believe now that Gen Lee has capitulated. Oh! how sad it makes me feel, not that I for one moment think that we are whipped. I believe as firmly we will be free as I do there is a God in Heaven.” When defeat finally became too real to ignore, and it became clear that the South would not be an independent nation, did House question that “there is a God in Heaven?” If she did, it was not a sentiment that she wrote in her journal. The question lingered, however, in her equation of southern independence and the existence of God. If separation from the Union could prove the existence of a God in Heaven, might Confederate failure call his very existence into question?

Diaries also reveal that women feared and resisted becoming victims of wartime deprivation, and that they did this through the use of competing tropes about women on the home front. Southern diarists—especially young women—often wrote about the fears they were supposed to feel but didn’t, including feelings of both fear and courage. Nineteen-year-old Sarah Wadley wrote in anticipation of meeting invading Union soldiers that she

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50 McGuire, Diary of a Southern Refugee, 352.
51 Stone, Brokenburn, 333-334.
52 House, A Very Violent Rebel, 161.
felt “perfectly free from fear” even though she could not “exactly describe my feelings.”

However, Wadley went on to express her disbelief at the possibility of soldiers in her own home, musing, “it does not seem possible to me that the Yankees should come here and I should see them . . . I do not fear them.”

The next day she reiterated that she was “perfectly calm,” capable of exercising a “firmness and activity which I so generally lack.”

In this passage, Wadley asserted her own courage and fortitude, but she struggled to fully embody these characteristics. This struggle is evidenced by her own inability to articulate her feelings even while she proclaimed that she was “perfectly free from fear.” Her disbelief also belied her assurances of calmness and courage; her passage created a parallel between the surreal reality of the situation and the possibility that her own performance of bravery may have proven to be a dream.

Wadley’s reassertion of her perfect calm in the next day’s entry represents an attempt to reproduce her performance, one which the diary helped her to script and enact, albeit imperfectly. In effect, Wadley used her diary to write new scripts for herself—scripts that centered on courage and fortitude—because her training as a “lady” left her ill-equipped to cope with the disruptions of the war. Emilie McKinley also wrote in her diary, “While they [Yankees] are here, it is not fright but indignation that we feel. . . . When they are here I feel no wavering nor fear, for that would do no good.”

Women like McKinley attempted to persuade themselves that they felt no fear because they understood the performance of bravery, like cheerfulness, to be one of their wartime duties. In her words, fear did “no good.” In spite of wartime propaganda that portrayed women as real or

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53 Wadley, Diary, August 24, 1863.
54 Ibid., August 25, 1863.
55 Wadley, Diary, August 25, 1863.
56 McKinley, From the Pen of a She-Rebel, 13.
potential victims—an image that was supposed to spur southern men to the fight—women often adopted the role of protector over home and family. Their diaries reveal rhetorical strategies for fending off victimhood in the face of feeling victimized. The diaries also suggest that slaveholding women on the home front were engaged in rethinking what it meant to be a lady, when the perquisites of ladyhood—including male protection—were unavailable.

Like Sarah Wadley, Priscilla Bond wrote first of her fears, of Union soldiers and of the family's slaves, and then of her lack of fear: "I heard the Federals were coming back today. I hope they will act rightly. I am afraid of the negroes!" A short time later, she wrote tremulously, "The Yankees came this morning—about 50 of them. I was so frightened." However, Bond soon steeled herself, finding unaccustomed strength to face the Yankees. She wrote that a slave woman "rushed in, with her eyes considerable enlarged and says, 'Oh, Miss Mitt, Yankees in town.' She looked so frightened. I did not feel at all afraid." Bond prided herself in this moment that she was not gripped by terror, as was her black maid. Indeed, by contrasting herself with the enslaved woman, Bond seemed to call up a courage that was linked to her whiteness. Simple-minded slaves had the luxury of helpless fear while she, a white mistress, maintained her composure as part of her claim to mastery. Bond's assertions of competence and courage were products of the changed conditions of wartime. Though courage was traditionally cast as a male trait, elite southern

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58 Kimberly Harrison argues that bravery was part of a “gendered rhetorical honor for self-protection” and that female diarists used a form of “self-talk” to persuade themselves of their ability to cope with difficult and demanding circumstances. Harrison, *Rhetoric of Rebel Women*, 25-39.
60 Ibid., 251.
61 Ibid., 260.
women had at their disposal cultural traditions of female bravery, and they valued expressions of honor and bravery. These women found themselves entrusted with the protection of family honor while their men were away at war, and they did their best to embrace their new roles as defenders of home and family.62

Like Bond, many diarists wrote of their freedom from fear by juxtaposing it with others around them, often the elderly, the very young, and the racially inferior. Kate Stone wrote of her family’s nighttime flight through the swamps, “We all stood it very well except Aunt Laura. She was terrified nearly to death and was alternately laughing and crying.”63 In this passage, Aunt Laura’s apparent hysteria became a foil that highlighted Stone’s own performance of bravery. Emma LeConte wavered between descriptions of herself as terrified and calm beyond reason, writing, “sometimes I wonder I can be so calm” and later, “I do not feel half so frightened as I thought I would. Perhaps because I cannot realize they are coming. I hope still this is a false report . . . But I cannot believe they are coming! Ah me, I look forward with terror, and yet with a kind of callousness to their approach.”64 Through the process of writing about her lack of fear, LeConte attempted to alleviate her own panic and to resolve herself to being brave, even in the course of events that terrified her. But her own fears broke through this resolve, and she claimed to be simultaneously free from fear and also gripped with terror. LeConte’s efforts at writing a script of bravery clearly possessed weaknesses. She struggled to be the defender of her home, even while she embraced the fear that was simultaneously thought to define womanhood on the home front. In the end, she concocted a useful device in her diary by establishing a foil for her

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62 Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor, 50-51.
63 Stone, Brokenburn, 201.
64 LeConte, When the World Ended, 30.
own behavior in the person of Sallie, a younger sister. She wrote, “Neither Mother nor I are much alarmed, though poor Sallie is very much frightened and has been crying hysterically all the morning” and “Sallie suffered the most—she would not be left alone, and would not allow me to go to the outer door to look about, but would call me back in terror . . . I do not feel as frightened as I thought I would.”

Sallie’s fear acted as a check on LeConte’s own reckless desire to “look about” during a bombardment. Finally, LeConte admitted, “Although we are composed, our souls are sick with anxiety.”

Women like LeConte struggled to embrace a conception of themselves that placed bravery at its center. Raised their whole lives to cultivate genteel helplessness, elite women were suddenly expected to act not only as independent agents but also as heroines in the face of legitimately dangerous situations. LeConte’s vacillations demonstrate the trouble that southern ladies experienced in performing both roles at once.

In writing about their freedom from fear, some slaveholding women also wrote of feeling nothing at all. Intense anxiety defined wartime life for women left at home. Wild rumors flew from house to house, and even the newspapers were not to be believed. Elite Confederate women’s diaries were filled with incomplete or incorrect information regarding the status of the Confederate war effort. Experiences proving that rumor could be wildly inaccurate caused many diarists to discount both good and bad news. In some cases, intense anxiety caused them to dread or avoid news altogether. Mary Caldwell, a practiced optimist, recorded that after the battle of Gettysburg, “I will be afraid to read the paper when I see it for fear of seeing the names [of wounded and killed].”

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65 Ibid., 31, 36-37.
66 Ibid., 32.
67 Mary Gray Caldwell, “It Does Appear as if Our Soldiers Were Made Altogether of Patriotism,” 56.
searching out the fates of her friends and family, she wrote that she was “almost afraid.”\(^{68}\)
The qualifier *almost* indicates that, whatever her fears of knowing the truth, she could not ignore the possible grief and heartache that stalked southern households. However, she tried to do just that a short while later. Recording the deaths of “a great many of our friends,” she insisted, “I do not believe it. Well, I am tired of writing and will stop.”\(^{69}\) In refusing to believe unsubstantiated reports, Caldwell attempted to reserve her strength for those tragedies that were undeniable. Her efforts to remain steadfastly optimistic about the fate of her friends represents the outward performance of cheerfulness expected of southern ladies, even in the midst of chaos and loss. However, her nonchalant decision to stop writing also indicates that she was exhausted and sad about the possibilities that she refused to acknowledge. She declared her unwillingness to believe the reports and used her self-imposed silence as a means of putting an end to the question.

Many women practiced the same type of willful ignorance or wishful thinking that Mary Caldwell exhibited in her diary. The counterpart to their insistence on faith was their insistence on ignorance. Indeed, “I hope it is not true” became “I do not believe it” and finally “I will not believe it” as women struggled to strengthen their wavering faith in the goodness of God and their attendant belief that God was on the side of the Confederacy. Ellen Renshaw House raged, “I’d like to murder such mean spirited animals” as those who willingly believed rumors about Confederate setbacks, declaring “I won’t believe.”\(^{70}\) When faced with such rumors, she steadfastly insisted that “I cannot believe it true” and “I don’t

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\(^{68}\) Ibid., 59.

\(^{69}\) Ibid., 68.

believe them.”71 Confronted with rumors that Vicksburg had fallen, Emilie McKinley likewise stated her determination that “I cannot and will not believe it.”72

**Religion and the Southern War Effort**

In the pages of their diaries, southern slaveholding women demonstrated their efforts to be steadfast in their faith that God would ultimately show favor on the South and provide for Confederate victory. Kate Stone pulled hope from the pages of her Bible: “In the last twelve months trouble and distress have been our portion. ‘We have swallowed our tears like water’ and have sunk beneath the chastisement of Our Lord. ‘His hands hath been heavy upon us,’ yet ‘He hath not utterly forsaken us,’ and we can thank Him for many blessings left.”73 Sarah Wadley reminded herself of God’s power to turn the tide of the war, finding comfort in “The thought that God stands this day the God of battles and the dispenser of justice, and that our only reliance is upon him.”74 She revealed her inner doubts, however, adding, “In these quiet moments when Faith triumphs over unbelief I can truly say ‘thy will be done Oh Lord,’ I feel that God rules justly and mercifully.”75 Wadley did not dwell on those moments when faith did not “triumph over unbelief.”

If God was truly on their side, then success was all but assured, but as the war dragged on and Confederate defeat seemed more likely, steadfast belief in his support for the South became more difficult to muster. However, diarists studiously avoided questioning God’s allegiance. If he had withdrawn his favor, it must be, they rationalized, a

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71 Ibid., 140, 142.
72 McKinley, *From the Pen of a She-Rebel*, 40.
74 Wadley, Diary, April 21, 1861.
75 Ibid., 1861.
means of testing their faith and encouraging them to renew their commitment to him. It could not be, they assured themselves, that God had actually turned his back on them because the South’s cause was not as righteous as Confederates believed it to be. Kate Carney suggested that Confederate reverses were, instead, the result of faithlessness in the South. She wrote, “I think the Southern people ought to fast and pray that the Lord might be on our side.”76 As Pauline DeCaradeuc Heyward wrote, “These reverses and terrible humiliations, come from Him to humble our hearts and remind us of our total helplessness without His aid.”77 However, she alternated between hope, that prayer would impel God’s aid, and a hopelessness that prevented her from prayer. She first assured herself, “Surely God has stricken us as much as He will; and we pray night and day for mercy.”78 After continued setbacks, however, she confided to her diary, “I am unreasonable and wicked I know, I cannot pray altho [sic], sometimes I’m over an hour on my knees trying to turn to God as I used to, persons think me more devout, but it’s like my spirits, empty.”79 Judith McGuire also found that she could not absorb spiritual messages, writing that while at church “I could not listen; I felt so strangely, as if in a vivid, horrible dream.”80 McGuire, devout though she was, worried that a great gulf had opened between herself and the “God of Battles” as Confederate hopes dimmed.

Like Lucy Breckinridge, McGuire and Heyward tried turning to God during the crises of war, but they found that they could not access feelings of faith, hope, and forgiveness. God, it seemed, had withdrawn his light when they most needed faith to persevere. Kate

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76 Carney, Diary, June 18, 1862.
77 Heyward, A Confederate Lady Comes of Age, 22.
78 Ibid., 20.
79 Ibid., 45.
80 McGuire, Diary of a Southern Refugee, 351.
Stone surmised, “We seem to be given up to the evil one now.” Still, slaveholding women strove to maintain their faith in God’s mercy and his eventual aid for the South. In the final entry of her diary, Sallie Armstrong struggled to sustain hope in the face of what seemed to be God’s desertion of the South: “Still our tormentors are on us. Our only hope is in God . . . If God did not rule we would die in despair. He only can help us.” Though this passage expresses hope that God may still show his hand and secure victory for the South, it reads more like a lament. Armstrong outwardly expressed her faith but signaled that it served more as a means to prop herself up than as a real hope that God would favor the South. In any case, Armstrong chose this moment to discontinue her diary, choosing silence over the unsayable thought that God had abandoned the South.

In their efforts to sustain hope for the eventual success of the southern cause, slaveholding women often experienced a roller-coaster of emotional ups and downs. Heartened by news of a victory one moment, their hopes might be dashed the next by Confederate setbacks or by the appearance of the enemy in their own towns and homes. In this context, many diarists revealed a certain numbness in their journals, brought on by the exhaustion of anxiety and loss. Hard hearts replaced the vaunted southern lady’s tender and sensitive constitution. Kate Stone wrote that people had developed a callousness to death in the wake of so much suffering. “Death does not seem half so terrible as it did long ago,” she wrote, “We have grown used to it. Never a letter but brings news of the death of someone we knew . . . People live so fast now. We have no time to mourn.”

81 Stone, Brokenburn, 130.
82 Sallie Armstrong Diary, Sept 1, 1863.
83 Stone, Brokenburn, 258.
What we might today call psychological trauma undoubtedly affected women who experienced war and the anxieties it produced on a daily basis. Pauline Heyward lamented her loss of sensibility in her diary, writing, “We feel all the time as tho we hadn’t time to stop to think or feel, I cannot make myself feel anything . . . I feel as tho sympathy, sensibility, all were suspended during the whirl and rushing of everything.”84 She continued to write about the fearful anxiety of wartime and the emotional shutting-down of her own battered psyche: “I wish I could feel frightened, anxious—anything, but this \textit{waiting}. I am perfectly astonished at myself. I am the life of the house, and I feel lively and cheerful all the time, I do not disguise my feelings, for I cannot affect what I don’t feel, neither can I describe what I do feel, unless one word can do it, and that word is—nothing.”85 The contradictions in Heyward’s diary—that she felt nothing at all and yet experienced unbounded cheerfulness—represented her desire to write proper emotion into being. She mourned the loss of her ability to respond to events with proper emotional expressions but at least had the reassurance that she was doing her womanly duty of being cheerful. Even so, she continued to worry, “I believe my heart is frozen.”86 As the seemingly endless war dragged on, accumulating death and anxiety beyond measure, many slaveholding women must have wondered if their frozen hearts would ever thaw.

\textbf{Lucy Breckinridge’s Lapse of Faith}

During the war, then, slaveholding women struggled to reconcile loss and faith as well as the images of themselves as both victims and zealous defenders of home and family.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{84} Heyward, \textit{A Confederate Lady Comes of Age}, 61.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 62.
\item \textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 46.
\end{itemize}
Their diaries shed light on how they negotiated contradictory roles but also suggest that many elite women could not fully embody the faith—in “the Cause,” in their God, and in themselves—that they professed. Their inability to do so created for them a crisis around how to behave in very changed circumstances. Writing new scripts for themselves in their diaries helped them to cope with changed and ever-changing expectations for ladies on the home front, but these scripts were of limited value in the end. Questions remained that they could not answer: Was God listening? Would he extend a helping hand to the South? Would he ever restore harmony to a world torn apart by the passions of men? What kind of women would diarists become before it was all over?

Like other southern women, Lucy Breckinridge was troubled by these questions. She wrote of her lapse of faith during a particularly difficult period of the war in Virginia, which coincided with a deep depression caused by the deaths of her brothers Johnny and Gilmer. Lucy, an Episcopalian, often turned to her Bible to find comfort and solace, but her efforts sometimes failed to produce their intended results. It was during this particularly difficult moment that Breckinridge turned to God for comfort and found him silent, cold. She used her diary to attempt to work through her feelings of faithlessness and to emerge with a purified heart and a refreshed spirit.

Breckinridge’s most beloved sibling, Johnny, had died early in the war, at the Battle of Seven Pines, in late Spring of 1862. His death cast a long shadow over her life, one that she never seemed quite able to overcome. She began keeping a diary just a couple of months after his death, likely as a means of coping with her personal and family tragedy, and she wrote frequently of the sense of loss she experienced after he died. She described the summer following his death as “days of intense agony” that seemed “more like some
dark dream” than like reality. 87 The surreal quality of her loss represented her inability to come to terms with it in a world that had been upended. As time went on, it seems that she encountered even greater difficulty accepting his death.

While resignation to God’s will was a sign of a true Christian heart, Breckinridge struggled to accept that Johnny’s death could have been part of a benevolent design, writing, “I miss him more than I ever did and find it harder to be reconciled to the death of one who might have been so useful and an honor to his country.”88 In this passage, and in others, Breckinridge elided public and private grief. She excused her resentment over Johnny’s death by indicating that it stemmed not just from personal feelings of loss but also from the loss of a soldier to the Confederate cause. Later in the same entry, Breckinridge again merged public and private grief, following her statement about Johnny’s death with one that reads, “Monday passed quietly and gloomily. On Tuesday the papers announced the death of Gen. [Stonewall] Jackson. No event of the war has cast such a gloom over the country. I felt so sad about it.”89 In this passage, the deaths of brother and general come together into one personal and public expression of grief. Fully aware of the suffering and loss of life that families across the South faced, Breckinridge may have felt some guilt over her continued mourning of her most beloved sibling. By placing her loss within the sectional context, Breckinridge was able to link her own suffering and her patriotism by claiming that it was not only the personal loss but the losses to “the cause” that produced her depression. It is also likely that news of Confederate losses truly compounded her own private grief. Even in peacetime, death in the nineteenth-century South was not

87 Breckinridge, Lucy Breckinridge of Grove Hill, 37.
88 Ibid., 126.
89 Ibid., 126.
uncommon. However, the loss of her brother Johnny, and the continued risk that her four living brothers faced as they served in the military, was cast in a new light by Confederate defeats. The merging of public and private grief represents Lucy’s trouble accepting the death of her brother as it became more and more apparent that the South might lose the war. Losing her beloved Johnny was a devastating blow, but it was made much more so as she grappled with the possibility that his life had been given in vain. The progress of the war melded, in Breckinridge’s mind, with her own personal grief, excusing her unwillingness to see Confederate and personal loss as part of a divine plan.

It is worth discussing the special relationship that was the brother-sister dyad in the Southern plantation family. A common theme in the writings of southern authors such as William Faulkner and Edgar Allen Poe, the brother-sister bond in southern families was often intensely close, as was the case for Johnny and Lucy Breckinridge. As Bertram Wyatt-Brown notes, such close sibling bonds were common and expected.  

Johnny, only a year younger than Lucy, and her closest male sibling in age, was the predictable object of Lucy’s affections. In a society that valued male honor and female submission, young women often came to rely on their brothers for protection as well as for companionship. As young women entered adolescence, brothers became the primary focus of what a man should be, and young women often adored their brothers and hoped to marry somebody who embodied the same traits, including courage, honor, and masculine authority. As Catherine Clinton argues, brothers took an “active, exaggerated role in their sisters’ lives . . . Men, sensitive on behalf of the family name, monitored their sisters’ every move.” Likewise, young women learned their roles—submission and obedience—through interactions with

\[90\] Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor, 144.
\[91\] Clinton, The Plantation Mistress, 56.
their brothers, as well as their fathers. However, in the case of the Breckinridge family, the brother-sister relationship was not all male control and female submission. It is clear that Lucy found in Johnny a confidante as well as a champion and protector. The loss of this central figure in Lucy's world was, then, a manifold loss: she grieved over her favorite brother, her protector, and her model for southern masculinity. When Johnny died, Lucy's masculine beau ideal died with him.\textsuperscript{92}

Even within a large family network, Lucy felt bereaved and alone upon Johnny's death, which signaled something beyond her own personal grief. His death, to be followed by the deaths of two other brothers during the war, left Lucy feeling quite vulnerable. As the “best men” of the South fell, one after another, Lucy likely began to question the cause for which they died. As for other southern ladies, Lucy Breckinridge's hopes turned from winning the war to preserving the lives of those dearest to her. More and more she despaired of either, admitting, "I feel so hopeless tonight. If I could only believe, as some, that peace may be declared in a few months, there would be some light in the darkness, but I can see no prospect for it."\textsuperscript{93} Even if peace really was on the horizon, Breckinridge acknowledged the lasting devastation caused by the war: “So many hearths will be desolate when we do have peace that many a heart’s bitter cry will be, 'The light hath risen but shineth not on me.'”\textsuperscript{94} Slaveholding women like Breckinridge struggled to remain cheerful,

\textsuperscript{92} Pauline Heyward wrote about similar feelings when she lost her brother Frank. “Oh! my God, my life is such a blank, dreary thing without my Brother. I am so lonely and lost without him.” Heyward, \textit{A Confederate Lady Comes of Age}, 17.

\textsuperscript{93} Breckinridge, \textit{Lucy Breckinridge of Grove Hill}, 191.

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 191. This line comes from a poem by Henry Alford, “Academe.” Like Breckinridge, Kate Stone struggled to hope in a still-distant peace as she contemplated the desolation of families across the South: “Now what remains of the high hopes, the stirring plans, and the great ambitions that burned in the hearts and filled the brain of these gallant boys—only a handful of dust ... What charms can peace have for us when it does come bereft of our nearest and dearest?” Stone, \textit{Brokenburn}, 262.
but in the privacy of their diaries, they admitted that their own personal bereavements, combined with the South’s unending struggles, caused them to feel hopeless.

Breckinridge’s tendency to unite public and private loss was not exceptional; many slaveholding women did just this in their diaries, especially as hopes for Confederate victory began to dim. In fact, Lucy’s lapse of faith represented one such low point for Confederate aspirations, especially from her vantage point in Virginia. Union forces arrived in the vicinity on June 16, 1864 and at her home just a few days later, on June 19. The Shenandoah Valley, where the Breckinridge family resided, was repeatedly contested and transferred from Confederate control to Union and back again. The summer of 1864 marked the initiation of what Union general William Tecumseh Sherman called a “hard war” against the South. Sherman convinced Ulysses S. Grant and Abraham Lincoln to allow him to destroy the southern people’s will to sustain the war, and Virginia became a major field of action during the summer and autumn. Union troops attempted to break the resistance of Confederates by targeting farms as well as armies, by shattering both their material and psychological will to support the Confederacy’s war efforts. In this context, Breckinridge’s gloom was all but inevitable.

In addition to Breckinridge’s ongoing depression and encounters with Yankee troops, the period in which she wrote of God’s aloofness also marks the time at which Breckinridge family slaves began to run away and to act “shamefully” by helping Federal soldiers loot Grove Hill, the family’s estate. First, the family’s slaves began to desert their masters and mistresses. When Federal troops came to the area, Breckinridge noted, “we found ten of our servant men had departed, two Bookers, Mat, Peter, Willis, Jim, Jasper,

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Anderson, Goen, and dear little Josh—the older servants made him go. In the evening Mr. Stratton came and interrupted Nelson in the midst of his preparations for leaving.”

Shortly after the departure of these slaves, “8 more of ours joined them,” and, “Mat and Joshua behaved shamefully” by helping Yankee soldiers to uncover hidden valuables.

These eighteen slaves would be joined by four more shortly after this entry. The departure of the family’s enslaved men would have shaken Lucy, as it did other slaveholding women, who reacted to slaves’ quest for freedom as a personal betrayal. In a moment fraught with fear, anxiety, and depression, the slave exodus added to Lucy’s sense that her world was coming apart at the seams. Surrounded by a hostile army, fearing the desertion of enslaved people, and suffering from the loss of her favorite brother and anxiety about the brothers still serving, Breckinridge was pushed to the limits of her ability to bear the trials of war. It was within this context that she penned her lament about her own lack of faith.

It was not just the arrival of Union troops and the departure of the family’s slaves that caused Breckinridge to despair. She had written about being deeply depressed about the war effort as a whole for some time before she questioned God’s benevolence. Her thoughts often lingered over happier times in her past, as when she wrote,

I sat on the sofa and thought sadly of the past. As usual, the future has no charms for me now. It is full of perplexity and uncertainty . . . Having so cheerless a future to look forward to makes me dwell very often on that happy past . . . Oh, those were happy days! . . . So, visions of past joy and fears of future unhappiness, take your flight, and let me soothe and calm my mind to read my Bible and fix my thoughts on holier and more peaceful things.

97 Breckinridge, Lucy Breckinridge of Grove Hill, 193.
98 Ibid., 194-195.
99 Ibid., 218.
100 Ibid., 68-69.
Although this entry represents Breckinridge’s attempts to constrain her thoughts, to let go of the past and be content in the present, later entries reveal that she began to dwell on the past with increasing frequency and without restraint, as when she wrote, “I tried to read and write, but could not command my thoughts, so I just sat looking in the fire and thinking of the past and future with all my might.”101 She later lamented, “Oh! dear, I used to be so happy. I feel now as if my life was darkened forever.”102 In contemplating what the war meant for her own life, Lucy despaired that she could ever feel happiness again. As she took refuge in memories of by-gone days, Lucy signaled what many Confederate women felt in the last year of the war—that hope was fleeting and the war and all its suffering had been in vain.

Breckenridge even fantasized about giving up on life altogether, as when she dreamed that she visited Johnny’s grave and found herself wishing she “was resting quietly beside him. I dreamed the other night of going up there and of seeing his grave with the white cross, and I saw him by it, and he put his arms around me and told me to lie down there by him.”103 As the Confederacy’s crisis deepened, Lucy was reminded of all that the war had cost her, and she despaired of making a life for herself within the bleak future that she imagined. In a later entry, she acknowledged again that suicide might have been a temptation for her. This time, however, she admonished herself for thinking of death as a release from her suffering: “Oh! for peace and a large family circle again . . . I cannot hope for an early death,” but, “I feel so alone.”104 Johnny, calling to Lucy from the grave,

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101 Ibid., 108. For other examples, see Breckinridge, Lucy Breckinridge of Grove Hill, 97, 119, 130, 132, 136, 148.
102 Ibid., 136.
103 Ibid., 60.
104 Ibid., 91.
represents not just the loss of a family member but the loss of the “best men of the South” who gave their lives for, it seemed increasingly likely, a doomed cause. Johnny, aged seventeen when he died at Seven Pines, was on the cusp of adulthood. Unmarried and enthusiastic to prove his patriotism and his vigor, Johnny symbolized the future of the Breckinridge family and of the South as a whole in Lucy’s diary as she struggled to make sense of his death and the deaths of so many other young men.

The severity of Breckinridge’s depression worsened over time, and on New Year’s Day, 1864, Lucy wrote simply, “I am wearied, would that I could say truly to death—yes, I want to die—I cannot sleep, and I feel chilled and miserable.” She sought consolation from her sister Eliza, but finding her asleep, she resolved to find solace in her faith: “I will read my Bible and say my prayers and then maybe I shall be happier.” Whether this was as effective as Lucy hoped is unclear, as she did not return to her journal that night. What is clear is that Breckinridge turned to her faith as to a life preserver. In her darkest moments, she sought God, but she did so as a way to soothe herself rather than to serve the Almighty.

Breckinridge was not alone in despairing about the future during the war years, and slaveholding women across the South looked for ways to alleviate their pain. Priscilla Bond confided to her diary that she slept away her hours and sometimes turned to opium to relieve her mental and physical pains: “I did not get up till three oc[lock] this afternoon.

105 Ibid., 173.
106 Ibid., 173.
107 George Rable argues that the war had the effect of strengthening faith for many Americans, who felt that it was their only source of comfort and strength. He suggests that faith helped to sustain morale and so actually had the effect of prolonging the war. “Explaining human affliction and reckoning with divine judgment became necessary adjuncts to relentless war.” Rable, God’s Almost Chosen Peoples, 8.
After my dear husband left I took an opium pill and slept till nearly dinner time.”

Bond even contemplated suicide, writing, “I feel so anxious I can scarcely content myself—so restless, I walked down to the bridge this morning; I felt so unhappy—I think perhaps—if it had been no sin I should have been tempted to jump over. God keep me from all such temptations, even in thought.”

Sally Armstrong also turned to sleep to allay the fears, anxiety, and depression that many Confederate women experienced during the war. She confided to her diary, “I destroy all the time I can sleeping hoping by so doing the time of the Yankees’ stay will be shortened.”

Judith McGuire likewise found herself wishing she “could sleep until it is over—a selfish wish enough.” Depression was a serious problem for white southerners during the war years, as they struggled to cope with long-term uncertainty and widespread loss. For the southern lady, enjoined to enact the duty of cheerfulness, depression not only carried with it the symptoms of listlessness and despair; it also threatened her sense of herself as a lady because it undermined her feeling of performing the duties of her gender. In their darkest moments, slaveholding women turned to scripture and prayer in an attempt to salve their worried minds, but as Lucy Breckinridge admitted, “Sorrows that I never dreamed of have come upon me in the last year. I know it is all for the best, but oh, it is so hard to be resigned sometimes.”

Lucy’s depression even caused her to consider destroying her journal. She wrote abruptly one afternoon, “I am sick of this journal. I believe I’ll stop it.” On a more melancholy day, she admitted, “I do not feel much interest in my journal now. I have been

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109 Ibid., 298.
110 Armstrong, Diary, August 7.
111 McGuire, Diary of a Southern Refugee, 231.
112 Breckinridge, Lucy Breckinridge of Grove Hill, 148.
113 Ibid., 173.
too low-spirited to care for anything.” Fortunately for historians, she found the will to continue to write, though she often contemplated destroying the volume. In the end, she continued to write in her journal, though not very regularly toward the end of the war. For Breckinridge, as for other Confederate women, the diary provided a space in which to confront doubts that could not be spoken aloud. Diarists created narratives in those private spaces which allowed them to perform resolution of their moments of ideological or emotional crisis.

Though she was devout, Breckinridge had hinted at earlier points in the diary that she was not entirely resigned to letting God's will play out. Though she claimed to “always drink in anything doctrinal very eagerly,” she admitted to being baffled by the notion of predestination, writing, “I have never met anyone yet who could throw any light on that subject. I am sorry I ever thought of it, it puzzles me so.” The logic of predestination, the idea that all events have been preordained by God, eluded Breckinridge, who struggled at other moments to accept God’s will without question. Later in the diary, Lucy wrote about a Jewish tradition in which God uses indirect means to effect justice. In the scenario that Breckinridge recorded in her diary, Moses is permitted to speak to God and to ask him questions “concerning His administrations of the Universe.” Lucy wrote:

In the midst of this divine colloquy he was commanded to look down on the plains below. At the foot of the mountain there issued out a clear spring of water, at which a soldier alighted from his horse to drink. He was no sooner gone than a little boy came to the same place and finding a purse of gold which the soldier had dropped, took it up and went away with it. Immediately, after this, came an infirm old man, weary with age and travelling. Having quenched his thirst he sat down to rest himself beside the

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114 Ibid., 180-181.
115 One example of this is when Breckinridge wrote, “I know I shall destroy this volume very shortly.” Ibid., 174.
116 Ibid., 27.
spring. The soldier, missing the purse, returned to search for it. He demands it of the old man who affirms he has not seen it, and the soldier, not believing his protestations, kills him. Moses fell on his face with horror and amazement when the divine voice thus presents his expostulations: "Be not surprised, Moses, nor ask why the judge of the whole earth has allowed this thing to pass. The child is the occasion why the blood of the old man is spilt; but know that the old man whom thou sawest is the murderer of that child's father.  

Lucy commented simply, “That's not my idea of justice.”  

The moral of the story was that God “works in mysterious ways,” that his designs aren't always apparent, but they ultimately work to the ends of divine justice. Breckinridge rejected this notion of God’s plan. Southerners often argued that the war itself was a purifying fire, an ordeal inflicted by a loving but jealous God upon a wicked South. In this interpretation of the war’s purpose, southern men and women had to turn to God and to trust that he would ultimately grant the South victory and independence if the southern people were faithful. Lucy’s entry suggests that she found little comfort in the idea of God’s indirect methods. She was, instead, impatient for victory and for an end to the war. While many southern men and women turned to religion to help make sense of the war and its attendant suffering and hardship, Breckinridge indicated to her diary that rather than strengthening her faith, the war undermined it.

Finally, in the days leading up to Lucy’s crisis of faith, news arrived that she had lost a second brother, Gilmer, in service to the Confederacy. The family had been in fearful anxiety about his wounds for weeks. “Sister Julia,” Gilmer’s wife, lived with the Breckinridge family while her husband was serving in the military. Upon first hearing of

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117 Ibid., 105.
118 Ibid., 105.
Gilmer’s wounds, Lucy wrote, “Sister Julia’s countenance frightened me.” Lucy’s mother, too, seemed to “have no hope,” but Lucy herself held out hope that God would spare Gilmer to his wife and family. In contrast, Sister Julia was “completely broken-hearted and hopeless.” Finally, the family received a newspaper report confirming Gilmer’s death. Lucy noted sadly that Julia’s “face nearly breaks my heart. I never witnessed such hopeless sorrow.” Women across the South received such reports that robbed them of all hope of ever seeing loved ones again. They also confided to their diaries that such losses pushed them and other women to the very limits of forbearance. By July 1864, slaveholding women across the South had confronted incredible destruction and loss of loved ones, even while they began to contemplate the possibility of defeat. They turned to their diaries to ask themselves what it had all been for.

Lucy Breckinridge wrote her doubts about God’s goodness in the private space of the diary, but her experience was not an entirely private one:

My mind has been so full of doubts of God’s goodness and mercy today. I have been so sinful. I read my Bible and prayed, but the light of God’s countenance was withdrawn from me. I longed for some kind friend or pastor to guide and comfort me. Tonight I sat out here in the hall, writing all my sinful doubts, when I heard Eliza and Sister Julia talking about Jesus and the quietness and loveliness of his character until my heart was touched—and I believed. Sorrows are too apt to harden my heart against God, yet, I must reconcile myself to a life of hardship and sorrow. We are born to suffer and die. The gloomy state of the country depresses me so terribly I cannot see the dawn of peace that I hear some people talk about. They cry “Peace, peace, when there is no peace.” But I will try to believe that ‘He doeth all things well.’

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119 Ibid., 182.
120 Ibid., 189.
121 Ibid., 199.
122 Ibid., 197.
Again, Breckinridge created links between personal and national crises. She was as unable to visualize peace as she was unable to feel God’s loving arm around her. In a dark moment of doubt, Lucy flailed as if the ground had come out from underneath her.

In writing about her lapse of faith, Breckinridge vacillated between castigating herself and blaming God, though without any apparent realization that she was doing so. She claimed that God’s countenance had been “withdrawn” from her. Did she conceive of her struggle to believe—or her wartime suffering—as a test of her faith? Despite her “longing” for guidance and comfort, God remained silent. However, she went on to write, “Sorrows are too apt to harden my heart against God.” Here she put the blame on herself for her lack of faith: her own hard-heartedness was her fault, rather than God withholding the light she sought. She followed this with the lament that people “are meant to suffer and die.”

In the end, despite taking the responsibility for her faithlessness, she presented God’s plan as one meant to intentionally inflict suffering on his creation. Lucy ended the passage with the uncertain hope that she would come to believe “He doeth all things well.” To do otherwise, she noted, constituted “sinful doubts.” In this moment, Breckinridge actively struggled to conform her thinking to make sense of a God who was both loving and unwilling to help the South, or to preserve the lives of Lucy’s loved ones. Her ambivalence was clear, however. She claimed, “I believed,” while just a few lines later she resolved, “I will try to believe.” Both of these statements were meant as self-persuasion, as tools to help Breckinridge actually believe in God’s grace and mercy.

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123 George Rable argues that this kind of fatalism was common: “Believers’ powerful and sustained faith in divin providence could at times become a fatalistic attitude toward both ordinary and extraordinary events.” Rable, God’s Almost Chosen Peoples, 24.
When Breckinridge wrote, "They cry 'Peace, Peace, when there is no peace,' she alluded to a verse from the Book of Jeremiah in the Old Testament. The Book of Jeremiah, known for its lament about the fallen spiritual state of Israel, is a book of prophecy. Jeremiah was chosen by an angry God to prophesy Israel's destruction as punishment for its sins. The Israelites had turned away from God and worshiped idols, in addition to committing other sinful acts. Jeremiah was sent to the people to counsel repentance. However, his words fell on deaf ears, and God determined to punish his people through the means of famine and war. Jeremiah prophesied, "Disaster looms out of the north, even terrible destruction . . . A lion has come out of his lair; a destroyer of nations has set out. He has left his place to lay waste your land. Your towns will lie in ruins without inhabitant." Finally, God told Jeremiah that the Israelites' "houses will be turned over to others, together with their fields and their wives." Breckinridge can be excused for conflating the plight of the South with the plight of Israel. In both cases, God had allowed a powerful northern nation to destroy his people. As she contemplated the invasion of her own home, the mounting destruction of the war, and her own inability to conjure faith, Lucy's mind wandered into thoughts that God was indeed punishing the South. She must

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125 Jeremiah’s prophecies actually deal with two Jewish political entities, Judah and Israel. Following a civil war, the old Israel had been split into the two kingdoms, and Jerusalem remained in Judah. For the purposes of this chapter, I will discuss the prophecies of Jeremiah as they relate to Israel, by which I mean the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel. I do this for two reasons: First, it simplifies the text. Both Judah and Israel had sinned against God, and both were punished; Second, nineteenth-century Americans routinely envisioned the United States as a “new Israel,” a people especially blessed by God and possessing a divine purpose. Events on Earth, then, represented the favor or displeasure of an omnipotent God, and the lessons of Jeremiah were seen as being applicable to God’s chosen people, including Christians in the Confederacy. Rable, God’s Almost Chosen Peoples, 4. See also: Charles Reagan Wilson, Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920 (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1980), 39, 43.
126 Jeremiah 6:11, NIV.
127 Ibid., 6:12, NIV.
have wondered if the South’s sufferings would last, as had Israel’s, for generations or even millennia.

God’s reasons for the destruction of Israel involved more than just that nation’s worship of idols; Jeremiah also castigated his people for their greed and refusal to take care of the poor. God also issued indictments against the “prophets and priests,” who “all practice deceit. They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace.” These false prophets encouraged the people to ignore God’s warnings, promising them peace even while God promised war. They were responsible, in part, for Israel’s continued refusal to submit and repent, and so for its suffering. In return for this continued refusal, God warned Jeremiah that the Israelites would be exiled into a hostile land, that “An army is coming from the land of the north; a great nation is being stirred up from the ends of the earth. They are armed with bow and spear; they are cruel and show no mercy.” It is clear why Lucy Breckinridge might have understood these verses as a description of the South’s plight, confronted as she was with destruction and death at the hands of a northern army. Like other slaveholding women, however, God’s apparent displeasure with the South did not cause Breckinridge to raise questions about the righteousness of the Confederacy’s war for slavery. Indeed, amidst the tortured soul-searching that filled elite women’s diaries during the second half of the war, diarists’ silence around this issue is striking and suggests that questioning the institution of slavery was completely beyond the pale. When they searched for explanations for God’s fury, they sought answers in the behavior of individuals—greedy speculators, for

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128 Jeremiah 1:16, 5:26-28, 6:13, NIV.
129 Jeremiah 6:13-14, NIV.
130 Jeremiah 6: 22-23, NIV.
131 This is especially true, given Americans’ view of the United States (or Confederacy) as a New Israel.
example—rather than in institutions. They maintained this silence in spite of their familiarity with the moral argument that abolitionists—and eventually the United States government—made against slaveholding.

In the Bible, Jeremiah became angry with God, accusing him of allowing the Israelites to be deceived by false prophets. He cried out, “Ah, Sovereign Lord, how completely you have deceived this people and Jerusalem by saying ‘You will have peace,’ when the sword is at our throats.”132 Here, Jeremiah is actually blaming God for allowing false prophets to promise peace when God’s plan was destruction. God remained unmoved by both Jeremiah’s pleading and his anger. He instructed Jeremiah, “Do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them, because I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their distress.”133 In effect, the Jews had missed the time of repentance, and God was determined to judge them. Breckinridge, in her moment of despair, also found God unwilling to listen to her pleas for help and guidance. Using the Book of Jeremiah as her guide, she may have felt that God’s judgment was already upon the South, and that he had turned away from her and from the Confederacy. But like Jeremiah, Lucy struggled not to be angry with God, not to “harden her heart” against him in spite of feeling that she—and the South—had been forsaken.

Breckinridge held the false prophets of her own day accountable in this diary entry. They cried peace, ignoring the devastating effects of the war on the people of the South and holding out false hope that the South would be victorious. The diary entry suggests that Lucy had not only lost hope in the South’s ability to win the war, but also that she was exhausted by the war and wished for peace, even if it meant defeat. The ways in which this

132 Jeremiah 4:10, NIV.
133 Jeremiah 11:14, NIV.
piece of scripture reflected Lucy's own situation is worth examination. First, she admitted to hardening her heart against God. This is the same charge that Jeremiah leveled at Israel, when he wrote, "They made their faces harder than stone and refused to repent."\(^{134}\)

Second, Breckinridge wrote from the context of a brutal Civil War, in which prospects for Confederate victory were becoming increasingly dim. Her own trouble finding the mercy and favor of God was reflected by the plight of the South as a whole, which many believed was losing the war as a punishment from God for the same sins—greed, speculation, and unfaithfulness—that drove God to punish Israel. As historian George Rable has argued, people of faith in the nineteenth century shared—regardless of denominational affiliation—a “pervasive, providential interpretation” of the events of the war.\(^{135}\) Nineteenth-century people of faith believed that God was interested in the events that shaped individual lives as well as nations. This belief encouraged the faithful to see every event, every change in fortune, as evidence of either God’s favor or his displeasure. Wartime national days of thanksgiving and of humiliation, fasting, and prayer represented this belief and were common in both the North and the South. If God permitted the South to be defeated by its enemy, it could only be because the South had done something to lose God’s favor and protection.

Like Breckinridge, other southern slaveholding women believed that the South continued to be punished, in spite of public displays of southern faith. Pauline Heyward remarked after a national day of fasting and prayer that she feared the South had not done enough to trust in God rather than in its own military forces. She worried, “I fear our self-confidence, boasting and pride of the successes accorded us by God, have weighed heavily

\(^{134}\) Jeremiah 5:3, NIV.
\(^{135}\) Rable, God’s Almost Chosen Peoples, 1-3.
in the balance against the justice of our cause in the hand of our creator, and these reverses and terrible humiliations, come from Him to humble our hearts and remind us of our total helplessness without His aid.”

Elizabeth Collier complained in her diary about southern speculators who preyed on the desperation of civilians, “It is fearful to think of it, but we see quite enough without dwelling upon it. Poor grasping, misguided wretch. What good will the few dollars you have wrung from your own people do you when you come to die. Each cent will be a red hot coal burning your perjured soul.”

Judith McGuire also worried that God would punish the South for its sins, including its tendency to rely “too much to an arm of flesh; for he [General Stonewall Jackson] was the nation’s idol,” and she pleaded in her diary, “O God, let us not be given over a ‘hissing and a reproach to our enemies’”

In the Bible verse that McGuire chose to quote when she penned her prayer, God promised to punish the Jews who had disobeyed his order to become exiles in Babylon. An exile herself, pushed out of her comfortable Virginia home and finally into boarding houses in Richmond, McGuire may have been drawn to the Book of Jeremiah, which presented God’s wrath against the Jews, and their exile, as punishment for national sins.

Did she wonder if the South was being punished? The verse suggests so, but she did not address this idea directly in her diary. Her diary demonstrates that McGuire saw God’s hand in every battle, every change in fortune, and that she believed God used earthly

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136 Heyward, A Confederate Lady Comes of Age, 22.
137 Elizabeth Collier, Diary, April 11, 1862, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.
138 McGuire, Diary of a Southern Refugee, 211, 121. Here, McGuire also pulls a passage from the Book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah reports God’s words: “I will persecute them [Jews who refused to go into exile] with the sword, with the famine, and with the pestilence, and will deliver them to be removed to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a curse, and an astonishment and an hissing, and a reproach, among all the nations whither I have driven them: Because they have not hearkened to my words, saith the Lord, which I sent unto them by my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them; but yet would not hear, saith the Lord.” Jeremiah 29:18-19, King James Version.
enemies to punish the unfaithful.\textsuperscript{139} Mary Early certainly understood the South’s condition in these terms, and she repeatedly turned to the Book of Jeremiah, “which seemed to apply to our case with perfect accuracy.”\textsuperscript{140}

In the Christian tradition, there are three reasons that God allows his believers to suffer misfortune. The first, that God uses indirect means to effect justice in the end, was rejected by Lucy Breckinridge in her journal. The second is represented by the Old Testament Book of Job. Job was a righteous man, and God had blessed him with prosperity and family. Satan suggested to God that Job’s righteousness was a result of God’s favor in his life, and God allowed Satan to test Job’s faith by visiting financial and physical ruin on him and killing his children. Job’s story is representative of the second reason that God allows the righteous to suffer: to test their faith and bring them to a closer reliance on God’s wisdom rather than man’s. The third reason that God allows bad things to happen to his people is as punishment for their sins, especially the sin of unfaithfulness. This motive animates the story of Israel’s rebellion and God’s wrath in the Book of Jeremiah.

Breckinridge had both the stories of Job and of Jeremiah at her disposal, but she concentrated on the message of Jeremiah, on misfortune and suffering as punishment for sin. This choice suggests that she envisioned her Lord not as a God of mercy but as an angry God. Again, as she frequently did in her diary, Lucy conflated personal and national suffering and loss. She suggested that she had sinned, by hardening her heart, but also,

\textsuperscript{139} For example, she wrote approvingly of a sermon about the South’s dependence on God. The sermon centered on a verse from the Book of Exodus in which Moses led the Israelites through the desert, where they were attacked by a tribe called the Amalekites. In the ensuing conflict, “‘When Moses held up his hand, then Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, then Amalek prevailed.’ Oh, that our hands may always be ‘held up’ for our cause and armies.” When Moses testified to the power of God by raising his hands toward Heaven, the Jews were empowered, but when he lowered his hands, the Amalekites had the advantage. McGuire worried that southerners were not sufficiently faithful to keep their hands raised and therefore suffered military setbacks. McGuire, \textit{Diary of a Southern Refugee}, 152; Exodus 17: 8-13.

\textsuperscript{140} Early, Diary, March 10, 1865.
through her use of a passage from Jeremiah, that the South had sinned and was then suffering God’s wrath as a consequence. This presentation of the combined suffering of the Breckinridge family and the Confederacy suggests that Lucy’s faith had been shaken, not only in the goodness and mercy of God, but also in the righteousness of a war which had already claimed the lives of two of her brothers.

In spite of Breckinridge’s clear ambivalence, she wanted to believe that her crisis of faith had been resolved. She claimed to have spent the evening “writing all my sinful doubts,” but there is no evidence of this in the journal. Perhaps she had been writing letters. Perhaps she had chosen to write her doubts somewhere other than in her diary because doing so would have rendered them permanent and subject to future scrutiny. In any case, we can’t be entirely sure what those “sinful doubts” consisted of. However, Lucy decided to write of her lapse of faith in the diary only after she felt that it had been resolved and she was back on the right (believing) side of things. Her entry, however, suggests that the resolution had not been as complete as Breckinridge had hoped. As she struggled to reclaim a connection with the divine, Lucy found only partial relief; her diary indicates that her renewed faith was a small life preserver in a roiling sea of doubt.

This passage marked a progression that represented the movement from disbelief to belief in the evangelical conversion process. First, Breckinridge confessed her sinfulness in doubting God’s mercy. But she did not come easily to the next step, that of faith. Indeed, she cast about for somebody to help her, to guide her through the dark moment of doubt so that she could emerge again secure in God’s love. Lucy sought guidance in the Bible and through prayer, but she could not seem to find God through these means. Eventually, it was the words of other women—Eliza and Julia—that brought Lucy back to faithfulness.
However, the conversation that Breckinridge overheard was “about Jesus and the quietness and loveliness of his character.” Faith in Jesus was essential to Protestant ideas about salvation, but it was God’s love that Lucy had trouble finding. The “quietness and loveliness” of Jesus’s character stands in marked contrast to the God’s wrath in the story of Jeremiah. Lucy was attracted to the gentleness of Jesus even while she remained ambivalent about God’s severity and his judgment. The resolution of the lapse of faith, then, was not complete. Lucy managed to find her faith again by focusing on Jesus, but her conflict with God remained.

Like many diarists, Breckinridge turned to other women for comfort and support during the trials of war and the suffering of loss and despair. Women relied on each other during the war to renew their wellsprings of faith and strength. Even so, the language in the entry suggests that the conversation had not entirely allayed her concerns. She took responsibility for hardening her heart against God, but she also made the claim that “God’s countenance was withdrawn” from her. In the end, though, Breckinridge could only resolve to herself that she “will try” to believe that God’s will is best.

Lucy Breckinridge was not alone in making this resolution. Slaveholding women across the South turned to their private writings to pen prayers that God would strengthen their faith, help them to be thankful, grant them resignation to his will. Priscilla Bond also had trouble conjuring the warmth of God’s love. She wrote sorrowfully, “It seems to me I have not heard a sermon that has entered deep in my heart since I came south” from Maryland to Louisiana.141 But she repeatedly prayed for the “faith of a mustard seed!” and asked God to strengthen her faith, writing “Oh, my Father grant I may see thy hand in all

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141 Bond, A Maryland Bride in the Deep South, 234.
things! For I have put my trust in thee . . . Lord increase my faith!”\textsuperscript{142} Women’s diaries revealed that they not only had trouble conjuring hope for the southern cause but that the war even shook their faith in God. Under these trying circumstances, they turned to their most private writings, working to develop and strengthen their faith.

Like Bond, Judith McGuire increasingly felt the need to pray for faith. At the beginning of the war, and with Confederate success, McGuire felt assured of God’s blessings and his preference for the South. She wrote after one Confederate victory, “I do believe that the hand of God was in this fight, we were so strangely successful.”\textsuperscript{143} In another incident, she reassured a soldier by asking, “Don’t you believe that God will hear us for the justice of our cause?”\textsuperscript{144} In the face of military defeats and personal struggles, McGuire increasingly attempted to reassure herself, arguing that God would remain on the side of the South.

Under mounting evidence of Union success, she cried out to God through her diary, asking, “Lord, how long must we suffer such things? I pray that the enemy’s hands may be stayed, and that they may be driven from our fair borders to their own land.”\textsuperscript{145} She continued, “I am constantly expecting the blessing of God in a way that we know not. I believe that all of our difficulties are to be overruled for good. A croaker\textsuperscript{146} accuses me of expecting a miracle to be wrought in our favour[sic], which I do not; but we have been so often led on in a manner so wonderful, that we have no right to doubt the mercy of God towards us.”\textsuperscript{147}

In this last passage, McGuire warded off the doubting thoughts in her own mind by responding to the “croaker.” Her diary entries suggest that she constantly looked for the

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 262, 275.
\textsuperscript{143} McGuire, Diary of a Southern Refugee, 31.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 98.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 305.
\textsuperscript{146} “Croaker” referred to a person who grumbles or forebodes evil.
\textsuperscript{147} McGuire, Diary of a Southern Refugee, 332-333.
hand of God and for his favor on the South. When the war finally ended and defeat was certain, she wondered, “It seems to me passing strange that, with all their advantages, we kept them at bay so long, and conquered them so often.” Struggling to make sense of how God could have let North conquer South, she used the diary as a space in which to work out the puzzle of God’s plan for herself and for the South. Like many other southerners, she stopped short of blaming God directly, instead finding his guiding hand in the South’s ability to stave off defeat for as long as it did.

Margaret Gwyn also found herself praying for faith and a grateful heart, even in the midst of loss. Gwyn routinely ended her diary entries with a line about God’s goodness. Typical of this standard format was the line, “Thank God for his continued mercies.” However, after the death of her son Romulus, Gwyn’s prayers changed perceptibly in an acknowledgment of her suffering. She wrote, “Thank god it is as well with us as it is.” For Gwyn, the diary clearly served as a space where she wrote in an attempt to renew her sources of faith. After her son’s death, she increasingly wrote entries pleading for God to give her the right attitude toward suffering in life on Earth: “Lord give me a grateful heart for all thy goodness.” Sarah Wadley also prayed for a grateful heart, moaning, “I feel my heart cold when I know it ought to be grateful, I am grateful, but I am so sad, so coldly sad, God forgive me and deliver me from my own sinful, murmuring heart.” She tried to steel herself against suffering and defeat by arguing with herself, “I will trust in him, surely he will deliver us and if not, if it be his will to take from us what is dearer than home, friends,

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148 Ibid., 355.
149 Margaret Gwyn, Diary, March 29, 1862.
150 Ibid., April 23, 1862.
151 Ibid., February 11, 1863.
152 Wadley, Diary, October 15, 1863.
or life itself, our country, can I not believe that Our Father doeth all things well, I will try thus to believe, Oh, Lord, help thou mine unbelief!” Wadley struggled to maintain the belief that God directed human events and that justice and mercy flowed through him, and she phrased part of her lament as a question. Could she continue to believe? She promised herself that she would try but cried out to God that he would at least assist her. If the prospect of losing her country drove her to question God’s mercy, she was determined that she would make every attempt to safeguard her soul.

Unlike Lucy Breckinridge, Bond, McGuire, and Gwyn did not explicitly confess to a lapse of faith, but they practiced the art of self-persuasion, even self-deception, in attempting to reconcile themselves to the will of a God that they could not understand. After praying ceaselessly for Confederate victory and for the protection of loved ones, they all faced evidence that God was not, in fact, on their side. Blaming God, or turning away from him, represented a breach of faith they could not abide. Therefore, they used their diary-writing to search their own souls and to try to cleanse themselves of feelings of faithlessness. Complaining of “the burden of humanity pressing too heavily to be borne,” Sarah Wadley reprimanded herself for despairing,

The future looks threatening, the present is clouded with doubt, and uncertainty; our country is in turmoil and danger, and our family seems like a ship floating upon a troubled sea, with no particular destination, no particular interest in any thing, only to keep afloat. I know I am doing wrong, I know I am murmuring when I should be thanking God for his blessing to us . . . but oh I am so weak so wicked, I struggle against it but cannot overcome; when when shall I learn to trust Providence, when shall I cease to care about the disappointments of this world.154

153 Ibid., July 26, 1863.
154 Wadley, Diary, April 26, 1861.
Wadley’s lament mimicked that of women across the South who struggled against mounting personal loss, economic pressures, and self-doubt. Like most of them, she blamed herself when she felt her heart hardening against God, but slaveholding women’s diaries reveal that they used writing to ward off the dark thoughts that God had, indeed, turned his back on the South in its darkest moment and that a southern war to preserve slavery was not a righteous undertaking. Slaveholding women could not confront these possibilities, so they used their diaries as spaces to conform their thinking to what they had been taught to believe about the morality of slaveholding and about divine sanction of a nation built on slaveholding. They substituted their own personal failings for the great national sin of slavery, finding fault with their own relatively minor transgressions rather than questioning their society as a whole.
CHAPTER 5
THE LIMITS OF RACIAL POWER AND MALE PROTECTION: THE DIARY OF KATE STONE

When the Civil War swept across the Confederacy, Kate Stone was a young woman—just twenty years old. Raised in the productive lands that bordered the Mississippi River in eastern Louisiana, Stone lived on the periphery of the Confederacy. Her family was, however, deeply invested in the cause of the South, and her widowed mother controlled the labor of approximately 150 enslaved people. The Mississippi River provided the Stones a strong link to the rest of the South. Four of Kate’s brothers served in the Confederate armies, and two did not survive the war. Madison Parish, where the Stone family plantation was located, sustained a strong black majority with a ratio of nine black people to every single white person, the type of demographic configuration that contributed to the wealth of white planters but also raised their fears of black rebellion.¹ Kate and her siblings were taught to rule over this black majority by virtue of their whiteness, but the sheer numbers involved meant that they were also raised to fear and dread even minor disturbances in the traditions of white supremacy. In this context, even more than in others across the South, the specter of armed African Americans threatened to upset fragile white control.

It was in this context that Stone penned a terrified entry in her diary on April 25, 1863. Visiting their neighbors, the Hardisons, Kate and her sister encountered what was perhaps their greatest fear: armed black soldiers. Mrs. Hardison explained to Stone that a “Party of Yankees and armed Negroes had just left,”

They were led by Charles, Mr. Hardison’s most trusted servant, and they were all vowing vengeance against Mr. Hardison. They said they would shoot him on sight for moving two of his Negroes a few days before. Mr. Hardison had fortunately seen them coming and, knowing he would be arrested or perhaps killed as a conscript officer, had escaped into the woods.

Stone continued, writing of her own encounter with armed black soldiers in the Hardisons’ home,

We walked in and found Mrs. Hardison and the children all much excited and very angry, with flaming cheeks and flashing eyes. The Negroes had been very impertinent. The first armed Negroes they had ever seen. Just as we were seated someone called out the Yankees were coming again. It was too late to run. All we could do was to shut ourselves up together in one room, hoping they would not come in. George Richards was on the gallery. In a minute we heard the gate open and shut, rough hoarse voices, a volley of oaths, and then a cry, ‘Shoot him, curse him! Shoot him! Get out of the way so I can get him.’ Looking out of the window, we saw three fiendish-looking, black Negroes standing around George Richards, two with their guns leveled and almost touching his breast. He was deathly pale but did not move. We thought he would be killed instantly, and I shut my eyes that I might not see it.

The soldiers took their time moving through the house, laughing, cursing, and rummaging through wardrobes, desks, and cabinets while the women huddled together.

Directly one came bursting into our room, a big black wretch, with the most insolent swagger, talking all the time in a most insulting manner . . . He came right up to us standing on the hem of my dress while he looked me slowly over, gesticulating and snapping his pistol. He stood there about a minute, I suppose. It seemed to me an age. I felt like I would die should he touch me. I did not look up or move, and Little Sister was as still as if petrified. In an instant more he turned away with a most diabolical laugh, gathered up his plunder, and went out. I was never so frightened in my life . . . In the meanwhile, the other Negroes were rummaging the house, ransacking it from top to bottom, destroying all the provisions they could not carry away, and sprinkling a white powder into the cisterns and over everything they left. We never knew whether it was poison or not. The Negroes called and stormed and cursed through the house, calling each other ‘Captain’ and ‘Lieutenant’ until it nearly froze the blood in our veins . . . I was completely unnerved. I did not think I could feel so frightened . . . Mr. McPherson and George were all
the time on the gallery with the Negroes guarding them with leveled guns . . .

Mrs. Hardison was almost crazy.²

Once the soldiers left the Hardisons’ home, Kate and her sister fled with the white women, children, and men in tow, heading for the Stone family home.

As we passed through our quarters, there were numbers of strange Negro men standing around. They had gathered from the neighboring places. They did not say anything, but they looked at us and grinned and that terrified us more and more. It held such a promise of evil . . . We spent a night and day of terror. The next evening the Negroes from all the inhabited places around commenced flocking to Mr. Hardison’s, and they completely sacked the place in broad daylight, passing our gate loaded down with plunder until twelve at night. That more than anything else frightened Mamma and determined her to leave, though at the sacrifice of everything we owned.³

The Stones did leave their home in Louisiana, setting out on a terrifying nighttime journey through the swamps, ultimately establishing a new war-time home in Texas. This chapter is an examination of what Kate Stone’s diary entry can tell historians about how Confederate women coped with challenges to prevailing class and gender ideologies during the war. The scene is the home, the ostensible site of female protection. The crisis revolves in large part around the absence or impotence of white men, those men who were charged with protecting supposedly helpless women in both peace time and time of war.

For the class of southern women known as “ladies,” the home had important meanings. Though not designated as “women’s sphere” in the same way as northern homes were, the home was certainly the center of women’s worlds.⁴ The boundaries of the

² Stone, Brokenburn, 194-197.
³ Stone, Brokenburn, 197.
⁴ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese describes the difference between the northern bourgeois model and the southern agricultural model this way: “During the period in which northern society was undergoing a reconversion of household into home and ideologically ascribing it to the female sphere, southern society was reinforcing the centrality of plantation and farm households that . . . [preserved] men’s dominance. . . . Effectively, the practical and ideological importance of the household in southern society reinforced gender constraints by ascribing all women to the domination of the male heads of households and to the company of the women in their own households.” Fox-Genovese, Within the Plantation Household, 39.
home were porous in the sense that business and politics often filtered into the southern home, but they could also feel limiting to women who were confined within the household and prohibited from venturing beyond it without a proper escort. As southern writers at the time made clear, a lady’s place was within her own household, serving the needs of family, servants, and master. In exchange for her restraint and her service, the southern lady was assured of male protection. The home may sometimes have acted as a prison, but elite women were also promised that it would be their fortress, a defense against the violence, competition, and want that prevailed beyond its walls.

The Civil War called into question the impermeability of the southern household’s protections for white women and, by extension, the honor and status of the white men who were supposed to rule over it. When the front lines moved to the home front, slaveholding women were compelled to defend themselves and their property. How did such women adjust to the destruction of the ideal of the home as well as to the actual destruction of property? How could they maintain faith in the honor and masculine claims of their male kin when they felt abandoned, endangered, and ill-equipped to face down invaders? Their diaries suggest that they struggled to reconcile ideological teachings about masculinity, honor, and the benefits of ladyhood with the necessity of relying on themselves, other women, and slaves, while white men either served in the military or fled to the woods to avoid Federal soldiers.

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5 Clinton, The Plantation Mistress, 6-8; Kirsten E. Wood, Masterful Women, 2-3.  
6 For example, George Fitzhugh made clear to southern ladies that, “A husband, a lord and master, whom she should love, honor and obey, nature designed for every woman.” Fitzhugh, quoted in Fox-Genovese, Within the Plantation Household, 199.  
7 For ladies, as Elizabeth Fox-Genovese put it, “Women, like children, have only one right—the right to protection. The right to protection involves the obligation to obey.” Fox-Genovese, Within the Plantation Household, 199.
Kate Stone's diary entry is revealing of the ways that southern slaveholding white women experienced the war in their most intimate spaces. Taught, as they were, to put their faith in the protection of white men, these women learned a very unsettling lesson during the war: the power of white men was not nearly as absolute as they had been taught to believe. Women of the slaveholding classes were confronted by evidence not only that white slaveholding men could become as powerless as themselves in the context of war, but also that these white men in general could lack the requisite qualities of elite southern masculinity, including bravery, dignity, and chivalry. The ideological threat was thus twofold: the gender regime that structured elite women’s lives suddenly appeared hollow, and the repository of these women’s faith—their male kin and southern soldiers—appeared to be ill-equipped for the tasks of winning a war and safeguarding southern women’s privileges. Slaveholding women worried ceaselessly about the well-being of the men they loved, but they also felt resentment at being forced to shoulder unaccustomed burdens to support a war that these men had started.

The honor of slaveholders, inextricably tied to class status and exercises of male power, came under intense pressure during and after the war, as slaveholders mourned the loss of the wealth that had supported their claims to honor and community leadership. As class status became less secure for those at the top of society, male power took on new importance in maintaining family honor. In spite of the ideological crisis engendered by white men’s failures, southern slaveholding white women continued to hold to pre-war notions of masculine honor, and they did their best to try to rebuild their men during and after the war. Slaveholding women continued to search for men who lived up to their ideals, and, in the end, these women rejected their own wartime independence and
strength and retreated into a rhetorical female helplessness as a means of building southern men up after defeat. Southerners continued to reject changes to women’s status after the war just as they had done in the antebellum period, and women’s subordination continued to be seen as a cornerstone of white supremacy. As historian Marjorie Spruill Wheeler argues about the post-war period, “The commitment to preserving the traditional role of Southern womanhood was not just an isolated, idiosyncratic whim of nostalgic Southerners; it was part of an intense, conscious, quasi-religious drive to protect the South against the ‘ravages’ of Northern culture during the period of massive and often unwelcome political, social, and economic change.”

Class Status, Material Deprivation, and the Household in Wartime

The home stood for more than just the protection of elite white women. It also acted as a signal for class status, which was extrapolated outward to signify community standing and leadership. Planters’ homes, filled with fashionable clothes, fine furnishings, and other luxuries of life, and maintained in tidy order by teams of enslaved people, provided elite families with the means of displaying wealth and leisure of which their poorer neighbors could only dream. Southern planters retained an Old World vision of social relations in which economic and social elites guided politics through paternalism demonstrated toward both household dependents and less-fortunate neighbors.

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8 Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, New Women of the New South, 5.
9 Eugene Genovese argues that “medieval lordship” provided a model for southern planters’ conceptions of social relations. Genovese, Mind of the Master Class, 312. Slaveholders sought a type of “moral progress” that was antagonistic to bourgeois free labor. They saw themselves as the legitimate heirs of European feudalism, which relied on conservative conceptions of “organic” social relations. In slaveholder thought, the exceptional were meant to lead those—black and white—with fewer talents. Eugene Genovese, The Slaveholders’ Dilemma. Slaveholders knew their history and understood slavery—and the organic social relationships that it anchored—as fundamental to the rise of Sparta, Greece, and Rome. As one southern
Class standing was jealously guarded through the practices of class endogamy and complex webs of interpersonal loans and the power of reputation. However, as W. J. Cash argued, class was not the primary category of social difference in the Old South. Racial slavery, according to Cash, prevented poor whites from ever reaching the lowest rung of the social ladder, and because the plantation did not need their labor, these poor whites maintained a real sense of individual autonomy and status that stemmed from their race. Furthermore, except perhaps in the eastern seaboard states, social mobility remained a real possibility for those born into low circumstances. Class was, then, important in defining social life and marriage opportunities, but it was always subordinate to race as a social classifier. The plantation household guarded and upheld both hierarchies. It also defined the circumscribed limits of elite women’s worlds. The plantation household was thus a microcosm of southern social relations, ordering class, gender, and racial categories that extended beyond the plantation and into the public realm.

For southern mistresses, however, class had concrete meanings. Confined primarily to the household and prevented from doing the kind of benevolent and religious work that had become common among northern middle-class women, southern mistresses had little significant contact with people outside of their class beyond the home. As Elizabeth Fox-Genovese said of one slaveholding woman, she “mercilessly dismissed those whom her social position did not oblige her to know.” Elite southern women were expected to form acquaintances, friendships, and marriages with people in their own circle, and their friends

intellectual described social inequality, a man was most free when permitted “to occupy his proper place. He, only, is the slave who is forced into a position in society which is below the claim of his intellect and moral.” Drew Gilpin Faust, *A Sacred Circle*, 118-120.

10 Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 46, 63-64; Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery*, 3-23.
12 Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 22.
and kin policed such relationships to ensure that they adhered to elite social codes of propriety and gentility.13

The war threatened to undermine the relatively rigid class distinctions that ordered southern social life. Inflation and shortages affected even wealthy southerners.14 Women of all classes suffered as commodities became scarce and incredibly expensive during the war, but some elite women thought that their gentility prevented them from receiving the help that poorer southerners could. Julia LeGrand remarked that members of her class “have the troublesome spirit of proud people who will exist on a crust rather than ask help.”15 Likewise, Judith McGuire was sure that “the poor genteel are the real sufferers. Money is laid aside for paupers by every one who can possibly do it, but persons who do not let their want be known are the really poor.”16

Elite slaveholding women did not, in fact, suffer the same degree of deprivation as their poorer neighbors, but they did learn to do without many things they had once

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13 Catherine Clinton describes three significant differences between marital traditions for elite southern women and their northern counterparts: “wealth was a primary factor in match-making, cousin marriage was prevalent, and the median age of marriage was dramatically lower for women.” The first factor meant that young women’s choices were carefully managed by their families. The second, cousin marriage, helped families to both make informed decisions regarding marital partnerships and also to keep resources within the family. The third, the early age of marriage for women, facilitated both natal family control in marriage options and the control of the husband over his often significantly younger wife. All three factors indicate that marital choice was a family affair and that control over the bodies and destinies of young women was both expected and important to planter families. Clinton, The Plantation Mistress, 59. Jane Turner Censer agrees, arguing that, in spite of widespread expectations of companionate matches, relatives opposed to a particular match usually tried to influence the female participant who was likely to be younger (sometimes significantly so) than her suitor and whose future happiness was most closely linked to marital choice owing to the dependence of wives upon husbands. Jane Turner Censer, North Carolina Planters and Their Children, 1800-1860 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 65-95. Southern parents could accept matches about which they were less than enthusiastic, but they drew the line at matches to particularly objectionable suitors because these matches demonstrated a lack of family-minded thinking on the part of the child. Lorri Glover, All Our Relations: Blood Ties and Emotional Bonds among the Early South Carolina Gentry (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 65-66.

14 As James McPherson points out, “By the beginning of 1863, it took seven dollars to buy what a dollar had bought two years earlier. This kind of inflation became, in effect, a form of confiscatory taxation whose burden fell most heavily on the poor. It exacerbated class tensions and caused a growing alienation of the white lower classes from the Confederate cause.” McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 440.


16 McGuire, Diary of a Southern Refugee, 247.
considered necessities. Virginian Lucy Wood Butler lamented in 1863, "Confederate prices are startling to persons of small purses."\textsuperscript{17} In Tennessee, Ellen Renshaw House admitted that her dwindling reserves of cash caused her distress: “I don’t fancy that state of affairs in the least, for I do love to spend it.”\textsuperscript{18} Kate Stone had a similarly difficult time doing without the little luxuries of life, writing, “I doubt that I was ever intended for a poor girl. Deprivations go hard with me.”\textsuperscript{19} “A year ago,” she wondered, “we would have considered it impossible to get on for a day without the things that we have been doing without for months.”\textsuperscript{20} Even for elite women, food became scarce during the war. In the Fall of 1862, Ida Powell Dulany marveled at the “almost fabulous” prices of food and clothing, noting that “for months we have had nothing but salt pork on the table.”\textsuperscript{21} Emma LeConte complained, “We live tolerable poorly. Two meals a day.”\textsuperscript{22} She would later confide to her diary that the family had begun eating the peas that had been set aside for cow feed.\textsuperscript{23} Elite women struggled to come to terms with the new economic realities ushered in by the war. Deprivation was difficult for women across the South, but for elite women, it also threatened to undermine their claims to the status of “lady.”

The pressures of voracious moving armies caused precious resources to dwindle even further. After a Yankee raid on her home, Margaret Gwyn wrote sadly, “feeling very gloomy was foraged on all day looked like we were going to be deprived of any

\textsuperscript{17} Lucy Wood Butler diary (typescript), February 28, 1863, Lomax Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA.
\textsuperscript{18} House, \textit{A Very Violent Rebel}, 177.
\textsuperscript{19} Stone, \textit{Brokenburn}, 185.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 109.
\textsuperscript{21} Ida Powell Dulany diary, 1861-1865, May 1, 1863, Accession 42246. Personal papers collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.
\textsuperscript{22} LeConte, \textit{When the World Ended}, 17.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 67.
subsistence.”

Lucy Wood Butler admitted, “Though we laugh at the vain boasts of our enemy, we have good cause for sadness as provisions are growing scarce.” Ella Moore Basset Washington wrote after one raid, “When I saw the meat going, our last dependence, my firmness forsook me; what with exhaustion from want of food and sleep, I was perfectly unstrung in body and mind.” Ida Dulany also looked at Yankee raids as the final straw that could push the family from bare subsistence to devastating poverty. She complained about rumors of raids, writing that even though the Yankees hadn’t been to her home in months, “we have so little left us that we cannot venture to risk what we have, so upon every rumor we have all the meat taken from the meat house, and concealed.”

Slaveholding women across the South wrote frequently of trying to preserve what they had by hiding meat, live animals, silver, jewelry and anything else that might be spirited away by a hungry army.

Elite women were sometimes willing to confront the soldiers who raided their homes, even to the point of physical altercations. Ella Bassett Washington “plead, persuaded, entreated” with Union soldiers to give up entering her house, but her entreaties were unsuccessful. Other women found that words could not protect them, and they put their bodies between family resources and invading troops. While her neighbors fled from coming Union troops, Ida Dulany vowed to “stand my ground . . . If I pretend to keep the farm [while her husband served in the military], the only way to do so is positively and

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24 Gwyn, Diary, July 12, 1865.
25 Butler, Diary, March 3, 1863.
26 Ella More Bassett Washington, Diary (typescript), May 30, 1864, Mss5:1 W 2767:1, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA.
27 Dulany, Diary, May 11, 1863.
28 Washington, Diary, May 29, 1864.
firmly to resist the foragers when they come.”

She did just this on a number of occasions, putting her body between her sparse provisions and Federal soldiers. In the summer of 1863, Dulany did her best to feed groups of hungry Confederate soldiers. Soon, however, the Yankee foe appeared, and Dulany watched from her balcony as the armies fought and the Confederates retreated. For days, she endured searches of her house, watching as Federal soldiers stole hams, saddles, and everything they could carry away. “They poured in in such numbers that everything on the place was soon eaten up,” even though her own children cried from hunger. When the soldiers finally gave up the meat house and began to look for provisions in the cellars, where Dulany had squirreled away a few hams, she resolved that they should not have the last of her family's food and refused to give them the key. While one soldier went to find an axe to break the door down, Dulany “put one hand upon each door side and stood waiting for them” in spite of her debilitating hunger. In the end, she lost most of her household provisions, but she ended up saving the hams.

Women who were sure they would faint at the sight of enemy troops found unexpected wells of strength when faced with the prospect of losing the means to support their own families. When Union soldiers came to Lucy Buck’s neighborhood, she resolved, “I think twould be very wrong for us to desert father and the house now. Our flight would leave everything much exposed to pilferers.” She stayed in the family home to confront the soldiers. When they arrived, Yankee soldiers threatened Buck’s Aunt Cattie with pistols when she defied their efforts to confiscate her horse. The next day, Federals shot twice at a

29 Dulany, Diary, March 4, 1862.
30 Ibid., June 2, 1862; June 13, 1862; June 22, 1863; Dec 26, 1864.
31 Ibid., June 22, 1863.
32 Ibid., June 22, 1863.
33 Ibid., June 22, 1863.
34 Buck, Shadows on my Heart, 96.
neighbor woman who refused to heed their commands to halt. One week later, in another raid at Buck's home, Bel Air, Fannie Buck attempted to secret away a small box of jewelry but was found out. As Lucy recorded the incident,

She resisted and [the soldier] raged threatening her in a loud voice at last drawing his pistol and taking deliberate aim he swore he would shoot her if she did not deliver it. She never quailed but facing him with her back to the parlor door held the casket behind her refusing even to let him see it lest he should wrest it from her. He then fired his pistol or rather snapped a cap right full in her face without producing any impression. Rushing forward he attempted to gain possession of the coveted box and a rough hand to hand scuffle ensued in which Fannie dealt the miscreant such a blow as sent him reeling from her . . . She called them poltroons and the little imp who had been most forward all the time told her if she persisted he would burn the house just as soon without as with orders.35

When the soldiers returned to the yard and stole a horse, Fannie followed them and hurled a rock that hit one of them in the shoulder. Slaveholding women, newly responsible for defending their homes and family resources, broke the constraints of ladyhood by sparring—verbally and physically—with the strangers who invaded those homes and threatened those resources.

Yet many slaveholding women were concerned with more than just survival, and they made attempts to keep up appearances by offering increasingly scarce resources to guests. Hospitality was a social duty of the master class, and mistresses made efforts to set abundant tables and offer clean rooms for guests. Eliza Andrews and her sister made sacrifices to maintain the illusion of plenty. Andrews wrote, “We eat as little as we can do with ourselves, but we don’t want father’s guests to suspect that we are stinted, so Metta pretends to a loss of appetite, while I profess a great fondness for whatever happens to be

35 Ibid., 297-301.
Most abundant." While slaveholding women scrimped and went hungry to keep up appearances, "like the poor people I read about in books," as Andrews put it, they were sometimes forced to acknowledged their straitened circumstances. Diarist Margaret Ann Morris Grimball noted, "Two poor women recently came here to beg, I was not able to give them meal, for I find it hard to get it for my own family." Material deprivations weighed heavily on women who were accustomed to having more than the necessities of life, and they threatened these women's sense of themselves as ladies of the elite class. Slaveholding women mourned the loss of an abundant table or a well-stocked wardrobe, even as they struggled to adhere to pre-war codes about hospitality and charity.

Even before Lee's surrender, some women turned to powerful daydreams of emigrating out of the South, but their reduced financial situation rendered it an impossible goal. Julia LeGrand wanted desperately to leave occupied New Orleans, but did not have the resources. "So here we are a fixture," she sighed, "where our hearts are almost breaking." Such thinking became more pronounced among Confederates as the war came to a close. Eliza Andrews noted in her journal, that all talk had become "about emigration to Mexico and Brazil." In spite of her family's financial troubles, Pauline Heyward responded to Confederate defeat by penning her dreams of relocating. She wrote, "All I

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37 Ibid., 96.  
38 Meta Morris Grimball diary, November 28, 1862 in the Margaret Ann Meta Morris Grimball Diary #975-z, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.  
40 Andrews, War-Time Journal, 59. Mexico was invaded by the French forces of Napoleon III and occupied between 1861 and 1867. Many Confederates saw Napoleon as a potential ally against the Union, though France never formally recognized the Confederacy. Brazil was one of the last remaining slave societies in the Western Hemisphere by the 1860s. After the close of the Civil War, roughly 20,000 Confederates did emigrate to Brazil, attracted by protections for slavery and by subsidies offered by the emperor who wished to attract planters knowledgeable in cotton agriculture. Alicja Iwanska, British American Loyalists in Canada and U.S. Southern Confederates in Brazil: Exiles from the United States (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1993); Cyrus B. Dawsey and James M. Dawsey, The Confederados: Old South Immigrants in Brazil (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995).
want it to leave this vile place, to go to some other country . . . We are all so anxious to go to Brazil."Emma LeConte grieved in her diary that finances rendered her stuck in the defeated South: “If we could only leave the country—will we ever have the means to do so?” While a small number of former Confederates did leave the country in the wake of defeat, most slaveholding women were left to make the best of incredibly difficult social and economic circumstances, all while dealing with the emotional trauma of a protracted war and ultimate surrender.

The Social Meanings of Lost Status

For women of planter families, wartime deprivations and the loss of household control undermined—to some degree—the importance of class distinctions in the South, but slaveholding white women conceived of the ability to take it in stride as part of their patriotic duty. As the war threatened social leveling, these women vacillated between attempts to maintain their pre-war class standing and to accept patriotism and whiteness as the new standard of respectability and family honor. Forced to flee her home ahead of Union forces, Sarah Morgan—torn from her community standing as one of the “Aristocrats of Baton Rouge”—wrote that at least the clothing on her back would “certainly establish us on the footing of ladies, if we chance to fall among vulgar people who never look beyond.” Women forced to become refugees, especially, continued to rely on their class standing to pave the road as they came to rely on strangers for aid, including lodging and transportation.

41 Heyward, A Confederate Lady Comes of Age, 76-78.
42 LeConte, When the World Ended, 108.
43 Morgan, Civil War Diary, 70, 99.
These same women frequently complained about the rough quality of their new surroundings, often forgetting to be grateful that less-fortunate neighbors took them in and fed them. Refugees often felt unwelcome in their new communities, which struggled to incorporate them in the face of housing and food shortages. As historian George Rable notes, “In some ways, social prejudice intensified even as economic distinctions were being leveled beyond recognition.” Planter women often wrote with disdain of their new neighbors. Kate Stone commented frequently on the backward fashions and habits of her new community of Tyler, Texas. When invited to a neighborhood picnic, she wrote acerbically, “We went out, as Mamma said, ‘to see the animals feed.’” However, she also marveled at what she considered a strange “prejudice that exists all through the state against refugees. We think,” she concluded, “it is envy, just pure envy,” borne of her family's superior lineage, education, and bearing. In spite of changed financial circumstances, women like Stone maintained a haughty, aristocratic demeanor that rendered their acceptance in their new homes unlikely.

Slaveholding women who were forced out of their homes or faced deprivation lost access to the site and practices that most defined their class standing. The home was the location in which white elite women performed their wealth and community status and claimed protection from their male kin and deference from social and racial inferiors. Sixty-two year old Margaret Crozier Ramsey reflected sadly on the loss of her home, remarking, “Now all occupied by the vandals who desolated our beautiful country. Now the

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44 Rable, Civil Wars, 185. Drew Gilpin Faust agrees, arguing that “refugee” was a term that was used mostly used to describe “wealthy individuals who had chosen to abandon their customary place of residence, frequently with an eye to keeping property, especially slave property, out of Union hands. Smaller slaveholders and poorer farmers often felt this choice unavailable to them, and many regarded ‘refugeeing’ as evidence of a lack of patriotism.” Faust, Mothers of Invention, 40.
45 Stone, Brokenburn, 292.
46 Ibid., 238.
old mansion where we dispensed hospitality with a liberal hand is in ashes.”

For Ramsey, the home was the site where she had been a “mistress,” and both the structure and the hospitality which flowed through it had marked her status as such. With her home lost and forced by straitened economic conditions to take up teaching, Ramsey was set adrift without the life raft of class status to buoy her up in her trials.

Sarah Morgan also contemplated the loss of her family home in Baton Rouge with dread: “We will not be ashamed to earn our bread, so let it [money] go. But this house, is really something to us.” “Sometimes, when all are asleep,” she admitted, “I cry, I rave for what I can never have again. Father, Harry, Home, all lost in six short months . . . I was not made for this life.”

Like Ramsey and Morgan, Grace Brown Elmore grieved over the prospect of losing her home. “The days of our home are numbered,” she wrote, “and I feel very much like one who is watching the last days of one near and dear to them.” When Priscilla Bond’s home was burned during the war, she stopped writing in her journal for a year. Devastated by the loss of her home, she didn’t have the heart to write about its destruction. Slaveholding women across the South were filled with fear and dread at the thought of being forced out of their homes, their safe havens. For these ladies, the home symbolized safety and abundance. To lose their homes was to lose the security and the worldly goods that had helped them define their place in society. To women whose claims to ladyhood were largely tied to their place in the affluent household, losing the home unmoored them from community recognition of their status. Such women, however, did
their best to embody the traits of ladyhood while they made their way through the world and to signal their class status to strangers. They relied on manners, clothing, education, and social connections to help them demonstrate their status as elites.

In a move that both recognized fading class distinctions and simultaneously upheld them, slaveholding women sometimes deigned to grant status to men who served in the military, regardless of their class standing. While returning home from the depot with her sister, Eliza Andrews met a group of soldiers who had been stopped from crossing the river by high water. The coarse, barefoot men spoke familiarly with Andrews, and one even took her sister’s arm to show her the high-water mark. Even while Andrews recorded their manners and speech as exotic, evidence that the soldiers were clearly of a lower class, she also ruminated, “They meant no harm. These are unceremonious times, when social distinctions are forgotten and the raggedest rebel that tramps the road in his country’s service is entitled to more honor than a king.” Andrews’ description of the soldiers signified that, on the one hand, patriotism and military service had usurped the place of class distinctions in marking men as honorable. On the other hand, Andrews felt empowered to bestow the status attached to honor on these men precisely because of her class status. In spite of the fact that her family had been reduced to a diet of “cornfield peas or some other coarse, rank thing that I detest” and had resorted to eating her little brother’s pet lamb, Mary Lizzie, Andrews continued to think of herself and others in terms of their pre-war class standing. As a member of the respectable set, she felt it her duty to condescend to the soldiers.

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52 Ibid., 95-97.
Finally, slaveholding families struggled to come to terms with what poverty meant for their relationships with enslaved people. In some cases, white family members were forced to rely on their slaves to provide them with basic necessities because they were newly unable to afford them. Eliza Andrews acknowledged that her family only enjoyed coffee and sugar because of the benevolence of the family’s former slave Uncle Osborne, and she marveled at her new circumstances, writing, “I can hardly believe it is I, plotting with the servants in the pantry to get up a dinner out of nothing.”53 Likewise, Emma LeConte noted that the family’s slaves supplied their mistresses with meat that they would otherwise have had to forego. “How times change!” she marveled, “Those whom we have so long fed and cared for now help us.”54 As a refugee in Texas, Kate Stone noted miserably that the labor of slaves marked the only luxury that the family had managed to hold on to. The labor of enslaved people, she wrote, “is about all we do have. So little to eat.”55 She worried, “If the Negroes are freed, we will have no income whatever, and what will we do?”56 Sarah Morgan also came to rely on gifts and favors given by enslaved people. She received the “distressing” news that “the one chicken and two dozen eggs Miriam and I succeeded in buying from the negroes by prayers and entreaties” had saved her sister Lilly from “actual hunger.”57 In each of these cases, elite slaveholding women endured the cognitive dissonance and indignity of begging favors of the people that their families held in bondage. As slavery unraveled during and after the war, former mistresses struggled to come to terms with the ways that class and mastery had ceased to mark them

53 Ibid., 96, 102.
54 LeConte, When the World Ended, 41.
55 Stone, Brokenburn, 258.
56 Ibid., 335.
57 Morgan, Civil War Diary, 442.
unquestionably as superiors. In the post-war years, their whiteness would stand in as the undeniable mark of status, as southern whites rebuilt the racial hierarchies that took on increasing importance in the context of widespread white poverty.

In some cases, slaveholders wished to drive slaves away because they could not afford to sustain both the white family and the black labor force. Mary Stribling wrote that her father wished to drive the slave women and their children away because he could not afford to maintain them when all the slave men had gone. She “begged him not to do that for that would be forcing them to go and leave the washing, milking, cooking, and cleaning the house to us and we were not quite ready to begin.” In the end, for many slaveholding women, the primary concern was who would do the housework—the endless cooking, cleaning, sewing, and mending—that had been the labor of enslaved women within the household. Even though Lucy Buck prided herself on the “decided success” of dressing herself and helping to make breakfast, she acknowledged that housework had made her “deathly sick,” and she “experienced quite a sense of relief” when the family’s new cook arrived. Kate Foster wondered if “some day I shall be obliged to do my own cooking,” so she began practicing in 1863. Like Foster, Fanny Cohen Taylor anticipated the day her maid would leave by learning to darn her own stockings, “the first time I have ever done such a thing in my life.” Emma LeConte also ventured into uncharted territory, noting that she had cleaned her own room. She carefully recorded her “first experience in work of this kind.” Emilie McKinley also expressed a sense of pride in her first attempts at ironing, but

58 Stribling, Diary, April 23, 1862.
59 Buck, Shadows on My Heart, 102, 209, 242.
60 Kate Foster, Diary, July 4 1863.
61 Fanny Cohen Taylor, December 30, 1864 in the Phillips and Myers Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.
62 LeConte, When the World Ended, 54.
she overestimated her willingness to do such labor. In one entry, she looked forward to getting rid of the troublesome slave woman Sue, while in the next, she admitted, “We were anxious to keep Sue if possible.”63 While many mistresses initially exaggerated their own capacity for domestic labor, Kate Stone wrote pointedly that housekeeping was “horrid work, vanity and vexation of spirits.”64 Many mistresses attempted to face new domestic tasks with a brave face, but over time their labors became oppressive. In the aftermath of the war and emancipation, these ladies struggled to retain access to the domestic labor of black women.

Even though the exigencies of war threatened to destabilize southern society by diminishing distinctions between non-elites and their social betters, women of slaveholding families remained committed to the rules of polite elite society. They married within their class, organized social life within the confines of elite circles, and remained true to conceptions of honor and status, though they adapted these to include military service and whiteness in new ways. They may have found themselves to be woefully behind on the fashions of the day, forced to travel in the back of a wagon, or reduced to taking handouts from other families, but as Sarah Morgan exclaimed in her diary, “Bah! A Lady can make anything respectable by the way she does it!”65 In spite of Morgan’s youthful optimism, slaveholding Confederate women were humiliated and devastated by their diminished economic circumstances, which undermined their claims to ladyhood and mastery.

63 McKinley, From the Pen of a She-Rebel, 42, 23, 24.
64 Stone, Brokenburn, 155.
65 Morgan, Civil War Diary, 102.
The War as a Test of Southern Masculinity

Southern families who experienced the loss of their homes, fine clothes, libraries, family heirlooms, and slaves, and who even confronted food insecurity, were predictably concerned about their class status and the leveling effects of the war. Status categories such as class and honor were inextricably linked, and the weakening of one element threatened the other. The war marked a period in which both concepts came under intense pressure and threatened to crumble. The Civil War created, as historian LeeAnn Whites has argued, a “crisis of gender.” As the white men of the South marched off to defend their privileges, white women were left to take responsibility for both male and female tasks at home. In addition, white men were drawn away from the local and familial networks upon which their claims of mastery and masculinity were built. As white men served the Confederacy, then, white women became the keepers and protectors of white masculinity and its privileges at home. This shift marked a major reversal of pre-war gender norms.

As Bertram Wyatt-Brown has demonstrated, southern conceptions of honor had traditionally been focused on white male dominance over and protection of subordinates, including enslaved African Americans, white women, and children. However, the tradition of honor also provided space for women to exhibit masculine traits in the service of protecting the honor of the family. “Bravery in woman,” writes Wyatt-Brown, “as in ancient Germany or in eighteenth-century Celtic lands, was still honored in the Old South. Women’s expression of valor, however, was to be in the form of stoical acceptance of fate, or if their protectors were unavailable, fierce defense of hearth.” During the war, slaveholding women practiced both the stoicism and the defense of the home that Wyatt-

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66 Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*. See also Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery*.
67 Ibid., 233-34.
Brown described. The war also invited women to police the honor of their male kin and so to ensure the honor of the family.

Wartime sacrifices necessitated difficult decisions on the part of slaveholding women because they put duty to family and duty to nation into conflict. As LeeAnn Whites argues, women were torn between “a militant identification with the cause of the men of their class” and fear and concern about sending their sons and husbands to battle. Some mothers and wives encouraged their male kin to stay home during the conflict, or at least to wait to rush off to glory on the battlefield. A Mr. Davies was “wild to join the army but has his mother and four grown sisters absolutely dependent on him, and it seems impossible for him to get off.” Young Joe Carson was “crazy to join the army . . . but his parents will not consent. He is most wretched.” On the other hand, some men enlisted reluctantly, without relish for the idea of camp life or the dangers of battle. Margaret Morris Grimball’s son was “not very enthusiastic about Military affairs, and finds the camp life perfectly horrible.”

However, both men and women in the Confederacy, especially of the planter class, recognized military service for men as a social imperative, and they did their best to remain cheerful as the war disrupted their families and threatened long separations and devastating loss. For Ida Powell Dulaney, the sight of soldiers, who “seemed like sheep

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68 Southern women from planter families tended to be knowledgeable about the political movements of their day, in spite of the fact that politics was seen as a male preserve. The war accelerated their interest in and commitment to the politics of the white ruling class. Whites, Crisis of Gender, 29; Faust, Mothers of Invention, 12-18.
69 Stone, Brokenburn, 95.
70 Ibid., 95.
71 Grimball diary, October, 19, 1861.
72 Whites, Crisis of Gender, 31-40; 12-18.
gathered for the slaughter” made her heart “ache to look at them.”73 She was, however, insistent that her husband, Hal, serve his country. In spite of the “anxiety—no I may say anguish” that his absence caused her, Powell prided herself in that “Though greatly grieved I have never murmured at his going to fight for his country, for I know he has done right.”74 The women in Kate Stone’s family also anticipated the enlistment of another young man—another of Kate’s brothers—with fear, contemplating a future in which he would be “marching and counter-marching, weary and worn, and perhaps dead on the field of battle.”75 Even so, Stone “would not trust any man now who stays at home instead of going out to fight for his country.”76 While many slaveholding women felt the same sadness and anxiety, they made heroic efforts to appear calm and stoic as they sent their men off to unimagined dangers and unknown fates. Martha Abernathy prayed daily “that I may be ready to give him [her husband] up. God alone can give me the strength, for it will try me sorely.”77

Slaveholding white women’s diaries suggest that they offered themselves as a rationale for the war and for their men’s involvement in it. References to soldiers’ protection of “hearth and home” filled elite women’s diaries.78 Corinda Tyler identified

73 Dulany, Diary, July 25, 1861.
74 Ibid., May 16, 1862; July 29, 1861.
75 Stone, Brokenburn, 94.
76 Ibid., 92.
77 Abernathy, The Civil War Diary of Martha Abernathy, 15.
78 James McPherson demonstrates that Confederate soldiers also conceived of the war as one for “hearth and home,” even when fighting for the South required men to leave their homes unprotected and fight a thousand miles away. Competing ideals of manhood and honor caused married soldiers to experience a dilemma: “In one direction lay their responsibilities as husbands, fathers, and breadwinners for dependents to whom they had made a sacred pledge to cherish and support. In the other direction lay their duty as able-bodied citizens to defend their country. To evade either obligation would dishonor their manhood. But in time of extreme national peril, the manly call of duty to country seemed more urgent.” Soldiers assured their lonely wives that fighting for country was indeed fighting for the protection of their homes. They did this, in part, by appealing to notions of family honor, arguing that women must do their patriotic duty by supporting the men.
with other women who mourned the men of the South, lamenting the “brave and manly brother who has poured out his life blood to defend her home and her honor.”\textsuperscript{79} Julia LeGrand pitied Union soldiers who were forced to fight for causes that were not their own. She was sure that southern men, “fighting for home and fireside,” played the part of knights who were borne up under the trials of war by the immediacy of the cause to their own families.\textsuperscript{80} “Who,” she asked, “would not be sustained for fighting for hearthstone and native land!”\textsuperscript{81} Sarah Morgan’s diary suggests that Confederate soldiers also believed in the narrative of a war to defend home and family. When a group of soldiers encountered a gathering of women, they waved their hats and promised, “We’ll fight for you!” The women, waving handkerchiefs, “sobbed with one voice ‘God bless you soldiers! Fight for us!’”\textsuperscript{82} Eliza Andrews’ family resolved, “Pinched as we are, it is impossible to refuse anything to the men that have been fighting for us.”\textsuperscript{83} Lucy Buck agreed that, “ragged and unpolished” as many Confederate soldiers were, “they were yet our defenders and protectors.”\textsuperscript{84} In spite of their own growing independence and competence, slaveholding women helped to shape a narrative of the war that focused on the trope of helpless women. They also began—during the war itself—to rewrite the history of its causes, placing themselves at the center of a war fought by strong men on behalf of weak women. In this narrative, the home took on a place of central importance. Left behind to defend that sacred space—the home—women placed household integrity and inviolability at the center

\textsuperscript{79} Corinda Tyler diary, Aug 9, 1863, Accession 38766, Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA.
\textsuperscript{80} LeGrand, \textit{The Journal of Julia LeGrand}, 79.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 243.
\textsuperscript{82} Morgan, \textit{Civil War Diary}, 67.
\textsuperscript{83} Andrews, \textit{War-Time Journal}, 64.
\textsuperscript{84} Buck, \textit{Shadows on My Heart}, 50.
of their understandings of the war. Centering the home also allowed slaveholding women to write a narrative in which Yankee violations of that hallowed space proved their own degeneration as opposed to the “Confederate knights” who fought gallantly to preserve the rights—the right to protection, in particular—of southern women.85

Left behind by their men to wait and worry, elite slaveholding women described feelings of uselessness and anxiety. While women across the South made ample use of tropes describing “helpless women,” slaveholding diarists often confessed to feeling frustrated by the restrictions of their sex, and they penned complaints that their lot was to remain at home, anxiously awaiting news, while men were able to expend their energies and strive for glory and purpose on the field of battle. Grace Brown Elmore complained, “We poor women must stay behind and trust in God and pray for our men.”86 Catherine Broun wrote proudly of a confrontation with Union soldiers, in which she assured them, “If they killed all the gentlemen that the women would take it [the fight] up.” However, she noted, “They were very much amused at many of my remarks.”87 Hindered by the dictates of ladyhood, Kate Stone wished for the “stir and excitement in the busy world outside. It is enough to run one wild. Oh! to be in the heat and turmoil of it all, to live, to live, not stagnate here.”88 Emma LeConte pleaded, “Why does not the President call out the women if there are [not] enough men? We would go and fight, too—we would better all die together.”89 LeConte, like the vast majority of women in the United States, did not take up

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86 Elmore, Diary, November 25, 1861.
87 Broun, Diary, November 6, 1862.
89 LeConte, *When the World Ended*, 90.
arms and rush into the fray. However, her diary suggests that she felt helpless, guilty, and frustrated by the gender role she was expected to inhabit. Sarah Morgan, stymied by life on the home front, exclaimed, “If I was a man--! O Wouldn’t I be in Richmond with the boys!” “Why,” she wondered, “was I not a man? What is the use of all these worthless women, in war times? If they attack, I shall don the breeches, and join the assailants and fight.” After a bit more reflection, though, Morgan wondered if she could ever possess the courage to wear men’s clothing.

Though slaveholding white women craved the prewar security that their homes and their men had provided them, they also prided themselves on their own expressions of bravery and competence in the face of physical threats. While Lucy Wood Butler claimed that women’s “needles are now our weapons,” and Ida Powell Dulany was sure that her tongue was her only weapon against invaders, other women took up arms in their own self-defense. Mary Gray Caldwell admitted to being so afraid of Yankee raiders that she could not sleep. She wrote, “I once actually felt for my sword which I keep always at my head.” While Caldwell kept a sword close to her bed, Pauline Heyward acknowledged, “I do not go out unless armed.” She later met a party of Yankee raiders armed with “my revolver, and a bag of bullets, caps and powder in my pocket.” Kate Stone likewise armed herself when out in the company of a female friend for a horseback ride. Sarah Morgan, always sure of her own courage, armed herself with a dagger, a carving knife, and a seven-shooter,

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90 Some women did serve on the front lines, however. DeAnne Blanton and Lauren M. Cook, They Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers in the American Civil War (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002); Richard H. Hall, Women on the Civil War Battlefront (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2006).
91 Morgan, Civil War Diary, 166-67.
92 Butler, Diary, May 24, 1861; Dulany, Diary, Apr 17 1862.
93 Caldwell, “It Does Appear as if Our Soldiers Were Made Altogether of Patriotism,” 77-78.
94 Heyward, A Confederate Lady Comes of Age, 61.
95 Ibid., 65-69.
96 Stone, Brokenburn, 353.
“always ready for use.”97 Other women—Cate Carney, Julia LeGrand, Lucy Breckinridge, and Emilie McKinley among them—gave themselves peace of mind by arming themselves against the enemy.98 McKinley recounted a story of a neighbor woman who told a Union soldier that she would gladly shoot him, if she only possessed a pistol. The soldier offered his gun to her, but she couldn’t go through with shooting him. As McKinley saw it, “her will was good but not her courage.”99 Slaveholding women’s diaries were filled with tales of their own bravery, their own willingness to die in service to the cause and in defense of home and honor. They expected their menfolk to be at least as brave as they thought themselves.

While many mothers, sisters, and wives felt deeply distressed as their male kin left to serve the Confederacy, slaveholding women across the South also recognized that masculinity and honor were riding on performances of bravery during the war. Many slaveholding women expressed the heartfelt wish to act, to sacrifice, to preserve the honor and independence of the South. Prevented from achieving martial glory, such women sought to ensure that their male kin lived up to their ideal of the gallant soldier. As outlined in Chapter One, slaveholding women jealously guarded the martial honor of their brothers and sons, and they hoped that their families would receive glory from the bravery and sacrifice exhibited by their male kin. Lucy Buck celebrated the praise that her male kin, or “the boys,” received from their superior officers, writing that they were “much esteemed and respected” and had behaved “with great bravery.”100 Buck was not alone; slaveholding

97 Morgan, Civil War Diary, 150, 176, 51.
98 Carney, May 30, 1861, June 14, 1862; LeGrand, The Journal of Julia LeGrand, 133; McKinley, From the Pen of a She-Rebel, 51; Breckinridge, Lucy Breckinridge of Grove Hill, 124.
99 McKinley, From the Pen of a She-Rebel, 51.
100 Buck, Shadows on My Heart, 153, 187.
women across the South made careful notes in their diaries whenever their male kin received praise and notice for their actions on the battlefield.

Slaveholding women also attempted to live vicariously through their men, finding in them an outlet for the ambitions that were closed to ladies. Elizabeth Collier put all of her hopes for glory onto her brothers, writing, “I have longed more than ever since this war to be a man—The love of glory is all powerful in my heart—crushed and mangled as it is—But I am a helpless woman and can only try to instill some of my ambition into my brothers [sic] breasts.” 101 Pauline Heyward never tired of reports of her “peerless boys,” writing, “I cannot hear enough of them.”102 Slaveholding Confederate women also projected their ambitions for glory and honor onto the bodies of their male kin, especially their brothers. Kate Stone relished reports of her “gallant” brother and admitted, “I am very ambitious for him. All my dreams of future glory for our name center in My Brother.”103 Elizabeth Collier likewise admitted to being ambitious for her brother and prayed, “God grant that he may live and realize all my hopes.”104 Southern women on the home front were anxious first about their male kin’s well-being, but family honor and promotion came a close second on their list of concerns. In short, slaveholding women hoped that their brothers and sons would live up to the martial ideal around which honor was increasingly configured. These sentiments were not limited to the early days of the war or to those who had yet to experience the loss of a loved one in battle. In fact, for many women, accumulated sacrifice and loss served to render their commitment to the martial ideal even more robust.

101 Collier, Diary, October 1, 1864.
102 Heyward, A Confederate Lady Comes of Age, 39.
103 Stone, Brokenburn, 121.
104 Collier, Diary, December 8, 1864.
However, not all women were satisfied with the performance of their menfolk’s martial masculinity. Indeed, some slaveholding white women looked on in horror as their male kin refused to live up to the standards of southern masculinity that would have guaranteed their standing as men of honor and leaders in the community. Ellen Renshaw House grumbled about her brother Will in January, 1864, “I wish he was in our army where he ought to have been long ago.” Reflecting on expanded conscription laws, House crowed, “That is exactly right. If a man has not spirit enough to fight for liberty, he ought to be made to do it or leave.” As Bertam Wyatt-Brown has noted, during wartime, white southern women became in many ways the wardens of family honor, and they expected their men to live up to their ideals and to do their duty.

Women guarded family honor, measuring their male kin by the recognition they received for conduct in the war. In this capacity, Grace Elmore bemoaned her fate, to be the sister of a man who shirked his duty and brought disgrace on the family. “Heartsick and weary,” she pleaded in her diary that her stay-at-home brother might “see the anxious hearts, the weary longing for your character to become that of a noble true man.” Her “sickening disappointment” affected “not only my faith in one but in all men. Knowing that Truth and honor do exist,” she wrote, “I yet cannot distinguish their dwelling place.”

Slaveholding women expressed their concerns about the honor of their own family members, but they also wrote of their desires that men of the South in general would prove the honor of the region and the righteousness of the war. Stay-at-home men were roundly

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105 House, A Very Violent Rebel, 89.
106 Ibid., 199.
107 Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor, 233-35.
108 Elmore, Diary, January 3, 1863.
109 Ibid., April 19, 1863.

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condemned and cut off from the society of patriotic Confederate women. Labeled *cowards* and *traitors*, such men found themselves shunned by women who had sacrificed their own loved ones to “the glorious Cause.” Kate Stone summed up her feelings on stay-at-home men when she wrote, "With all of our relations going out to fight, I am not apt to think other men should sit comfortably at home”

110 Martha Abernathy concurred in her belief that, “If ‘tis right for some to suffer, all should suffer and then all will share *equally the reward.*” Those who shirked their duty, she worried, had lost sight of “principle, country, and I fear, *of God.*”

111 Lucy Wood Butler noted of an acquaintance early in the war that he “is quite a handsome agreeable young Gentleman but he has not yet joined the army and I, of course, cannot like him much.”

112 Ellen Renshaw House sent a nasty poem to “that little Turncoat” Tom Van Gilder, accusing him of changing his politics as often as he changed his dress coat.

113 Elizabeth Collier was more violent in her opposition to “shirkers,” addressing an appeal to the men of North Carolina, “If there is one coward among you shoot him down. We must,” she determined, “have no cowards among us.”

114 For women who had experienced the pain and anxiety of sending loved ones to fight, stay-at-home men existed beyond the pale.

Slaveholding women went beyond policing the behavior and patriotism of southern men; they also shunned Confederate women who fell so low as to fraternize with the enemy. Ellen Renshaw House noted with disgust, “I don’t know which hold their heads the

112 Butler, Diary, Aug. 6, 1861.
114 Collier, Diary, Sept. 1, 1861.
highest since the Yankees have been here, the negro girls or the tory girls.”

In this entry, House rhetorically compared white and black women, implying that they shared an equally dishonored state because of their familiarity with Union soldiers. While “negro girls” had no honor to lose, “tory girls” were in a fallen state because of their lack of patriotism, as evidenced by their willingness to be friendly with the enemy. Cate Carney reported that an acquaintance of hers “who is in deep mourning for Confederate Officer, [was] out at the gate talking to a Yankee officer.” She hoped that the ghost of the dead Confederate haunted his lover for her inconstancy. Ellen Renshaw House wondered, “How a Southern girl can marry a Yankee I cannot see.” Anyone who fell so low, she sneered, “must be hard up for a husband.”

In addition to the shortcomings of shirkers and turncoats, southern slaveholding white women also frequently became frustrated with the primary expression of southern masculinity, the Confederate Army. Confederate women often complained in their diaries that their army was not protecting them as they thought it should. Though these same women prided themselves on their courage and strength in the face of Union soldiers, they remained committed to the idea that their class, race, and gender should guarantee them male protection. When this protection failed to materialize, women often scolded retreating Confederate armies, by which they so often felt abandoned. Lucy Buck lamented the “vicissitude” of being “one day in the very heart of our army the next abandoned in the

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115 House, *A Very Violent Rebel*, 22. “Tory” was the term used to describe Americans who remained loyal to the Crown during the American Revolution. In this context, it denotes a person whose loyalties remained with the Union. From the perspective of a staunch Confederate, a southern tory would have been akin to a traitor to the South.

116 Carney, Diary, June 20, 1862.


118 In Chapter Three, slaveholding women’s frustrations with military and civil leadership is discussed. This chapter deals instead with women’s frustrations in the enlisted men of the South in general.
hands of the Yankees. Would like to understand,” she added, “the movement of the

troops.” Mary Caldwell also found herself frustrated with southern armies. “I should

think,” she wrote, “that they ought to have been in before and driven the invaders out, but

they are too cowardly I suppose.” Emma LeConte wondered that Sherman’s armies were

permitted to sweep on “unresisted, devastating, burning.” Pauline Heyward raged, “our

men have behaved disgracefully, have deserted, straggled and everything else.” Kate

Stone wrote acerbically, “The 31st La. Regt. was camped there and had only time to seize

their arms—and run away.” Stone continued, “One company of good men could put a

stop to all of this, but our men are across the Macon with no desire to come this way. We

hear they are panic-stricken at the name of a Yankee and run the other way.” Lucy Wood

Butler compared Confederate soldiers unfavorably to the women on the home front:

And now that treachery and cowardice seem to have arisen in our land, hope

is dying out, and we have brought ourselves to look the worst bravely in the

face, and think of what we shall do when the Yankee tyrant reigns supreme,

and grinds us to dust by insult and wrong. If I were a man, no such thought

would dare enter my mind, but I, being merely a woman, must sit still, with

my weak sisters, for fear of doing aught unwomanly, and see 700 men

surrender as they did at Donelson, a deed that women would have blushed to

own, and a deed that makes us weep to feel that such men are our

countrymen. Oh, may the black flag soon wave over the land, and fight to the

death, or live victorious, be the watchword! Pure cowardice would be enough

to make men fight now for if we do not win, what would life be: a useless

burthen without honor, happiness, wealth are gone, and disgrace and

oppression descend upon us.

Butler was not alone in making the comparison between the courage and honor of

slaveholding white women and their men, or in finding the men wanting.

119 Buck, Shadows on My Heart, 234.
120 Caldwell, “It Does Appear as if Our Soldiers Were Made Altogether of Patriotism,” 80.
121 LeConte, When the World Ended, 77.
122 Heyward, A Confederate Lady Comes of Age, 76.
123 Stone, Brokenburn, 137.
124 Ibid., 174.
125 Butler, Diary, Feb. 27, 1862.
Slaveholding women across the South penned scathing condemnations of stay-at-home men, the Home Guard, deserters, and even Confederate soldiers. Military retreats and losses raised the specter of cowards and traitors, and slaveholding women excoriated men who seemed unable to defend southern rights and southern honor to the same extent as their women.

At the end of the war, some women even acknowledged that southern armies were as destructive as Union armies. Margaret Morris Grimball complained, “Our own soldiers are most destructive in their visits to houses left, and entered ours and helped themselves to what they liked.” Margaret Crozier Ramsey noted that the disbanding of southern armies led to a situation in which “the country is full of horsethieves [sic], lawless soldiers prowling around.” Ida Powell Dulany wrote of the inability of southern armies to protect women left at home: “The impression in the army seems to be that we are protected from Yankees by them, but I fear it is just the reverse” because Confederate raids on Union troops were met with retaliation by Federals against the citizens. Lucy Buck became frustrated that “we cannot distinguish friend from foe and ten chances to one if you aid a poor distressed looking soldier today tomorrow he will return . . . to murder and plunder you . . . Wonder which it will be next—Yankee or Confederate or a mixture of both.” Demoralized Confederate troops, it seemed, could be just as cowardly, just as destructive, and just as untrustworthy as their Union counterparts. Women who had spent the war framing it as a contest for their protection were deeply disturbed by evidence that their security was not foremost in soldiers’ minds, regardless of the side for which they fought.

126 Grimball, Diary, November 27, 1862.
127 Ramsey, Diary, April 16, 1865.
128 Dulany, Diary, May 1 1863.
129 Buck, Shadows on My Heart, 241.
In what was a disorienting and humiliating reversal, slaveholding Confederate women were frequently put in the position of defending and hiding their men, rather than the other way around. Lucy Breckinridge noted in her diary that the women in the family persuaded visiting Confederate soldiers to hide in anticipation of an impending Yankee raid. "We all besought them earnestly, almost tearfully, to run, and succeeded in getting them to go into the passage where they stood peeping around the corner." Lucy Buck reported of an acquaintance, “Green Samuels was at home and made his escape by adopting female costume and walking out after dusk” while “one of the girls” defended her equine property by leading the horse into the dining room and fending off raiders with a pistol. Buck’s entry exemplifies the ways in which southern gender roles could undergo a complete reversal under the pressures of war. Samuels relied on a woman to clothe him in her garments for his own safety while leaving “the girls” to fend for themselves in the face of Yankee raiders. While Green Samuels dressed in women’s clothing, Martha Abernathy noted, “One of our citizens found a cozy retreat in his wife’s wardrobe” in an effort to hide from Federal soldiers. Emma LeConte recorded her father’s flight from home as “the saddest moment of my life,” noting that he was forced to leave the women “to the mercy of the inhuman, beastly Yankees.” Ida Powell Dulany’s husband spent several days “hiding out” from Yankees who were in the neighborhood. She reflected, “A feeling of intense sadness comes over me at the idea of our men being obliged like criminals to skulk about their own homes, or to flee before the enemy.” She longed for the days when “our own

131 Buck, *Shadows on My Heart*, 263.
132 Martha Abernathy, *The Civil War Diary of Martha Abernathy*, 44.
133 LeConte, *When the World Ended*, 34.
134 Dulany, Diary, March 10, 1862.
men were here, and we entirely safe from evil of every kind under their protection.”

Frustrated in their attempts to arrest Dulany’s husband, Union troops arrested her instead, taunting her because her husband had “skulked away and left me to bear the brunt of it.”

Torn between a desire to protect her husband and a desire to be protected by him, Dulany gave up her claim to masculine protection and allowed her body to stand in for that of her husband. In such moments, southern women must have felt more than frustration—their diaries suggest that they felt cheated out of the security that was supposed to be part of their race, gender, and class privileges.

Many slaveholding women expressed shame and disgust with men who would give up the struggle and take the hated Loyalty Oath. Upon hearing that her brother Will had taken the oath, Kate Carney asked herself, “Why didn’t he die before returning to bring eternal disgrace on the family. He has ever been a draw back. I could have stood him dying so much better.” She went on, “I had rather our throats cut, or turned beggars on the world than that [another brother] should disgrace himself by taking that dirty oath.” Ellen Renshaw House likewise pledged, “I had rather see both my brothers dead than take the oath.” Ida Dulany urged the men of the South to reject the oath and instead to embrace “Exile, Confiscation, even death before perjury and disgrace.” The oath, she wrote, made it “impossible for any man to remain in this country with honor and safety both.” Given the choice between safety and honor, slaveholding women across the South pressured their men to choose honor. After years of war, supposedly to preserve southern rights and

135 Ibid., November 5, 1862
136 Ibid., Dec, 1864.
137 Carney, Diary, May 27, 1862.
138 House, A Very Violent Rebel, 115.
139 Dulany, Diary, Aug 5, 1862.
140 Ibid., July 31, 1862.
honor, slaveholding women looked on in horror as friends, neighbors, and relatives took
the oath pledging loyalty to the same government that sent soldiers to invade their homes,
destroy their property, and terrorize their families.

These women took wartime discourses of honor seriously and were appalled that
any southerner could abandon his principles, rendering these women’s own sacrifices
either misguided or pointless. Without honor, they had been told their entire lives, a family
had nothing. Slaveholding women’s diaries suggest that these women felt betrayed by
southern men’s impotence. Elizabeth Collier ended her diary with a desperate appeal to
the disgraced men of the Confederacy:

Men of the South are you dead to all shame? are you so cowed and broken in
spirit that you cannot feel yr living sorrows—will you drain the bitter cup of
disgrace to its very dregs, without one single effort—to dash it from yr lips—
Think of what you were four years ago—to contrast that with yr present
subjugated state—And think that you have brought it all upon yrself—You
knew what was in store for you—if you gave up—and yet you did it—[one
page cut out] How are the mighty fallen— … Better oh a thousand times it
were better that you had all fallen on yr own swords, and that you were with
our brave dead who sleep well—What has life in store for you now—You
have no country—no honor—you are a disgraced and ruined people—and yet
men of the South you are content—content to be slaves . . . Shame on you
forever—\(^{141}\)

Forced to admit the failures of southern masculinity, in addition to defeat and subjugation,
Collier chose silence by ending her diary. With all hope lost, what more could she have to
say?

**Kate Stone’s Story**

The war undermined male claims to honor and mastery by obliterating men’s ability
to provide protection for dependents. Wartime conditions compounded white men’s

\(^{141}\) Collier, Diary, July 9, 1865.
impotence by requiring white slaveholding women to assume the responsibilities of
mastery, including the protection of property, dependents, family honor, and even of white
masters. In the story that begins this chapter, Kate Stone struggled to make sense of a
world in which white men were powerless in the face of black soldiers, the plantation
household was subject to invasion by the enemies of the South, and white women became
responsible for protecting themselves as well as the men who were supposed to be masters
of any situation. Stone wrote,

They were led by Charles, Mr. Hardison’s most trusted servant, and they
were all vowing vengeance against Mr. Hardison . . . Mr. Hardison had
fortunately seen them coming and, knowing he would be arrested or perhaps
killed as a conscript officer, had escaped into the woods. We walked in and
found Mrs. Hardison and the children all much excited and very angry, with
flaming cheeks and flashing eyes. The Negroes had been very impertinent.
The first armed Negroes they had ever seen . . . We saw three fiendish-
looking, black Negroes standing around George Richards, two with their guns
leveled and almost touching his breast. He was deathly pale but did not
move. We thought he would be killed instantly, and I shut my eyes that I
might not see it....The Negroes were completely armed and there was no
white man with them....Directly one came bursting into our room, a big black
wretch, with the most insolent swagger, talking all the time in a most
insulting manner...He came right up to us standing on the hem of my dress
while he looked me slowly over, gesticulating and snapping his pistol . . . I felt
like I would die should he touch me . . . I was never so frightened in my life . . .
The Negroes called and stormed and cursed through the house, calling each
other ‘Captain’ and ‘Lieutenant’ until it nearly froze the blood in our veins . . .
I was completely unnerved. I did not think I could feel so frightened . . . Mr.
McPherson and George were all the time on the gallery with the Negroes
guarding them with leveled guns . . . Mrs. Hardison was almost crazy. As we
passed through our quarters, there were numbers of strange Negro men
standing around. They had gathered from the neighboring places. They did
not say anything, but they looked at us and grinned and that terrified us more
and more. It held such a promise of evil . . . We spent a night and day of
terror . . . That more than anything else frightened Mamma and determined
her to leave, though at the sacrifice of everything we owned.142

142 Stone, Brokenburn, 194-197.
Mr. Hardison was not only endangered by the presence of armed northern troops, but his only recourse was to flee the home, leaving women and children to face the dangers of invasion on their own. Hardison’s abilities as a slave master were called into question first because his “most trusted servant” led the assault on his master’s property and threatened the safety of the master himself. He had clearly both misjudged the loyalty of his slaves and lost control over them. Hardison had failed as a master in two fundamental regards: he had failed to control his slaves, and he had failed to protect the white women and children in his care. In short, he was unsuccessful in meeting his responsibilities to all of his “dependents.” These masterly responsibilities—controlling inferiors and protecting dependents—defined white elite masculinity in the South, but the Civil War disrupted men’s power and so undermined their status in the eyes of enslaved people and white women alike.

Mr. Hardison was not the only white man stripped of his power in this anecdote; Stone watched with horror as George Richards was held at gunpoint on the porch by two armed African Americans. She noted that Richards was “deathly pale” and “did not move.” In this instant, Richards lost the activity and self-determination that defined masculinity, rendered immobile by fear instead. Stone, convinced that Richards would be killed, closed her eyes so as not to see the murder take place. While Mr. Hardison had fled, leaving his family behind to fend for themselves, Richards was also placed outside the home by the power of the black men who detained him, and the women and children inside found him powerless to protect them. The women inside the house were likewise powerless to help Richards, forced to look on in breathless anticipation of bloodshed. Stone was herself so sure that Richards would be killed that she closed her eyes against the sight. By refusing to
look, Stone was protecting herself against seeing violence done to her male acquaintance, but she was also shutting out the sight of his humiliation, rendering herself blind to his debasement. By refusing to look at the scene, she attempted to avoid shaming him further by acting as a female eyewitness to his humiliation. In a way, then, she protected his masculine honor by not looking, even at the moment when she most desired white male protection. Though Richards survived the encounter, his honor was diminished by his inability to control social inferiors or protect white women.

Even though southern white masculinity failed the Stone and Hardison women, Stone continued to cast about for a more potent white manhood to rectify the reversal of power from white to black. She noted, “the Negroes were completely armed and there was no white man with them.” In spite of the evidence of white male powerlessness, Stone continued to look for a white male savior, though in vain. In this moment of crisis, she continued to fall back upon two decades of training in a social system that insisted on scripts of white female helplessness and white male power. In spite of the reality of the situation, she continued to grasp for the white man who could restore racial and gender order.

Just a month before the incident at the Hardisons’, Stone had written about an encounter with two white Yankee soldiers. Kate interfered when the two men attempted to steal her beloved horse, Wonka, and one of the men “dashed up with the pistol pointed at my head . . . and said ‘I had just as soon kill you as a hoppergrass.’ I was not frightened,” she wrote, “but I was furiously angry.” Even though Stone was threatened with violence, the scene did not frighten her because the man wielding the pistol was white. Though he

\[143\] Stone, *Brokenburn*, 182.
violated social conventions that required men to protect rather than threaten white ladies, this man did not represent a major threat to Stone’s personal security. It seems that she believed herself to be insulted rather than endangered. In the same entry, Stone observed that Mrs. Hardison—whose husband was away—had asked Kate’s fifteen-year-old brother Johnny to help her retrieve six runaway slaves and their children. However, Johnny “could do nothing. None of them have even a gun.”

Even though the enslaved people were refusing to heed the instructions of their mistress and Johnny was rendered powerless without a gun, this event did not cause Stone’s mother to decide to flee Brokenburn. There was something, then, that was qualitatively different in this instance of apparent danger and white southern men’s helplessness. That something different was the race of the aggressor. While this scene made Kate “furiously angry,” it did not freeze the blood in her veins as the encounter with the armed black men would do. A white man remained in charge of the situation, which rendered it in line with the racial and gender hierarchies of the South.

Stone’s narrative described a nightmare scene in which the world, it seemed, was turned on its head. White men were powerless to rescue their female dependents, the home was violated by the presence of threatening black men, and white ladies were at the mercy of social and racial inferiors. These supposed inferiors, however, claimed for themselves the honor and power that were meant to apply only to white men. Stone noted that the men called each other “Captain” and “Lieutenant,” terms reserved for service in official armies. This, she noted, “nearly froze the blood in our veins.” Stone found the titles to be so disturbing because these men were claiming things that were decidedly closed to

144 Ibid., 183.
them in the context of the southern caste system: male honor, military power, entry into the plantation home, familiarity with white women, authority over white men, and even the male prerogatives of physical and sexual violence. All this demonstrated for Stone that these armed black men were not bound by any of the rules of the South. What, then, would be the limit to their depredations? Stone found herself caught in a moment of extreme cognitive dissonance. Nothing in this nightmare scenario was supposed to be possible and yet she found herself living through it. She continued to search for white male protection, even when it became clear that none would be forthcoming.

Stone’s account suggests that she experienced the presence of the “big black wretch” in particular as a sexual as well as social and racial threat. Indeed, the presence of a menacing black soldier contained all three perils at once: clearly unwilling to accept the racial caste system of the southern social order, this man defied racial convention when he approached these white women “with the most insolent swagger, talking all the time in a most insulting manner.” Through his body language and his speech, the armed black man rejected the servility and deference that white women had come to expect from black men and women. He approached Stone brazenly, even coming so close as to stand on the hem of her dress. With this detail, Kate signaled a shift in her thinking about the moment. By touching her clothes, the armed man signaled that even her body could be his for the taking. His presence, then, was a threat not only to the well-being of the women, but also to every organizing principle of their society on which they based their status.

Stone shuddered. “He looked me slowly over, gesticulating and snapping his pistol,” she wrote. In this moment, the black man reversed the power of the gaze onto Stone herself. While southern whites were accustomed to looking at and judging the bodies of
African Americans, southern blacks were to lower their eyes in the presence of whites. The armed man’s steady appraisal of Stone’s body in this moment reversed the relationship of power, turning the racial hierarchy upside down. The pistol figures as a surrogate phallus, implying the black man’s seizure of the male prerogatives of power and sexual violence. In conjunction with the man’s proximity to Kate’s body, the pistol signaled a sexual threat, one that the white men nearby—George Richards and Mr. McPherson—were powerless to avert. Guns aimed by black hands unnerved Stone at the same time that they emasculated Richards and McPherson while the sanctum of the home was violated by black male bodies.

The symbolic rape of the home and the women within it rendered white masculinity impotent, and suggested that white female honor was not inviolate, even within the home. With the power of white men thwarted, in this moment, Stone lost access to her own racial power. The loss of white male protection left Stone vulnerable, confronted by what she perceived as a physical and sexual threat. In this moment, Stone’s gender became a liability, and even her racial privilege could not protect her because the racial hierarchy had been inverted as black men lorded their power over white men and women.

The logic of home invasion, it seems, was one that was shared among black and white, male and female, Union and Confederate both during the war and after. In the years after the close of the war, white southern men organized themselves into terrorist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan whose mission it was to intimidate black families into submitting to racial and political injustices. Known as “night riders” these groups of men intimidated and terrorized the families of freedmen by assaulting them within the private space of the home. Theorizing that the home provided the space from which men claimed political and economic rights as heads of household, night riders disrupted the homes of free people in
highly ritualized performances of racial dominance. The effect was to emasculate black men, to shear them of their civil and political rights, and to deny the sexual purity of black women over whom white men wished to retain control as potential sexual objects and laborers. To violate the home, whites knew, was to undermine black claims to the benefits of citizenship and family.

In the context of the Civil War, this logic of home invasion operated against white southerners. Attacks on the sacred space of the home indicated that white men had lost the power to protect and control white women. White women’s bodies, no longer protected by white privilege or the walls of the home, became subject to physical and sexual violence. The implications were staggering for white southerners who based their sense of racial and class status on the dominance of the master and the purity of white women. Though Kate Stone and her female family members were not physically assaulted in this episode, the threat was one that terrified her. Just as night riders would do to black families throughout the following decades, the men who invaded the Hardisons’ home made white women witnesses to white emasculation and rendered white men helpless in the face of threats to “their” women. In short, the threat of violence and the disrespect of the home signaled that white masters and mistresses no longer had power or even rights that must be respected. The whole scene demonstrated that the power of the ruling class was a charade, and the fact that black men were responsible for exposing it as such must truly have created the sense that the war had ushered in a nightmarish dystopia.

After the incident at the Hardisons’, a mortified Stone and her sister shepherded the group to safety at the Stone home. They had first, however, to pass through what felt like to Stone, at least, a hostile gathering of black men at the slave quarters. Again, the theme of
danger accompanies the leering of the slave men. Though slaves were expected to meet the master class with smiles, Stone found something sinister in the “grins” of these men. Her account suggests that she was again uncomfortable under the gaze of black men as they “looked at us.” It was not necessarily the “grinning” of the enslaved men that frightened Stone, but those grins as perceived in a dramatically changed context. Grinning—so celebrated by pro-slavery polemicists as the evidence of simple-minded happiness on the part of slaves—became a sign of “evil” in the moment at which these slaves stood poised to grasp their freedom and possibly even their revenge. Even though these particular men did not threaten the group of whites, the bold quality of their scrutiny made Stone self-conscious, even afraid. Directing the gaze onto the body of another person was a perquisite of power. Elaborate rules of racial deference demanded that African Americans lower their gaze rather than meet the eyes of white people. No longer bound by such rules, the enslaved (or newly freed) black men who stared at Stone indicated that the power of the planter elite had been broken, at least in that moment. The brazenness of their gaze sent chills through Stone because it symbolized her precarious situation: social and racial inferiors were not bound to respect her claims to ladyhood in the context of an unraveling slave society because white men could no longer enforce the old rules. In spite of the fact that she traveled in the company of white men, she felt unsafe, a sign that she understood now—for the first time in her life—that white masculinity had lost its power.

How did Kate Stone and other women like her make sense of this apparent reversal of male power, of the new and frightening realization of white male impotence? Most immediately, it impelled Stone’s mother to begin planning the family’s flight from their home. After first making plans to ask for a Union Army order of protection, Stone’s mother
abandoned the effort and decided to leave everything behind. Stone noted, “All the servants behaved well enough . . . but you could see it was only because they knew we would soon be gone. We were only on sufferance.”  

Stone’s brothers, fifteen and sixteen at the time, “carried their guns all the time” during the family’s preparations to leave their home. “Without them,” Stone speculated ominously, “I think we would never have gotten off.”  

Kate’s diary reveals that she continued to look to white masculinity to protect her and the rest of the family. Her younger brothers, Jimmy and Johnny, did their best to fill the place of the adult men who had failed to protect the Stone and Hardison women, but Kate continued to look for the coming of her favorite brother, “My Brother,” to restore order to the racial situation by coming home from the war.  

Kate’s mother, Amanda Susan Ragan Stone, also continued to look to her eldest son to help her manage the enslaved labor force, trying repeatedly but unsuccessfully after the family’s flight from home to have him transferred to Texas. In the end, My Brother would not return until the end of the war, and when he did, Kate worried about him—his withdrawn demeanor and his trouble finding work.

The women and teenage boys and little children fled through the swamps at midnight, Kate swimming for a time with her little niece in her arms. The family narrowly escaped from a party of Yankee soldiers who pursued them for miles. As their dugout canoes finally pulled away from the reach of the soldiers, Johnny and Jimmy let fly shouts of

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145 Ibid., 198.
146 Stone’s brothers had apparently recovered their guns, but Kate had already indicated that, “Guns are of no use to people in our dilemma. To use one [against enslaved people] would only be to invite competition destruction from the soldiers.” Stone, Brokenburn, 183-84.
147 Ibid., 198.
149 Stone, Brokenburn, 265, 273-76, 290.
“Farewell to the Feds!” “Hurrah for Jeff Davis!” and “Ho for Texas!” The boys were, in short, demonstrating a childishness that may have concerned Stone and the other women who put their faith in the teenagers. Meanwhile, a neighbor’s slaves distributed the family’s clothes—“our underclothes and dresses, all my fine and pretty things”—among themselves. In a stunning reversal of the slave escape narrative, the white family fled through the swamps with barely more than the clothes on their backs, fleeing from the power of armed black men.

In spite of the fact that, well into the war, the Stone women had become accustomed to fending for themselves, this episode was elevated to such importance that it caused them to become refugees. It was the disturbing realization of white male powerlessness, evidenced by the presence of armed black men, that drove them to seek refuge in Texas, where the war had done little to disturb the racial and gender status quo ante bellum. In the longer term, Stone and other women like her would do their best to rebuild white male authority in the period following the war. After the war, slaveholding women did their best to rehabilitate broken-down white men and to reestablish white supremacy even in the face of social leveling. Stone would attempt to bolster her favorite sibling, My Brother, who came back from the war “exceedingly quiet . . . We hope,” she wrote, “home life will brighten him up and make him more cheerful . . . He cannot reconcile himself to give up everything but honor.”150 Stone, and slaveholding women across the South, did their best to reassure their men that, even if everything else—slaves, homes, wealth, independence—was lost, male honor and family honor remained intact. These women worked to forget

150 Ibid., 364.
wartime lessons about the limits of white manhood and strove to rebuild the hierarchies that had structured pre-war society.

The post-war period witnessed, as noted above, the rise of white terrorist organizations that sought to roll back the gains that African Americans had made in claiming their freedom and their political and economic rights as well as to reclaim white male supremacy. Elite white women played significant roles in the efforts of white men to undermine black freedom and reclaim what white men had lost in defeat. Women of the former slaveholding class offered themselves—their purity, their honor—as rationales for violence against black men.\textsuperscript{151} Black men, so often entrusted with the care of white women and children during the war, came to be imagined as the ultimate sexual threat to white women. The protection of white women’s bodies became a major rationale for violence against black men in the decades following the end of the war. In her diary, Kate Stone noted, “Quite a number of Negroes are flocking into town [Tyler, Texas], but there is not disorder. Occasionally we hear of a Negro shot down and lying unburied in the woods.”\textsuperscript{152} Stone did not comment on the cause of the violence or on how the community perceived it, but by linking violence against freedmen and the restoration of order in the community, Stone suggested that she accepted these deaths as the price of racial order. Indeed, the violence seems quotidian, barely worthy of a mention in the diary.

\textsuperscript{151} While it is difficult to ascertain with certainty the roles that women played in vigilante terror—episodes of night rider violence and, later, in lynchings—it is clear that the purity of white women was central to the logic of violence in the name of white supremacy. For example, during Reconstruction and after, disguises worn by white assailants were manufactured by white women, as Hannah Rosen points out. Amy Wood also discusses women’s participation as spectators of lynching, either through direct attendance or through photographs. Hannah Rosen, \textit{Terror in the Heart of Freedom}, 18; Amy Wood, \textit{Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in American, 1890-1940} (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 7.

\textsuperscript{152} Stone, \textit{Brokenburn}, 356
White vigilante violence in the post-war period was constructed around threats to white male supremacy, including the economic, political, and educational gains made by African Americans and their white allies.¹⁵³ White male honor had to be reclaimed in an era of widespread white poverty, military defeat, and humiliation. The violence that became part of this reassertion of white male power was also, however, couched in the language of male protection of white women. As historian Amy Wood has argued, while “most lynchings did not stem from allegations of black rape, the specter of violated white women lay at the center of prolynching rhetoric and instigated the most horrific lynching tortures and spectacles.”¹⁵⁴ Even before lynching became common, the rationales behind anti-black vigilante violence centered on the patriarchal authority of white men, whose “exclusive claim to political power rested on fulfillment of his role and responsibilities in his household, as a supposedly benevolent lord providing for and protecting virtuous wives and chaste daughters.”¹⁵⁵ Men who had not themselves been slaveholders were drawn into the project of punishing freedmen and freedwomen through the rationale that centered on the figure of the black male sexual predator. Sold as a means of “protecting” the white family, vigilante violence helped to unite whites across all classes in the aftermath of a war that had undermined cross-class solidarity.¹⁵⁶ All white men, then, could become the chivalrous knight, the champion of white female purity, male honor, and white supremacy.

Indeed, honor was at the center of white vigilante violence in the post-war decades. White men—seeing their own defeat, their own economic struggles, and their own political

¹⁵³ White supremacist violence during Reconstruction and well into the twentieth century operated as a continuum. Beatings, rape, arson, genital mutilation, murder, and lynchings constituted “punishment” for different sorts of crimes (or autonony) committed by African Americans.
¹⁵⁴ Wood, Lynching and Spectacle, 7.
¹⁵⁵ Rosen, Terror in the Heart of Freedom, 182
¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 194.
disenfranchisement reflected back to them in their women’s eyes—asserted their claims to honor by “protecting” white women from freedmen even as these “honorable” white men committed horrific, dishonorable acts against black men and women. They treated honor as a zero-sum game: denying honor to black men who would claim the rights of household head, family man, and citizen, whites reserved honor for themselves. At the center of it all was the notion that honor resided in the ability of a man to control and protect his dependents. Vigilante violence against African Americans robbed black men of their claims to patriarchal honor and simultaneously robbed black women of their claims to female honor, figured as sexual purity and confinement within the home. It simultaneously allowed white men of all classes to reclaim their own honor because they both protected their women and continued to control the labor and lives of former dependents. White women continued to build up their men and to bestow honor on them by both acting the part of helpless woman in need of protection and by witnessing the racial power of their menfolk through the acts of violence carried out in their names.
CONCLUSION

This project began with a question: how did southern slaveholding white women use their private writings to address and resolve moments of ideological crisis that arose when prevailing southern ideologies conflicted with diarists’ own lived experiences. I have sought to answer that question by listening carefully to these diarists’ voices and by paying close attention to what they said—and did not say—in their diaries. My methodological approach to each diary and diarist was shaped by the stories they themselves chose to tell, and conditioned by a desire to let their words tell us something about the more intimate meanings of the Civil War experience.

During the Civil War, slaveholding Confederate women struggled to make sense of a world that was rapidly changing. They committed themselves to upholding the slaveholding worldview in spite of serious challenges to the ideologies—of race, gender, and class—that comprised it. They did this by crafting narratives in their private writings that conformed to what they had been taught to believe. Through the process of writing stories that reaffirmed, sometimes through great effort, southern dogmas of white supremacy, patriarchal authority, family honor, evangelical Christianity, and the righteousness of the Confederate cause, these elite women sought to evade troubling questions and to order the world around them in terms that were familiar to them and their social networks.

Emma Holmes rewrote slaveholder male violence in a manner that reinforced rather than undermined what she had been indoctrinated to believe about the righteousness of slaveholding and the depravity of African Americans. Rather than confronting the criticism of herself and other slaveholders that slaves’ departures implied,
Julia LeGrand placed the blame for slavery’s disintegration onto convenient villains, including “meddling” Yankees and “ungrateful” slaves. Lucy Breckinridge struggled to maintain faith in the God of her childhood and in the justice of the South’s cause, and instead of blaming God or the South’s leaders, she found relief in blaming her own hardheartedness and lack of understanding. Finally, Kate Stone attempted to renew her faith in the men of the South and to restore the ideological structures of white supremacy by reconceiving herself as a helpless woman and withholding judgment of white male Confederates, in spite of her own newfound strength and resourcefulness. These stories provided slaveholding women with the foundations for the postwar mythologizing that centered on a harmonious Old South and the glory of the South’s struggle for independence.

Working with the diaries has been simultaneously illuminating, frustrating, with a bit of entertainment thrown in. I began this project with a clear (and not very sympathetic) idea of slaveholders and their ideologies and my understandings have remained largely unchanged. These women were, in important ways, responsible for the horrors of slavery, even though they had little opportunity to change the structure of southern society or to challenge the status quo. The truth is that most of them also had no desire to do either thing. They had been indoctrinated throughout their lives in the ideas of white supremacy, patriarchy, and class privilege, and these ideologies remained central to their conception of themselves and to their worldview. They were, in short, mostly true believers.

However, spending time with these diarists and their private thoughts did affect my thinking about this class of southern women. As in any large group, I found women who
were extremely kind, pious, hardworking, and thoughtful. I also discovered women who were angry, bitter, overtly racist, snobby and entitled, and vapid. Most diarists, of course, were a mix of these traits at any given moment, and most suffered tremendously in their own ways during the war and after. This suffering sometimes caused them to doubt even the truest of truisms in the slaveholders’ worldview. They felt guilt and fear, even panic, about these moments of doubt, and they did their best to resolve such moments of crisis by renewing their faith in the southern systems that shaped their lives and gave them meaning.

Historians have long debated the meanings of the war for women in the South. Did the war provide an avenue to female empowerment, or did it cause a resurgence of southern conservative thought that hemmed in slaveholding women? My work suggests that years of war and loss forced women to confront ugly truths about the slaveholding experience. After the war, slaveholding white southern women wanted stability above all. Living through years of chaos had left many of them brittle and bruised. Even the most pragmatic among them dreamed about and prayed for a return to the way things had been before they had been tossed about by national strife that was not of their making. In the years after the war, they struggled between contradictory impulses to make the best of changed conditions and to do what little they could to restore their communities to plantation days. Former mistresses learned to navigate the post-war, post-slavery reality of Reconstruction, but they kept one foot firmly planted in an idyllic past.

Many of the diarists examined in this manuscript ceased keeping diaries at the close of the war. Myriad pressing concerns weighed on them, and they battled against mighty feelings of depression, hopelessness, and ennui. In the decades that followed the end of the
war, however, women across the South rediscovered their authorial voices and penned memoirs, recollections, and reminiscences about their wartime experiences. In doing so, they began to reconstruct the history of the war and of the southerners who endured it. They sent these recollections to newspapers for publication, delivered them as speeches at commemoration events, contributed them for preservation to local chapters of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and passed them along to children. Sue Alexander, who had spent the war in Knoxville Tennessee, sent her account of “Our Women in the War” to newspaper editors with a note asking that if they did not find her “scribblings” to be suitable for publication she would appreciate their return as she “wish[ed] to keep [them] for [her] children.” These memoirists generally did not extend their tales beyond the end of the war because they, like Elizabeth Randolph Callender, thought, “Reconstruction was a time of much suffering. I will not say more as this account is only a personal matter.” Southern slaveholding women in the post-war years understood their diaries and memoirs to be historical accounts, and they were justified in publicizing them only in that capacity. Reconstruction, devoid of glory and rife with emotional suffering and economic hardship, was a subject best avoided by female writers.

Through their public writing, former slaveholding women constructed homages to the idealized Old South—to faithful servants, valiant men, just causes, and a benevolent and right social order. These odes to the Old South provided the foundation for the myth of the “Lost Cause” and contributed to the white supremacist “redemption” of the southern states. Former slaveholding women offered themselves as rationales for the reestablishment of white supremacy in their capacities as historical eyewitnesses and as the beneficiaries of

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1 Sue Alexander, “Our Women in the War,” University of North Carolina Special Collections.
white male power. It was the ideological mental work that these women did—in their sewing circles, their churches, their families, and—perhaps most importantly—in their diaries, that allowed them to forget their own moments of doubt, the moments at which they saw through the veneer of slaveholding benevolence, patriarchy, and white supremacy. Diaries operated as philosophical battlefields where orthodoxy struggled against heresy, and as the victor, orthodoxy claimed the spoils of battle as the South moved beyond the war.
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