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THE “HONORABLE” WOMAN: GENDER, HONOR, AND PRIVILEGE IN THE CIVIL WAR SOUTH

Sarah West

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THE "HONORABLE" WOMAN:
GENDER, HONOR, AND PRIVILEGE IN THE CIVIL WAR SOUTH

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
History

by
Sarah West
May 2022

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Approved by:

Ryan Keating, Committee Chair, History

Richard Samuelson, Committee Member

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ABSTRACT

When past wars are discussed or taught in a mainstream setting, the focus is often on the soldiers, the battles, and the generals that led them. The topic of the people who passively lived through them is rarely included in the narrative and when it is, it usually pertains to the people on the winning side. During the Civil War, the Southern women made tremendous contributions on the home front. Although social construction of southern honor paved the way for patriotic expressions, as the war went on many women found themselves discarding these honorable gestures in favor of self-preservation. The ideology of Southern honor set social expectations for behavior. For men, honor was linked to the patriotic act of volunteering for military service and sacrificing one's life for the cause. Women expressed honor in a variety of ways on the home front and, specifically for this study, took on domestic duties that they were unaccustomed to as a result of their class. The intention of my research is to demonstrate how women from various classes of the American Civil War South reacted to the war through the lens of a woman's perceived societal duty as it pertained to the concept of southern honor. External sources such as peer pressure, government officials and media served to remind these women of what was expected of them. In turn, I will explore how women deviated from these social values as the war progressed.

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To my family and my “family”, I could not have done this without you. Your unwavering support for my journey has helped me maintain resilience. Your encouragement of my future endeavors has provided me with the momentum to achieve my goals.

DEDICATION

For my girls, Lily and Willow. It is never too late to change your path.

For all the “troubled youth” in transitional care and facilities, don’t be discouraged by where you are now. You are more than your past.

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CHAPTER ONE

ASSESSMENT OF LITERATURE

Historiography

Southern society relied on the ethical standards of honor as the backbone of behavior for all of its inhabitants. Historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown, author of *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, explains the basis of this concept and its representation in earlier civilizations. He wrote that “since the earliest times, honor was inseparable from hierarchy and entitlement, defense of family blood and community needs.”¹ Wyatt-Brown breaks down honor into different aspects such as self-worth, gentility, valor for family and complying with community expectations. He also notes that the manifestation of honor changed over time as men and women placed different attributes and priorities on honor. For southerners, honor was key to keeping social order, and the fear of being shamed in southern society kept this construct alive. Understanding that dynamic, Wyatt-Brown wrote, “it was the threat of honor lost, no less than slavery, that led them to secession and war”²

¹ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (Ann Arbor, MI: Scholarly Publishing Office, University of Michigan, 2010), 36.

² Ibid, 37.

In accounting for the relationship between owning slaves and honor, Wyatt-Brown explains how honor was strongly tied to material possessions, “rich or poor, the chief duty of government was the protection of men's property, by which honor was sustainable. Possessions were an essential component of personality, family identity, and moral position.”³ Through paternalism this concept could be applied to the poor. Wyatt-Brown states “there was a greater desire for involvement with the uplift of the poor.”⁴ This honorable practice encouraged the elite members of Southern society to provide the poor with subsistence. In turn this act fostered the hope of financial mobility amongst the poor families of the South. In this case, Wyatt-Brown praises W.J. Cash, an American Journalist, for rejecting the paternalistic approach between the rich and the poor. Wyatt-Brown cites Cash’s claim that the poor “expected and ordinarily received respect for individuality.”⁵ In Wyatt-Brown’s own interpretation, he goes on to note that paternalism towards the poor was damaging to the societal relationships and that there was no place for dependency within the concept of honor. He sums this up by explaining that honor will manifest amongst the different classes as it is appropriate to each ranking.⁶ William Harris, author of

³ Ibid, 72.

⁴ Ibid, 82.

⁵ Ibid, 67.

⁶ Ibid, 88

Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society also addressed these tidings and had similar sentiments to Wyatt-Brown. Harris wrote, “a person who asks for money, food, or favors is in some sense admitting dependence on another.”⁷ When addressing the giver as someone who could have motives outside of honor Harris asserts that, “to give credit may display generosity or liberality—and power.”⁸ Regardless of whether these notions should be labeled patriarchal or honorable, keeping the poor content was essential to preserving the institution of slavery. Without the support of the poor community, there may not have been a war.

Poor men and women in the Antebellum South were some of the most underrepresented factions in Civil War history. In *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, Keri Leigh Merritt writes, “defined as neither owning land nor slaves, poor whites comprised, at the very least, about one-third of the South’s white population in the few decades preceding the Civil War.”⁹ Due to the lack of sources such as letters and diaries written by poor whites, Merritt relies on a variety of alternative sources to formulate her study.

⁷ William J. Harris, *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society: White Liberty and Black Slavery in Augusta's Hinterlands* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 99.

⁸ *Ibid*, 99.

⁹ Keri Leigh Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2017). 2.

Utilizing everything from government paperwork, newspapers, and written works from their wealthy counterparts, Merritt builds a narrative that represents the lives of the poor.¹⁰ The observations that are cited from this outlying content suggests that despite being impoverished the poor still attempted to retain a sense of honor.¹¹ Merritt challenges other scholars and their definitions of honor and how it pertains to the poor. Merritt's exploration of Wyatt Brown is supplemented by her analysis of Ariella J. Gross, author of *Litigating Whiteness: Trials of Racial Determination in the Nineteenth-Century South*. Gross's book delves into the ways honor was represented amongst the poor. Gross associates the act of honor with whiteness, carefully outlining the behavior of men being consistent with good conduct and virtue. Gross includes white women displaying honor with the "purity of her sexuality, in stark contrast to the degraded sexuality of a black 'Jezebel.'"¹² But as interesting as this correlation is, Merritt notes that it only reflects the behavior of the wealthy stating that "many poor whites never had the chance to demonstrate these supposed traits of whiteness."¹³ In fact, Merritt proclaims that at the time wealthy whites considered poor whites to be of a separate race, denoting that while the poor had the appearance of a white

¹⁰ Merritt, 26.

¹¹ Merritt, 116

¹² Merritt, 216

¹³ Merritt, 261

person, they did not behave white. This idea creates a chasm between poor whites and the concept of Southern Honor and how it was traditionally applied.

To be a poor white person in the antebellum South was a sorrowful existence. Brown believed that poor whites gave respect to the people in their communities and were given respect by their financial counterparts. Merritt makes a strong argument about how that sentiment didn't apply to poor white women by quoting a former slave, "good white lady told me one time, that a bad white woman is a sight worse and more 'low downer' than a bad nigger woman can ever get to be in this world."¹⁴ Victoria Bynum describes this in her book *Unruly Women* as the defeminization of white women brought on by poverty, which is similar to the defeminization of black women brought on by race.¹⁵ These women were considered sexually depraved, leaving them outside of the scope of anything considered "honorable" and further separating poor women from that societal expectation. This partition tied honor to the ostracism of poor women. Bynum builds on this sentiment by asserting that for men to retain honor they were not to fraternize with these type of women. Unlike men, who were all held to some level of honor, the recognition of female honor was often divided by class, reserving this ideal for only those who held a certain standard of living.¹⁶

¹⁴ Merritt, 132

¹⁵ Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Relationship between Status and Behavior among Free Women of the North Carolina Piedmont, 1840-1865*, 1987, 7.

¹⁶ Bynum, 64

These observations left poor women vulnerable to rape because they were “unprotected by wealth or family”¹⁷ and “no one’s honor was at stake”¹⁸.

In Drew Gilpin Faust’s book, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* she argues women’s honor as collective, with the only separation being the evolution of women belonging to the elite class and how they coped with lifestyle changes during the Civil War. Poor women do not have a natural narrative in Faust’s book because, as one could imagine, life most likely did not change much. I contribute this idea with the sense that the pre-existing struggle poor women faced would soon be a common existence amongst many as the war continued. Faust opens her study with the female reactions at the beginning of the Civil War. Faust gives examples of how women publicly supported the war and participated in shaming any man who attempted to evade service. Though there is limited coverage in his book, Wyatt-Brown also explores this practice as he repeatedly places women on a pedestal, giving them the duty to instill shame in the men that surround them as well as their children. It was within their roles as mothers to teach their children the expectations that came with the practice of southern honor. Often, these lessons were specifically delivered using guilt and shame to ensure that honor would be upheld at all costs. Women, in general, were also portrayed as the “silent

¹⁷ Bynum, 117

¹⁸ Bynum, 118

sufferers”, bearing any hardships or burdens with grace. This was amplified during the war. Wyatt-Brown further asserts that in times of trouble, women were honor bound to appear poised, forbearing, and hopeful in order to please friends and relations. This statement ties into Wyatt-Brown’s initial argument that in upholding honor there was an absence of honesty in correspondence.

Southern paternalism was also considered a catalyst for the loyalty that women showed to the confederate troops. In his findings, Jarret Ruminski, author of *The Limits of Loyalty* suggests that this support was given because the Confederacy would “preserve women’s dependent but privileged status”.¹⁹ Ruminski follows up with the common belief held by historians that, “women either withdrew their support for the Confederacy based on its failure to protect their privilege, or steadfastly supported the breakaway nation as “respectable” Southern women who feared the loss of privilege that would follow Confederate defeat.

Expanding on the idea of war support, Faust explores women’s associations and their contribution to the shedding of traditional female roles. The direction of Faust’s book shifts significantly to women of means with little mention of poor women outside of food riots. Showcasing the expectation of higher class women performing tasks that were considered below their station.²⁰ She argues

¹⁹ Jarret Ruminski, *Limits of Loyalty: Ordinary People in Civil War Mississippi* (S.I.: UNIV PRESS OF MISSISSIPP, 2020), 91.

²⁰ Faust 39

that the idea of the new confederate woman changes throughout the war. In an effort to imbue patriotism and create entertainment, women started to participate in living pictures that consisted of familial scenes. These kinds of activities were unusual for women and helped to mark the deviation of social norms on behalf of the cause.²¹ As the war went on, the absence of men from southern communities became impactful on levels that were not foreseen. Faust writes, “Male prerogative and male responsibility thus served as the organizing principle of southern households and southern society”;²² “the removal of white men from households across the region thus inflicted a devastating blow to the most fundamental structures of the South’s society and economy.”²³ In some cases wealthy families lost their fortunes as their homes were caught up in the crossfire of the war but many had the financial resources to relocate their slaves in order to protect themselves and their assets. Middle-class slaveholders lacked the resources to make those moves and considered those who did to be unpatriotic.²⁴ However, fleeing consumed these resources rapidly, often leading to wealthier whites lacking in the resources and affluence they possessed.²⁵

²¹ Faust, 45

²² Faust, 54

²³ Faust, 55

²⁴ Faust, 79

²⁵ Faust, 76

Most Southern resources were redirected to the war efforts and, due to Northern blockades, southern families were left with shortages. One of these shortages were textiles. Women were encouraged to “revive home production”. There was contention over this because elite women did not want to appear to resemble their lower-class counterparts in homespun fashion. The idea of constructing their own clothes and wearing them out in public was a blurring of the lines for the elite regardless of its patriotic nature. In some households, clothes became more about functionality than fashion. Some women felt that they were unable to perform their newfound duties in their traditional garb and resorted to wearing bloomers or men’s’ clothes. This genderbending activity was not solely designated to their duties. Some women donned male costuming in effort to establish the respect and privilege previously given to only men. But this was a peripheral concern compared to the duties taken on by these elite women.

One of the most substantial male roles that needed to be filled was that of a slaveholder. Elite women had to step into the role of slave mistress and take on the duties of overseeing the slaves and farm. Many women were apprehensive in taking on these roles since southern women felt they didn’t have the dominating personalities that were required for these roles.²⁶ Fear of slave uprisings and the murder of owners ran rampant as stories circulated.²⁷ With the war waging on, it

²⁶ Faust, 104

²⁷ Faust, 105

was this duty that spawned letters to government officials pleading to return their husbands to run their farms. This action alone put these women into situations similar to their husbands, choosing death over dishonor.²⁸ Some of these situations were remedied once the Twenty Slave Law was put into effect, allowing men to be exempt if they had twenty slaves or more.²⁹ Not all women, though, were challenged by slave management, and some did not shy away from the physical violence required of slave control. Regardless, Faust points out that “this exercise of physical power was significantly different from that of their men. No gendered code of honor celebrated women’s physical power or dominance.”³⁰

Catherine Clinton writes about the role of the plantation mistress as well as disproving popular myths in her book *Tara Revisited: Women, War & the Plantation Mistress*. Outside of subscribing to the culture of Southern honor, some of these women viewed the war as a way to change their social status.³¹ This aligns with the idea that the war brought different classes together create ladies aid societies that would band together in their patriotic duty. But Clinton analyzes how these sentiments evolved as the war went on, and in turn deviates from Wyatt-Browns opinion that Southern honor kept women from being candid

²⁸ Faust, 109

²⁹ Faust, 99

³⁰ Faust, 118

³¹ Catherine Clinton, *Tara Revisited Women, War, & the Plantation Legend* (New York: Abbeville Publishing Group, 2013), 69

about their feelings. Clinton cites correspondence dating as early as the fall of 1861 that presented these women as less than eager for their men to go to war. Though these women struggled with the absence of the males in their communities Clinton points out that “Plantation mistresses were well schooled in handling their own affairs by planter absenteeism,”³² a reflection their role as the watchful eye of the plantation when the master was away. Clinton’s work builds on these assertions and depicts these women as less helpless than other research has implied. Furthermore, the historical narrative of some of these women was presented with a heroic sentiment at the time, perhaps to encourage other women to follow the same suit and rise to the occasion.³³ This is not to say that there were not women who didn’t. As Clinton shows, it was the longevity of the war that affected the majority of these women who could no longer sustain the expected level of patriotism.

Slave owning women had a different motivation in supporting the war since their economic freedom was dependent of the wars’ outcome. Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers’ book *They Were Her Property: white women as slave owners in the American South* explores the role of slave owning women during the Civil War. She asserts that these women had “immense economic stake in the continued enslavement of African Americans. They struggled to find ways to

³² Clinton, 91

³³ Clinton, 161

preserve the system when the Civil War threatened to destroy the institution of slavery along with their wealth along with it.”³⁴ Much like the patriotism expressed by Southern women in the beginning of the war, slave owning women felt the Civil War in very personal ways on the home front.

In her introduction, Jones- Rogers notes, in spite of their wealth, slave owning women were another segment underrepresented in the historiography because of their illiteracy.³⁵ This idea is based on statistics from the 1860’s census which shows that 500,000 southerners were illiterate and of those 1.5 times are more likely to be included in that figure. Leading this book to be written based on slave testimony. But this statement contradicts the idea that wealthy women were more likely to be able to read and write, meaning that slaveholding women would potentially be able to read and write. This contradiction is further confirmed when Jones-Rogers goes on to write that she used slave testimony because

Slave-owning women rarely talked about their economic investments in slavery, and they wrote about them even less...Many of them simply did not have the time or the skill to put their thoughts on paper while those who did probably saw their pecuniary investments in slavery as commonplace and unworthy of note.³⁶

³⁴ Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020). 149

³⁵ Jones-Rogers, 201.

³⁶ Jones-Rogers, 258.

Though Jones-Rogers claims that slaveholding women actually had little agency themselves, her book strongly represents what these women had to gain by a Confederate victory. Jones-Rogers even goes as far as using examples of women who supported the Union but still asserted their rights to own slaves. Ultimately, allegiances had little meaning when it came to the protection of their financial assets. Outlining the capabilities of women by utilizing the narratives and experiences of slave owning women expands the way we understand how women could live by the code of southern honor. Despite the circumstances but also recognizing that the outcome of the war could directly affect that as well.

Statement of Research and Analytical Methodology

In this project I intend to deconstruct the reactions of women of various classes throughout the Civil War as it pertained to the societal expectations of Southern honor. I will be exploring these class structures and the evolution of their behavior and the way it was received by society and their peers. I plan on paying particular attention to how Southern women and their duties evolved during the Civil War, specifically the way it affected their views on the outcome of the war. By homing in on class and gender and how their reactions to the Civil War compared, I believe I will be able to construct a more complete picture of how the concept of honor was used to encourage specific behaviors and elicit feelings of patriotism.

Though I will be exploring this concept by researching different class structures, I recognize that certain factions are underrepresented due to literacy

problems. However I intend to illustrate their places in this narrative to the best of my ability. I believe on the opposite ends of the spectrum is where the most intense reactions could be observed solely on how these women would be affected by the outcome of the war.

The primary sources I will be using to support these ideas will be letters from the Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi collection, public sources such as articles from several Southern newspapers, congress minutes, and art that have been helpful in establishing the societal expectations at the time. Furthermore, the 1860 census has been key in determining the classes of women as well as if they personally were in possession of slaves. In addition to these sources, I have accessed several diaries and personal letters that I believe sets the tone for the decline in the deviation from Southern honor.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ORIGINS OF SOUTHERN HONOR

In 1775, English statesman and philosopher, Edmund Burke, delivered a speech in front of Parliament on the growing crisis in the American colonies. In it, he described the strength and spirit of those in the southern states; “Freedom is to them not only an enjoyment, but a kind of rank and privilege . . . these people of the southern colonies are much more strongly, and with a higher and more stubborn spirit, attached to liberty, than those to the northward.”³⁷ With an observation such as this, it is of no surprise that this proud society would develop a moral code that drove the southerners to defend what they felt to be an encroachment on their freedom. This code, often referred to as “southern honor” showcased the gumption of its people, held them accountable to each other and, in turn, presumably prepared them to withstand the horrors of war.

Honor became a cornerstone of Southern society and ultimately set expectations for the behavior of all residents that transcended class and gender. Honorable behavior became synonymous with masculinity and also garnered respect from the community. As Bertram Wyatt-Brown noted in his book

³⁷ Edmund Burke “Speech on Conciliation with the Colonies.” (speech, London, England, March 22, 1775), (available online: <https://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch1s2.html>)

Southern Honor, “above all else, white Southerners adhered to a moral code that may be summarized as the rule of honor.”³⁸

Southern Honor was a major catalyst for secession, in large part because honor was steeped in the notion that no one should dictate how others should live. Furthermore, it was the owning of property itself that impacted a person’s overall position in society. This sentiment is best stated by the infamous counterfeiter *Virgil A. Stewart*:

What is it that constitutes character, popularity, and power, in the United States? Sir, it is property; strip a man of his property in this country, and he is a ruined man indeed— you see his friends forsake him; and he may have been raised in the highest circles of society, yet he is neglected and treated with contempt. Sir, my doctrine is, let the hardest fend off.³⁹

As civil war loomed on the horizon, this valued component of honor would help fuel the declarations that followed and came to define political rhetoric. Most apparent was at the 1860 Democratic convention in Charleston, South Carolina when Alabama senator W. L. Yancey noted about the pending presidential election: “ours are the institutions which are at stake; ours is the peace that is to be destroyed; ours is the honor at stake— the honor of children, the honor of families, the lives, perhaps, of all— all of which rests upon what your course may

³⁸ Bertram Wyatt-Brown,. *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, (New York: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1982), 3.

³⁹ H. R. Howard, *The History of Virgil Stewart ..* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1842), 18.

ultimately make a great heaving volcano of passion and crime.”⁴⁰ Less than one hundred years after Burke stood before Parliament and one year before the Civil War started, southern honor became the catalyst that ultimately drove men to volunteer to defend their “freedom,” forsaking their duties and obligations at the home front in order to live up to the familial honor that came with military service. As Samuel David Sanders, a physician from South Carolina, wrote to his daughter while he prepared to enlist, “I would be disgraced,” he wrote, “if I staid at home, and unworthy of my revolutionary ancestors.”⁴¹ Upon the formation of a volunteer militia called the “Mississippi Rangers” in Perry County the officers wrote Governor Pettus declaring their allegiance to the cause. “At any moment-to march to do their portion towards the defence of Southern Rights or if needed to avenge Southern Wrongs-or Wrongs-that she has in-dured by the Damnable fanatics of the North.”⁴²

Women echoed this sentiment, vocalizing their preference for the death of their kinsman rather than dishonor. Excerpts from Mary Chesnut’s diary, a woman who was considered part of the slave owning elite, revealed a very candid conversation that supported this radical belief. “Would you be happier if

⁴⁰ W.L. Yancy, “*Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention*”. United States: National Document Publishers, 1860. 69.

⁴¹ Wyatt-Brown, 59.

⁴² M. P. Powers to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; March 9, 1861, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, <https://cwrqm.org/item/30549>

all the men in the family were killed?' To our amazement, quiet Miss C took up the cudgels— nobly. 'Yes, if their life disgraced them. There are worse things than death.'"⁴³ Some men sought transfer to units simply to have the opportunity to be on the front lines bringing honor to their families. Kate Stone, a woman considered to be a typical "Southern Belle", noted in her diary that her brother rides out as far as Vicksburg on horseback because he "fears the fighting will be over before he can get there"⁴⁴ Mothers requested on behalf of their sons to be transferred as well to better serve the confederacy, simultaneously declaring their patriotism and pride in their sons. On July 22, 1861, Elijah M. Davis wrote to Governor Pettus requesting that his son be transferred to the same unit that his brothers were serving in at the time. Davis conveyed a message from Mrs. Davis stating, "the greatest regret she has is that she has not others to send also—and if she should live to meet them on their return cherishes the belief that they will return bearing with them the good opinion of all that know them, and hear it said they have nobly done their duty."⁴⁵ The pride Mrs. Davis felt to have all of her sons in the service of the Confederacy overshadowed her fear of their loss, but she still hoped that by serving together they would have the best chance for

⁴³ Mary Boykin Miller Chesnut, *Mary Chestnut's Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 811.

⁴⁴ Kate Stone and John Q. Anderson, *Brokenburn: The Journal of Kate Stone, 1861-1868* (Scholars Select, 2015), 13.

⁴⁵ Elijah M. Davis to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; July 22, 1861, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, <https://cwrgm.org/item/29544>

survival. Another mother's plea came from Mary F. Hazard who requested her son be transferred, suggesting he could better serve his country in a different position. She further ascertains, "I am I trust too patriotic to be unwilling for him to fight. In times of war, & contention, women have their mission to fulfill as well as men—duty must dictate our conduct—not affection or feeling."⁴⁶ This particular statement regarding conduct encompassed what southern honor was intended to represent to the women of the south.

But were these honorable declarations sincere? Wyatt-Brown argues that this obligation to honor impacted the ways in which men and women wrote and spoke because they were conscious of the repercussions that came with stepping outside of those expected social bounds. He states, "persistence of honor as the keystone in the arch of social order prevented Southern writers from achieving any significant authentic voice in the antebellum days, and even long after."⁴⁷ Though Brown was referring to antebellum literature, similar ideologies may also have impacted personal correspondence, especially in the early years of the war. Certainly, this may create some difficulties when trying to ascertain what life was truly like for the people of the South and, if Southerners were candid, in their reactions to the war. In spite of their potential limitations, these

⁴⁶ Mary F. Hazard to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; May 6, 1861, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, <https://cwrghm.org/item/33795>

⁴⁷ Wyatt-Brown, 21.

sources nevertheless provide an excellent resource for understanding the concept of southern honor and what it meant for women of various classes during the Civil War South. In particular, the notion of southern honor encouraged, if not required, Southern women to support the cause of the Civil War.

Support of the war became a crucial attribute to continue residing in the South. Citizens of the confederacy were determined to rid anyone in the vicinity that subscribed to Union sentiments. Many communities were encouraged to form vigilante committees with the intention to examine every man to weed out abolitionists. In her diary, Kate Stone recalled a Mr. Valentine who came for dinner. Stone wrote "To him, the whole affair is a grand humbug, the enthusiasm and patriotism of the South something to be mocked and sneered at...I could shake him."⁴⁸ Ironically, a year later Stone wrote in her diary, "some actually think Mr. Valentine is in favor of our enemies and advocate hanging him by mob law. A most unjust report and utterly without foundation."⁴⁹ Still, some were not so forgiving. On September 22, 1862, Asa Woodland wrote to Governor Pettus seeking advice regarding a self-proclaimed union man in their community with "some influence and is doing our country a great injury." "The citizens of this community," she continued, "wish you to instruct them how to proceed to dispose

⁴⁸ Stone. 27.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 113.

of him.”⁵⁰ Requests such as this were also made in the name of safety. For example, W.J. Fryday wrote to Governor Pettus regarding a few union men residing in Calhoun County requesting their removal because, “women and Children of min who are in the sirvis do not feel them selves and property safe with such men in their community and wish them Removed out of our country.”⁵¹

Tom West, a resident of Batesville was found to be involved in abolitionist activities. The people of Batesville “took him into a neighboring woods, and administered to him a severe flagellation.”⁵² West was then sent back up North with a label on his back that said, “‘nigger tamperer,’ with a hand pointing to the word ‘North’.”⁵³ Women became subject to banishment as well. On March 9, 1863, W.C. Falkner wrote to Lieutenant Colonel Jacob Thomson telling him of his concern about independent state troops that were operating in Northern Mississippi. Falkner writes, “They have ordered all females who may have relations in the Federal army, or who prefers union sentiments to leave the state

⁵⁰ Asa Woodard to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; September 22, 1862, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, <https://cwrgm.org/item/31074>

⁵¹ W.J. Fryday to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; March 25, 1862, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrgm.org/item/mdah_757-941-07-02

⁵² “Slave Tamperers,” Daily Evening Citizen (Vicksburg), December 26, 1860;

⁵³ Ibid

in ten days.”⁵⁴ The response to this correspondence suggests that this action was not sanctioned by the government as Thomson conveys the orders of Lt. Gen Pemberton to disband the state troops who attempted to carry out this order. The citizens of Rodney identified a woman as an abolitionist living amongst them. The woman had been working as teacher and had been telling slaves of Lincoln’s election she proclaimed “that they would soon all be free.”⁵⁵ Due to this behavior, the woman was arrested and sent up North.

Religious doctrine and practices were also used to show support. H. O. R. sent Governor Pettus a copy of *The Governing Race* asking for the approval of the books distribution. H. O. R. highlights that this publication focuses on proving “slavery is the ordinance of God, therefore not only not a sin or an evil but the berth condition that Africans can be placed in and the condition their Creator settled for them.”⁵⁶ H. O. R. also noted that he sent this publication to other “staunch patriots” in order to fuel succession for the sake of the South. Merrie Clayton Woodfin encouraged Governor Pettus to declare “a three days fast,

⁵⁴ W. C. Falkner to Jacob Thomson; March 9, 1863, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrqm.org/item/mdah_757-944-05-22

⁵⁵ “A Female Abolitionist,” Daily Evening Citizen (Vicksburg), December 18, 1860;

⁵⁶ H. O. R. to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; December 9, 1862, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, <https://cwrqm.org/item/47027>.

taking neither meat nor strong drink in that time.”⁵⁷ She professed that the “object of prayer be that Extortioner's our worst foes—may fall from their heights, and that the Northern Enemy may drop his arms & flee to his own country with fright and discouragement.”⁵⁸ Woodfin sought support with this endeavor and further encouraged Governor Pettus to deem anyone who refused to participate, an enemy of their country. Another letter to Governor Pettus from M. M. Keeth also requesting “a day of fasting humiliation and prayer.”⁵⁹ Keeth felt that this appointment would provide “aid in our deliverance from our enemies and the success of our arms in the present war.”⁶⁰

When the Civil War broke out, women were expected to shoulder as much responsibility as their men in Confederate service. Because of these obligations, many women felt they no longer had the privilege to address their own needs but rather, had to practice self-reliance and adjust to a new way of life while the war waged on.⁶¹ Not everyone was eager to go to war, and it did not go

⁵⁷ Mattie Clayton Woodfin to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; November 18, 1862, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, <https://cwrgm.org/item/47027>

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ M. M. Keeth to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; December 9, 1862, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrgm.org/item/mdah_757-943-05-08

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). 25.

unnoticed in the community. In the spirit of southern honor, social accountability was essential to the war effort as some men were not as eager as others to go. In a letter to Governor John Pettus, an anonymous volunteer wrote: “in our country there are a great many unmarried young men who seem to be loyal to their Country, but are not disposed to aid in driving the invaders from our midst. Cannot there be some means devised by which they can be forced into service?”⁶² Women were also encouraged to participate in shaming men who attempted to evade service. “The South,” noted one writer, “prided itself on its white woman’s zealotry.”⁶³ Northerners took note of the actions of Southern women who were said to ostracize any man who evaded enlistment. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported that “woman’s charms are to be reserved for those who go forth in battle . . . Generals, instead of addressing the soldiers direct, address the women, urging them to use their influence.”⁶⁴ A popular anecdote that was circulated at the time appeared in the *London Quarterly*, detailing an engaged Southern woman who sent some of her clothing to her intended who had not yet enlisted with a note that read: “Wear these or

⁶² Volunteer to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; July 17, 1861, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrqm.org/item/mdah_757-932-12-15

⁶³ Clinton. 63.

⁶⁴ *Chicago Daily Tribune*. (Chicago, IL), Mar. 31 1862.

volunteer!”⁶⁵ In a letter to her dear friend, Leora refers to her lost relatives as trophies. “How many beloved ones have ‘fought their last battle, and now sleep their last sleep’ . . . Pa was in the Battle of Manassas. We have a good many trophies from the battle field . . .”⁶⁶ These deaths were thought to bring glory to the families that experienced this loss, effectively eliminating the negative emotion that would normally correlate to this type of event.

⁶⁵ *The London Quarterly Review*. United States: J.M. Lewer., 1863. 224.

⁶⁶ Leora Simms, *Heroines of Dixie: Confederate Women Tell Their Story of the War*, ed. Katharine M. Jones (New York, NY: Konecky & Konecky, 1995), 70.

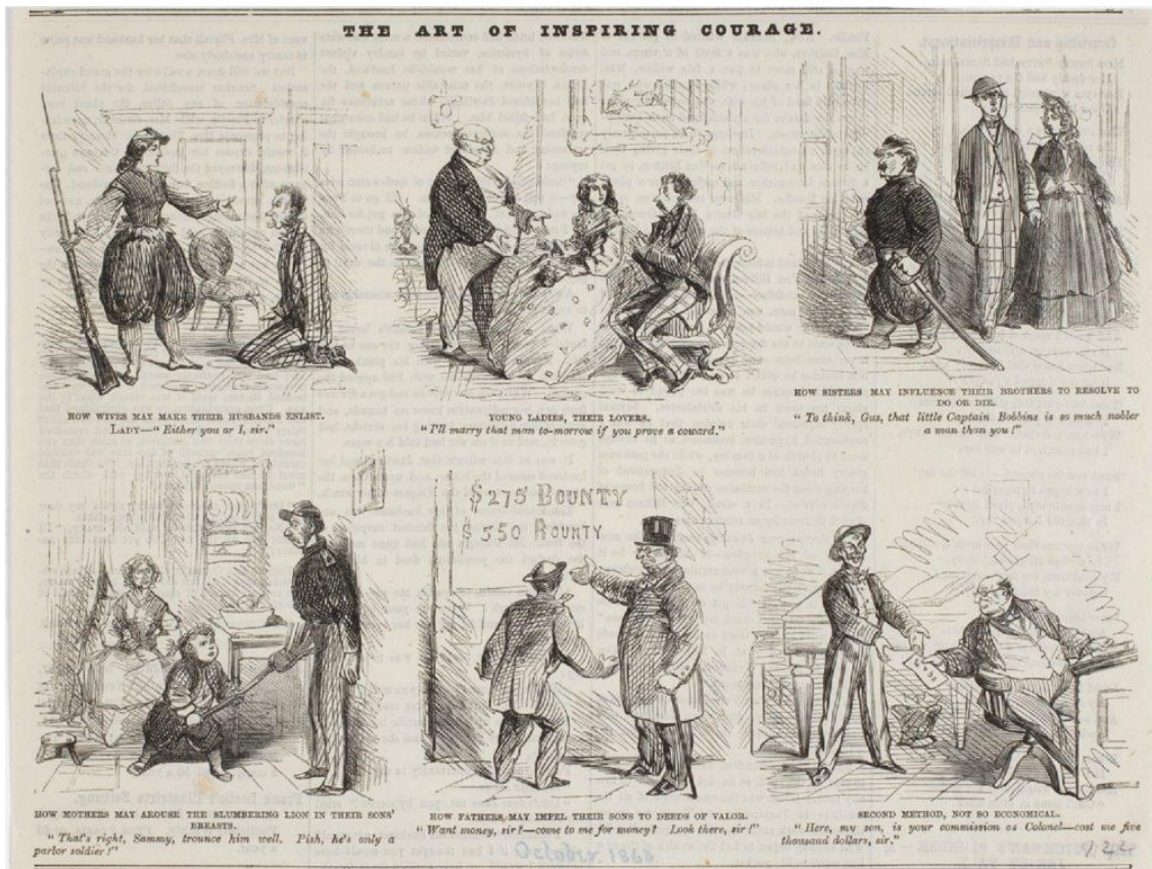


Figure 1. The Art of Inspiring Courage
 Frank Leslie, “The Art of Inspiring Courage” Cartoon, Frank Leslie’s Illustrated
 Newspaper, October 1863. Tulane University.⁶⁷

These efforts were supported and encouraged by the public press of the South. The constant call reminding women of their patriotic duty echoed throughout the war. “The Women of the Confederacy are responsible for the issue of this revolution,” one outlet noted, underscoring this attitude. “If they falter it will prove a failure, but if they smile through their tears, comfort even whilst they grieve, applaud the brave, scorn the timid, and sacrifice the comforts of home for

⁶⁷ Frank Leslie, “The Art of Inspiring Courage” Cartoon, Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, October 1863. Tulane University.

the sake of the cause.”⁶⁸ The community enforced the presentation of a brave façade, Betty Herndon Maury recalls seeing a woman getting shamed for crying as the troops were leaving, “How could you let them see you crying? It will unman them.”⁶⁹ These standards were not just projected outward but personal introspection was included as well as Maury also scrutinized herself for having unpatriotic emotions, “Went to church yesterday. Heard a sermon on patriotism. I fall short of the mark of a true patriot. I am selfish and narrowminded.”⁷⁰ This withholding of negative emotions was expected to be the emotional backbone of the war.

Not everyone held the same sentiment, On April, 20 1861, Mary Custis Lee, wife of Robert E. Lee, wrote to her daughter when war was declared, “I think both parties are wrong in this fratricidal war, there is nothing comforting even in the hope that God may prosper the right, for I see no *right* in the matter.”⁷¹ It would seem that Lee would reserve her true feeling for her daughter because only a couple short months later, on June 5th Judith Brockenbrough McGuire

⁶⁸ Geo. W. Jones, Major & Q.M., *The Clarke County Journal*, December 3, 1863.

⁶⁹ Betty Herndon Maury, *Heroines of Dixie: Confederate Women Tell Their Story of the War*, ed. Katharine M. Jones (New York, NY: Konecky & Konecky, 1995), 45.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 46.

⁷¹ Mary Custis Lee, *Heroines of Dixie: Confederate Women Tell Their Story of the War*, ed. Katharine M. Jones (New York, NY: Konecky & Konecky, 1995), 24.

commented on Mrs. General Lee, she wrote, "I have never seen her more cheerful, and she seems to have no doubt of our success."⁷² This interaction captures Lee portraying herself to be honorable when engaging with people in her community even if that maybe not be her true feelings.

Women's Bravery and Defense

Not all women of the South felt helpless against the Union army, some held perfect composure and unwavering faith in the Confederate army. Emma Holmes of Charleston, South Carolina showed no fear after fighting broke out at Fort Sumter:

Though every shot is distinctly heard and shakes our house, I feel calm and composed . . . There are some few ladies who have been made perfectly miserable and nearly frantic by their fear of the safety of their loved ones, but the great body of the citizens seem to be so impressed with the justice of our Cause that they place entire confidence on the God of Battles.⁷³

Women were not strangers to handling firearms before the war. As J. G. Clinkscales remembered of his pre-Civil War childhood, "many of the young ladies could ride as well as their brothers, and not a few of them could handle firearms with great accuracy and skill."⁷⁴ Therefore, it was not unheard of for

⁷² Mary Brockenbrough McGuire, *Heroines of Dixie: Confederate Women Tell Their Story of the War*, ed. Katharine M. Jones (New York, NY: Konecky & Konecky, 1995), 41.

⁷³ Emma Holmes, *Heroines of Dixie: Confederate Women Tell Their Story of the War*, ed. Katharine M. Jones (New York, NY: Konecky & Konecky, 1995), 19

⁷⁴ J. G. Clinkscales, *On the Old Plantation: Reminiscences of His Childhood* (Charleston SC: Nabu Public Domain Reprints, 2010), 102.

women to show their patriotism by taking up firearms in defense of themselves and their homes. Mary Chesnut wrote in her diary of a woman who was brave enough to stand up to union soldiers for a man she didn't know. Chesnut documented women rising to the occasion rather than faltering asserting that "These Southern women under the guns are brave enough."⁷⁵ In October of 1862, Cordelia Lewis Scales of "Home Sweet Home" Mississippi wrote to her friend Loulie and tells of how her lifestyle has changed "I never ride now or walk without my pistol. Quite warlike, you see." She includes in her letter how her brave interactions with Yankee soldiers prevented any damage being done to her or her property.⁷⁶ Cordelia writes her friend again in January of 1863 now referring her home as "Destruction Hollow" describing a search of her home and once again stood in defense, "I wore my pistol (a very fine six shooter) all the time & stood by my Saratoga, would not permit them to search it."⁷⁷ Cordelia effectively shed the delicacies that southern women are known for and replaces that with the bravery and willingness to fight off any invaders.

⁷⁵ Mary Boykin Miller Chestnut, *A Diary from Dixie* (New York: D. Appleton and company, 1905), 243.

⁷⁶ Cordelia Lewis Scales, *Heroines of Dixie: Confederate Women Tell Their Story of the War*, ed. Katharine M. Jones (New York, NY: Konecky & Konecky, 1995), 181-182

⁷⁷ Scales. 205.

In February of 1865, even as things became dire, Malvina Black Gist wrote of her desire to remain in the fray as Sherman marched on Columbia, South Carolina:

it is high time I was having some experiences out of the ordinary, and if anything remarkable is going to happen, I want to know something about it; it might be worth relating to my grandchildren! Anyhow, it is frightfully monotonous, just because you are a woman, to be always tucked away in safe places. I want to stay. I want a taste of danger.⁷⁸

Kate Stone expressed similar sentiments in the early days of the war, writing in her journal “the whole planet is in such a state of feverish excitement and everywhere there is a stir and mob of angry life—Oh! To see and be in it all. I hate weary days of inaction. Yet what can women do but wait and suffer?”⁷⁹

When the first lady of the confederacy, Varina Howell Davis was told to flee by her husband he armed her with a pistol and taught her how to use it and told her, “You can at least, if reduced to the last extremity, force your assailants to kill you.” These words of warning were spoken out of the fear that Varina would be captured. Mrs. Davis expressed no fear pertaining to these directions, only the sorrow of leaving her husband.

⁷⁸ Melvina Gist, *Heroines of Dixie: Confederate Women Tell Their Story of the War*, ed. Katharine M. Jones (New York, NY: Konecky & Konecky, 1995), 359

⁷⁹ Stone. 24.

It was these emotional ties to honor and the determination to defend the Southern way of life that would lead the women of the south to serve in the war in any way possible. Taking on physical burdens that among certain classes had never been practiced or even entertained. Effectively leading women of the planter class to way of life that was more often experienced by the impoverished. Driven by the expectations of society and the need to bring comfort to the men in their families and other soldiers in the field, the women of the South took on a variety of seemingly patriotic duties.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CIVIL WAR THE EARLY YEARS

Ladies Aid Societies

As the war progressed, the women of the South found what they thought to be a valuable contribution to the southern war effort. Ladies Aid Societies, or Soldiers Aid Societies, were formed across the South and reflected the commitment of southern women to the cause. Even though the South had considerable areas that were rural, that did not stop factions of women, big or small, from forming relief societies to make their own contributions. The manufacturing of Soldiers uniforms became a purposeful activity. In a letter to Waddy Butler, Lucy Wood declared: “our needles are now our weapons and we have a part to perform as well as the rest.”⁸⁰ Although many women, especially those from upper-class families, had little to no experience in these types of activities, they nevertheless enthusiastically took to the task at hand. In her memoir *Life in Dixie During the War*, Mary A. H. Gay wrote, “many of us who had never learned to sew became expert handlers of the needle and vied with each other in producing well-made garments”⁸¹ Women took great pride in using this skill to show their support and were widely recognized for it.

⁸⁰ Lucy Wood to Waddy Butler, May 2, 1861, Butler Papers, UVA.

⁸¹ Mary A H. Gay, *Life in Dixie during the War: 1861-1862-1863-1864-1865* (Project Gutenberg, 2012), 42.



Figure 2. The War Making Havelocks for the Volunteers
"The War-Making Havelocks for the Volunteers," Harpers Weekly, June 29, 1861.⁸²

In a circular letter that appeared in the *Clarke County Journal*, Alabama Governor John Gill Shorter put out a call for socks, in addition to this request he gave great accolades to the women who had already provided so much to the war effort, "to the women of Alabama, through whose patriotic labors our troops up to this time have been kept in the field."⁸³ The women who participated in

⁸² "The War-Making Havelocks for the Volunteers," Harpers Weekly, June 29, 1861

⁸³ John Gill Shorter, *The Clarke County Journal*, November 13, 1862.

these activities were often praised on many different platforms. Newspapers published stories focused on the women's contributions as a means of encouraging this level of patriotism across the community as a whole.⁸⁴ In 1862 in the first session of congress the following resolution was presented, thanking the "patriotic women of the country.":

Thanks of Congress to the patriotic women of the country. *Resolved by the Congress of the Confederate States of America*, That the thanks of the Congress of the Confederate States are eminently due, and are hereby tendered to the patriotic women of the Confederacy for the energy, zeal and untiring devotion which they have manifested in furnishing voluntary contributions to our soldiers in the field, and in the various military hospitals throughout the country.⁸⁵

These types of public proclamations further fueled the labors of those already war-weary women. Almeria L. McGee of Paulding, Mississippi wrote a letter to Governor John J. Pettus on behalf of the Prairie Lane Military Aid Society, also known as the "Thimble Brigade." In the letter she claimed her organization had gone above and beyond with their "assiduous service" and "stressed that the people have given liberally, one single company has been

⁸⁴ See *The Clarke County Journal* 2/7/63, 11/6/62; *The Mississippian* 7/31/61; *Natchez Daily Courier* 2/7/62; *The Times-Picayune* 12/3/61; *Southern Confederacy* 4/4/62

⁸⁵ James M. Matthews, ed., "Resolutions #8," in *Public Laws of the Confederate States of America: Passed at the First Session of the First Congress, 1862, Carefully Collated with the Originals at Richmond* (Richmond: R.M. Smith, printer to Congress, 1862).

fitted out at a cost of near four thousand dollars, by private subscription.”⁸⁶

However, within this declaration of loyalty, she bemoans the devastating impact of inflation on their lives which has left them no longer able to purchase of material as the community is struggling to meet their basic needs. Publicly steadfast in her the request that material be sent, McGee made sure that she underscored the magnitude of their patriotism. “We are extremely unwilling to dissolve our connection with the brave army, or resign our insignia,” she wrote, “so long as a gallant spirit is found to wield a sword, or point a cannon in our defense.”⁸⁷ A similar plea came from Mollie Colbert of Thomastown, Mississippi when she founded her local Soldier’s Relief Society. Colbert pleaded for cloth to be sent to the women so they could outfit the soldiers for the Winter months. She explained that because it was so late in the season the women of her society would not have enough time to manufacture the cloth and then construct the clothes before that winter deadline.⁸⁸ It became important to the women of the South that their men were provided with anything they could possibly need and they made sure to consider all of the factors surrounding that. These letters provided an interesting duality in their commentary. Women highlighted their

⁸⁶ Almeria L. McGee to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; October 26, 1861, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrqm.org/item/mdah_757-940-04-23

⁸⁷ Ibid

⁸⁸ Mollie Colbert to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; September 2, 1861, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrqm.org/item/mdah_757-939-06-31

patriotism while underscoring the struggle on the home front and, in doing so, were able to retain their honor while also subtly (or not so) illuminating their personal strife.

War work was not simply about providing clothing and other necessities for soldiers. In February 1862, Martha S. Boddie of Coahoma Count, wrote to Governor John J. Pettus wanting to contribute to the Ladies Aid Society of New Orleans who were raising funds to build a gun boat. Boddie offered up “one thousand or twelve hundred dollars worth of diamonds to aid in the accomplishment of this noble and useful work.”⁸⁹ This trend continued. A month later James H. Gaillard wrote Governor Pettus on behalf of the Coonewah Soldiers Aid Society offering to relinquish all their jewelry and other precious metals to help Mississippi secure a naval force. Gaillard’s letter highlights the brevity of this sacrifice and the resolve of the women in this community by suggesting their offering could be “converted into engines of death against the ruthless invaders of our Country.”⁹⁰ This notion suggested a great deal of material sacrifice and

⁸⁹ It is presumed that Martha S. Boddie resided in Coahoma County at the time. This presumption is based on information from the 1860 census information and provided to show range of women who made similar contributions therefore showing this was not an isolated incident.; Martha S. Boddie to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; February, 1862, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrgm.org/item/mdah_757-941-04-16

⁹⁰ James H. Gaillard to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; March 29, 1862, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrgm.org/item/mdah_757-941-07-24

went against the proposed idea of property being a key component in the concept of southern honor.

In Service of the Sick, Injured and Dying

The Civil War suspended many social norms on the Southern home front and, in addition to the domestic duties, Southern women also stepped into the medical field. In addition to war wounds, sickness ravaged the South. Dying of illness was considered dying without honor as one Iowaian soldier proclaimed, “all of the evils of the battlefield with none of its honors.”⁹¹ The state of conditions presented a great need that women were able to fulfill. Some women felt that nursing was the only alternative to going to war and for widows this was a way to serve on behalf of a family they no longer had.⁹² Before the Civil War, nursing was a profession that was mostly reserved for the lower class and most often men because women were viewed as too frail to aid the sick and injured.⁹³ Indeed, doctors often refused to work with women or markedly showed their displeasure with the situation.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 210.

⁹² Mrs. J.O. Smith to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; September 5, 1861, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrqm.org/item/mdah_757-939-06-16

⁹³ Barbara Duffey, *Confederate Women*, ed. Mauriel Joslyn (Gretna, LA: Pelican, 2005), 72.

⁹⁴ Kate Cumming and Richard Barksdale Harwell, *Kate: The Journal of a Confederate Nurse* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 14.



Figure 3. Women Attend to Wounded Soldiers
Library of Congress⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Found on <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/female-nurses-during-civil-war> labeled as Library of Congress

There were also women that used this avenue as a way to be closer to their husbands. Mary Jane Stevenson, for example, wrote Governor Pettus requesting financial aid to relocate to Florida where her husband was stationed. Stevenson offered up her services in return stating, "I will do anything to repay you i can work on The sick when i get there and anything else i can do."⁹⁶ Felicia Grundy Porter was more selfless in her willingness to support the soldiers. In January of 1862, she wrote to Governor Pettus on behalf of Tennessee's Soldiers Aid Society. Porter's group had been serving the confederacy by taking care of sick soldiers in the military hospital in Nashville and Porter proposed the "offer to assume a simi-lar change over the Hospital to be established by the State of Mississippi."⁹⁷ This echoed a proposal by Sallie Eola Reneau who had requested for the women of her community to form a traveling company of nurses called the Mississippi Nightingales. These women asked only that their expenses of this service be compensated, they be supplied with small firearms, and that a male surgeon was to escort them.⁹⁸ War work was a valuable asset in

⁹⁶ Mary Jane Stevenson to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; May 19, 1861, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrqm.org/item/mdah_757-932-04-17

⁹⁷ Felicia Grundy Porter to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; January 14, 1862, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrqm.org/item/mdah_757-941-02-08

⁹⁸ Sallie Eola Reneau to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; June 7, 1861, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrqm.org/item/mdah_757-932-07-05.

the Civil War, allowing the women to contribute to the fight in ways that were outside of the scope of their daily lives.⁹⁹ The actions of the Ladies Aid Societies and the women of the Southern communities showed a great level of patriotism, demonstrated drive and persistence and moreover, discarded the image of a delicate Southern woman.

Beyond the medical care that the women of the South provided their presence also became a great comfort to the soldiers, serving as stand ins for their own families. In 1863, Elmer Ruan Coates wrote a song that reflected these acts of compassion:

Now I feel my wound is mortal,
Soon I'll breathe my parting sigh.
Ladies, some on be my mother,
Be my mother till I die.¹⁰⁰

This was a boon that was also recognized and valued by the families on the home front who could not be with their dying loved ones. A song written by J. A. C. O'Connor titled, *Bless the Lips That Kissed Our Darling* expressed the gratitude of those women:

⁹⁹ War Work was not a new concept going into the Civil War and it was seen across the North and the South. For further reading on the role of women in war and the importance of war work to both causes see: Thavolia Glymph, *The Women's Fight: The Civil War's Battles for Home, Freedom, and Nation* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020).; Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Women in the Civil War* (Press, 1994).; MCCURRY, STEPHANIE. *Womens War: Fighting and Surviving the American Civil War*. S.I.: BELKNAP HARVARD, 2021.

¹⁰⁰ *Be my mother till I die. By Elmer Ruan Coates. Sold by Johnson, No. 7 North Tenth Street, Phila.* Monographic. Online Text. <https://www.loc.gov/item/amss.cw100570/>.

Bless the lips that kissed our darling,
As he lay on his death bed,
Far from home and 'mid cold strangers—
Blessings rest upon your head.¹⁰¹

Families who had sent their husbands and sons off to war not knowing that their goodbye would be the last, ultimately took solice in the comfort of their dying loved ones by the service of women who were there to bring life and ease death.

The Home Spun Dress

After southern resources were expended providing or producing cloth for the soldier's uniforms, there was very little left for those on the home front. Prior to the war, the southerners imported their clothing which was imported from the North and European countries. However, the onset of the war resulted in a blockade that quickly made these items inaccessible. As a result of these circumstances the homespun dress, which was already worn by poor women, became another way to show patriotism and, in some cases, the refusal to wear one showed lack of patriotism. The novelty of donning a "homespun" dress was greatly encouraged. In 1862, Carrie Belle Sinclair wrote a song called, *The Homespun Dress*, which was meant to encourage ladies to cloth themselves in patriotism:

The Southern land's a glorious land,
And has a glorious cause;
Then cheer, three cheers for Southern rights,

¹⁰¹ *Bless the lips that kissed our darling. Answer to "Let me kiss him for his mother."* By J. A. C. O'Connor. Monographic. Online Text. <https://www.loc.gov/item/amss.cw100620/>.

And for the Southern boys!
We scorn to wear a bit of silk,
A bit of Northern lace,
But make our homespun dresses up,
And wear them with a grace.¹⁰²

An article that appeared in *The Confederate Union* further reinforced this.

The editors paraphrased Jefferson Davis in his address to Mississippi: “When he saw a lady wearing a homespun dress he felt like taking his hat off in respect to her.”¹⁰³ Supporting this assertion, the author of the article furthers the argument by questioning their readers asking, “will any true Southern lady hesitate to weave and wear a homespun dress; when such a man as President Davis attaches honor to the act?”¹⁰⁴ Social events were held in several Southern states that required anyone in attendance to wear homespun fashions. This edict also extended to the gentlemen, creating a blanketed expectation across the entire family and effectively evoking patriotism over vanity in a world that was often perceived as decadent and indulgent.¹⁰⁵ Unfortunately, not all of these events resulted in patriotic admiration. Elizabeth Lyle Saxon recalled attending a ball and being overwhelmed by the smell of the indigo dye that had been used to

¹⁰² Arthur Palmer Hudson, *Folklore of Mississippi and their Background*, “The Homespun Dress,” Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1936, pp. 265-266 as cited in Bitikofer, Sheritta. *Hurrah For Homespun*

¹⁰³ “The Confederate Union,” *The Confederate Union* (Milledgeville, January 13, 1863).

¹⁰⁴ “The Confederate Union,” *The Confederate Union* (Milledgeville, January 13, 1863).

¹⁰⁵ Betts, Vicki, *Marshall Texas Republican*, April 20, 1861, p. 3, c. 3 (2016).

color the dresses. When a nearby attendee questioned her about it, she replied that the ladies were wearing a new perfume they called, patriotism.¹⁰⁶

Not all believed that the sacrifice of vanity was the best way to serve their country which caused contention as some elite women hesitated to dress in the same homespun fashion as their lower-class counterparts. The idea of sewing one's own clothes and wearing them out in public blurred the socio-economic lines and some elites struggled with this in spite of its patriotic nature. Some women of great means utilized their wealth to keep their wardrobes updated by acquiring them from blockade runners while others used household textiles of any caliber to differentiate themselves from the lower class.¹⁰⁷ In a letter to her husband Agnes¹⁰⁸ writes, "soon we will be without a stitch of clothes", explaining that Richmond is now out of bonnets. Agnes follows this up with "Some girls smuggle them, which I consider in the worst possible taste, to say the least. We have no right at this time to dress better than our neighbors and besides, the soldiers need every cent of our money."¹⁰⁹ Newspaper editors took note of this blatant inconsistency in patriotism. Atlanta Southern Confederacy published a

¹⁰⁶ Elizabeth Lyle Saxon, *Southern Woman's War Time Reminiscences* (Nabu Press, 2010), 22.

¹⁰⁷ Faust, 425

¹⁰⁸ In the notes there is no indication of what Agnes's last name is or who her husband was.

¹⁰⁹ Agnes, *Heroines of Dixie: Confederate Women Tell Their Story of the War*, ed. Katharine M. Jones (New York, NY: Konecky & Konecky, 1995), 202.

letter that exposed the city as a prominent example of city ladies who never deviated from their preferred styles, excusing themselves by declaring that homespun dresses made them appear plebian. It wasn't as though the people of the south did not recognize the difference in the quality and caliber worn before the war, it was what the homespun dress represented. A Mississippian was quoted in the *Clarke County Journal* reiterating to the ladies insisting upon wearing pre-war fashions, "Though not so fine of texture as similar articles worn before the war, they were far more becoming to the wearers than silks would have been, and showed a spirit of patriotic independence which deserves emulation."¹¹⁰ Still, not all acts of patriotism (or lack thereof) were outward in display. The duties that women now faced on the home front would be challenging as they prepared for life without a male presence.

Manning the Homestead

In 1838, the first property bill was passed in Mississippi, allowing married women to own property in their own right. Though the intent behind this bill was to benefit men, the bill itself spawned debates in several other states. In 1848 Missouri Governor John C. Edwards argued against similar legislature, stating that if a woman had to manage an estate it would change her character. "All that was soft and tender and endearing would vanish," he proclaimed, "and she would

¹¹⁰ *The Clarke County Journal*, April 9, 1863.

grow sturdy, obstinate and masculine.”¹¹¹ Though this argument was not unusual, it spawns an interesting paradox, as women were told that their patriotic duty was to hold down the homestead and manage the estate. These expectations appeared in opposition to the pre-war Southern Belle archetype, but, as duty commanded it, the fragility of these women would need to be shed. Some women rose to the occasion, especially if they had already possessed duties, such as that of female slaveholders or women who were groomed as girls by their fathers in order to maintain a presence in front of their slaves. Regardless of the perception of being delicate, southern women were equally as capable of brutality towards their slaves as men. Ruff Newton wrote to Governor Pettus on February 22, 1860, to report a man at large who “in conjunction with his daughter Drucella Mullin did by inflicting blow lashes and bruises cause the death of a negro girl.”¹¹² Sometimes these mistresses were the sole abusers and disciplinarians of their slaves despite objection from their husbands. A slave that belonged to Jack Barbee recalled Barbee’s intervention when his wife became abusive towards children, “he jerked her off of us many a time, and he’d say

¹¹¹ Journal of the House, First Session, 1848, 30-31, General Assembly, Record Group 550, Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City.

¹¹² Ruff Newton to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; February 22, 1860, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrngm.org/item/mdah_757-930-03-14

'plague take you, you trying to kill that little baby.'"¹¹³ On the other end of the spectrum some women felt that they did not have the commanding presence that was required to manage their slaves.¹¹⁴ Mrs. L. E. Nicholson wrote Governor Pettus on behalf of herself and her lady friends asking, "What is to become of the women & children if you call all the men? There are certainly some needed here. As for myself, I am not quite so brave as others & with all my timidity."¹¹⁵ As the war progressed, even women who had been comfortable with managing their slaves would be hesitant due to fear of insurrection.¹¹⁶ It was this fear and uncertainty that would bring in a flood of exemption requests.

Exemption

When Governor Pettus introduced exemptions into service, it was seen by many as creating an excuse not to serve but it is within the exemption law that the question of priority within the aspects of honor comes into question. Letters flooded in requesting discharge as it pertained to this law citing the need to take

¹¹³ Ophelia Settle Egypt, *Unwritten History of Slavery: Autobiographical Accounts of Negro Ex-Slaves* (Social Science Institute, Fisk University, 1945), 140.

¹¹⁴ Jones-Rogers. 2, 12, 63.

¹¹⁵ Mrs. L. E. Nicholson to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; December 17, 1862, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, <https://cwrqm.org/item/45719>

¹¹⁶ C. Vann Woodward, ed. *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981).

care of their families and their property. Legislator Edward P. Jones wrote to Governor Pettus encouraging him to incite the citizens of Mississippi to become more active in engaging in the war at hand, “If there ever can be a time when Mississippians should forget every thing but, Mississippi, and merge all private interests and feelings in public and patriotic considerations,—that time has Surely arrived”¹¹⁷

Many slave owning women in Mississippi wrote letters to Governor Pettus to petition for exemptions for their husbands, sons, or overseers.¹¹⁸ Letitia A. Andrews was among those letters requesting her husband be exempted stating, “women cannot attend to the labors of the farm; and you very well know that without some directing hand, the labour of the slave is almost worthless.”¹¹⁹ Governor Pettus received many letters requesting their family members be released in order to support them or make arrangements for their support. The

¹¹⁷ Legislator Edward P. Jones to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; November 20, 1862, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrgm.org/item/mdah_757-943-02-39

¹¹⁸ Mrs. E. L. Greenwood to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; June 30, 1862, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrgm.org/item/mdah_757-942-03-25.; Ann D. Matthews to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; October 29, 1862, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrgm.org/item/mdah_757-942-12-35.; Martha Dillahunty to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; November 5, 1862, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrgm.org/item/mdah_757-943-01-18.

¹¹⁹ Letita A. Andrews to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; March 28, 1863, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, <https://cwrgm.org/item/48994>

following letter is exemplary of the argument made by Wyatt-Brown where he states that correspondence such as this was not sincere for the fear of appearing to not have honor. Caroline V. Ball, in a letter that underscores the problematic questions of sincerity in southern patriotism, requested her “little” son Albert G. Ball, a drummer in his company, be sent home on the claim that she needs him to help run the household. This letter specified that she had a small boy left that could not be of assistance but also included that she followed the motto “victory or death” and would send 10 sons off to war if she had them.¹²⁰ What makes this a letter of interest is that according to the 1860 US census, the son that was still at home would have been fifteen by that time which would have made him capable of helping. Two widows, Francis Blocker and Charity Clements were also among those letters, with a presumably 60 slaves between them¹²¹. Their only request was that their current overseer would be exempted, according to Blocker and Clements, “hundreds of our Neighbors and Friends Negroes, have gone with them Mr., Eason has succeeded by good management in keeping ours at home. We have not lost one yet.”¹²²

¹²⁰ Caroline V. Ball to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; July 2, 1861, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, <https://cwrqm.org/item/31185>; See also: 1860 US Federal Census

¹²¹ This presumption is made citing the 1860 US census

¹²² Francis Blocker and Charity Clements to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; January 13, 1863, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, <https://cwrqm.org/item/31185>

Women were not the only ones to request an exemption on the grounds of managing the homestead, men did as well but they did this without any indication that women were capable of doing it or had failed at doing it. O. R. Powell, for example, wrote on behalf of the widow of S. H. Lanier to Governor Pettus requesting an exemption for the overseer of a plantation that contained “eighty negroes & many are known to be the most desperate in the County.” He further noted that if the overseer were to be called away, the widow and her adult daughters would leave the plantation unattended.¹²³ Archibald Brown of DeSoto, Mississippi wrote to Governor Pettus requesting that his son be exempted in order to oversee his plantation. Brown petitions Governor Pettus, noting that his son would be of far greater service to the war effort as an overseer: “He is rendering more important services to the confederacy than he could in the army,” Brown noted. “I will only add,” he concluded, “that my son has charge of my crop, of which, only 40 acres are in cotton, the rest being entirely of corn and other provisions.”¹²⁴ The lack of masters and overseers had led to a great exodus of slaves as Federal armies marched through effectively recruiting them to fight. This left many slave holders with no stake in the institution they were fighting to

¹²³ O. R. Powell to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; June 23, 1862, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrqm.org/item/mdah_757-942-06-41

¹²⁴ Archibald Brown to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; August 15, 1862, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrqm.org/item/mdah_757-942-06-41

protect. The further consequence of the unmanned plantations, in combination with the women who proved unable to manage them, yielded dire consequences and became one of the reasons that starvation became so prevalent in the South.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DARK DAYS

The weight of the war manifested in many ways. Exacerbated conditions existed in the field and in the home. Southern women who were determined to remain patriotic found their political voices as they would not stand for the sacrifices of their families to be made in vain. On August 20, 1862, Lucy Smith of Oak Hill Georgia wrote a letter to President Davis, Vice President Alexander H. Stephens, and the War department expressing her concerns. Smith opens by saying that the women of the Southern Confederacy are “striving to maintain ourselves as patriotic mothers are almost drive to subjugation and almost preferring the tyranny of Lincoln the tantalizing inhumane treatment to our soldiers by our head leading Generals and regimental surgeons.”¹²⁵ Smith accuses “Magruder” as well as other “big generals” of leading soldiers to slaughter so that they may ride to the hospitals in order to drink wine that was reserved for the sick. Smith advocates further examining the term “able-bodied” men by questioning how their local surgeon applied it to men who were sick. By conscripting these men, this sickness would then be spread to other soldiers not only negating their own usefulness but directly harming the war effort.¹²⁶ As time

¹²⁵ Lucy Smith, *Heroines of Dixie: Confederate Women Tell Their Story of the War*, ed. Katharine M. Jones (New York, NY: Konecky & Konecky, 1995), 166.

¹²⁶ *Ibid* 166-167.

went on the war exacerbated the already stressed conditions under which the people of the South had been living. In following suite with the early days of the war women were encouraged to keep their emotions in check by only writing of cheerful things to their loved ones in the field, “always write them cheerful or amusing letters, and bear patiently your ills and troubles at home till the war is over.”¹²⁷ This became a scare tactic as the war went on citing desertion and execution as a result of a women writing her husband a distressed letter asking her husband to come home:

a soldier was tried and convicted of the crime of desertion, and sentenced to be shot. He was taken to the place of execution, and the preparations being soon completed, at the word "fire!" he fell a bloody corpse at the hands of his comrades. I was curious to know why he deserted, and I learned that his wife was the cause. He received a letter from her full of complaints.¹²⁸

Desertion became a serious issue in the Civil War and many reports would incriminate the wife for assisting in this unpatriotic act. Mary Williams Pugh of Louisiana wrote her husband of all the troubles she had faced and begged him to come home. Pugh tells her husband, “you can certainly find some way of getting off—either a substitute or this late exemption law which requires one white man to every twenty-five salves. Many persons have been taking advantage of this &

¹²⁷ Duties of Those at Home to the Soldiers in the Field, *The Clarke County Journal*, May 12, 1863. p. 1, c. 1

¹²⁸ Warning to Wives, *The Clarke County Journal*, February 19, 1863. p. 2, c. 4

why cannot you?"¹²⁹ Pugh attempts to strengthen this plea by proclaiming her father's support of his return as well, "Pa says your interests demand that you should leave the army & *he* thinks it your duty to come if you possibly can."¹³⁰

In some cases, families and neighbors would help deserters, in a letter to Governor Pettus, G. W. Boleware reported a deserter who was being aided in Williamsburg, Mississippi, "lying in the wood in this neighborhood doing a great deal of mischief harbored by his friend some three or four families that say they will stand betwixt him and all damages"¹³¹ This became more common with the onset of starvation and lack of other provisions. A petition addressed to Governor Pettus presented by companies A and E of the 3rd Mississippi regiment made the request that they receive their pay regularly. They claimed, "It is very hard for a soldier to re=main at his post or to do his full duty when he knows his wife and children at home are starving. If families were better provided for there would not be so much desertion."¹³²

¹²⁹ Mary Williams Pugh, *Heroines of Dixie: Confederate Women Tell Their Story of the War*, ed. Katharine M. Jones (New York, NY: Konecky & Konecky, 1995), 187

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 187.

¹³¹ G. W. Boleware to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; October 6, 1862, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrqm.org/item/mdah_757-942-10-25

¹³² Petition to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; June 7, 1863, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrqm.org/item/mdah_757-945-01-13

The Poor

Notions of honor were supposed to unify classes and underscore wartime patriotism, but the hierarchy of southern society ultimately undermined this endeavor. Early in the war, many stressed the removal of class lines as a way of showing patriotism. Communities advertised it as their duty to visit them, feeling as though “help, advice and encouragement” would be an asset to them at the time.¹³³ Newspapers honored women who helped the poor in their communities by publicly acknowledging them in order to encourage more people to follow this lead:

We will endeavor to publish in our next paper a list of contributions by citizens of Marengo county in aid to the needy families of soldiers in our county. We desire to publish the names of those patriotic and charitable citizens ,in order that the public may know who they are and that others may be induced to emulate theirgood deeds.¹³⁴

Though this act of patriotism was advertised in various places not all subscribed to its endeavor. Divisions between the classes were ingrained into Southern society. “Avoid as much as possible low company,” advised a Natchez plantation mistress in 1859, highlighting these class divisions; “Associate with the refined for your manners soon tell what company you keep— Recollect dear Son you

¹³³ Vicki Betts, "Atlanta Southern Confederacy, September 27, 1861, p.2, c. 1-2. *Ladies Relief Society*; April, 10 1863, p. 1, c. 3-4 (2016). *Correspondence of the Richmond Sentinel. A Few Days in Georgia--Spent in Atlanta and Columbus.*

¹³⁴ Our Indigent Families, *The Clarke County Journal*, February 26, 1863.

have a name to preserve.”¹³⁵ Sidney Harding romanticized the poor until she found herself experiencing some of the aspects of how the poor lived. Harding claimed, “I used to think I would like to be poor but having never seen any poor people before did not know what it was. Have no such wish now.” Instead of showing compassion towards the poor, Harding felt disgusted with being exposed to things such as bed bugs and unsavory food.¹³⁶

Many of these examples representing the experiences of poor women through the lens of women of higher classes, it is difficult to depict the experiences of poor women based on their personal accounts.¹³⁷ This can be

¹³⁵ Olmsted, *Cotton Kingdom*, 416; R. A. Minor to James, October 21, 1859, in Minor Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

¹³⁶ Sidney Harding Diary, June 9, August 8, 1863, LSU as cited in Faust, 73.

¹³⁷ Using sources to represent poor women that are written by women of higher classes potentially are told through notions of ignorance and judgement which results in a narrative that is speculative at best. There are several works that have been written on the poor people of the South but I have found that they are mostly representative on the experiences of poor men or written in the scope of the poor family as a whole. See: Keri Leigh Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2017).; Harris, J. William. *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society: White Liberty and Black Slavery in Augusta's Hinterlands* / J. William Harris. 1st ed. Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1985; Bolton, Charles C. *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1994.

attributed to high rates of illiteracy as well as their time constraints.¹³⁸ According to Wyatt-Brown, though the poor often had little to no material possessions, the hope of upward mobility gave reason to uphold and fight for these values.¹³⁹ The chance of upward mobility, though was not as easily attainable especially for poor white women who earned significantly less wages than their male counterparts. Furthermore, the perception of poor women held by the wealthy was very negative, they were considered to be “deviant white women as ‘vile,’ ‘lewd,’ and ‘vicious’ products of an inferior strain of humanity.”¹⁴⁰ When looking at the reactions of poor women to the Civil War there is speculation that the poor did not comprehend what was going on and how it would affect them and resigned themselves to whatever decisions would be made for them on behalf of the ruling class.¹⁴¹ In an encounter with a poor white woman, Frederick L. Olmsted noted that what could be considered ambivalence towards her sick child was “merely a natural response to the feeling of helplessness, to which fatalism was a logical reaction.”¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Keri Leigh Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2017). 26.

¹³⁹ Harris. 99.

¹⁴⁰ Bynum, 89.

¹⁴¹ Merritt, 161.

¹⁴² Frederick L. Olmsted, *Journey through Texas: A Saddle Trip on the Southwestern Frontier*, James Howard, ed. (Austin: von Beekman-Jones Press, 1962 [1857]), pp. 48-53

To make matters worse, though poor white women would continue trying to make ends meet, their fate would continue to be controlled by the wealthy through the Conscription Act. The conscription act allowed men who owned 20 slaves to return home. In the eyes of C. Beckerdite, “the Law makes the rich man superior to the poor forcing the poor in the field —depriving his family of an equal meal with that of his rich neighbour—showing to the world that the rich is to good to become food for bullets.”¹⁴³ This caused dissent amongst many soldiers who initially felt they were serving their country with pride only to watch their families starve while the exemption law furloughed countless men.¹⁴⁴ Though this argument was countered with the assertion that slavery was what elevated the poor in society and that without the asset of slaves the status of the poor would fall exponentially.¹⁴⁵ Unfortunately, this argument also contradicts the preestablished views of poor women, making their status with or without slavery the same. In fact, Isaac Applewhite wrote Governor Pettus to advocate for the

¹⁴³ C. Beckerdite to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; November 23, 1863, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrgm.org/item/mdah_757-943-03-10

¹⁴⁴ James C. Rogers to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; March 23, 1863, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrgm.org/item/mdah_757-944-07-10

¹⁴⁵ Vicki Betts, Atlanta Southern Confederacy, October 25, 1862, p.2, c. 2. *Are We Whipped? Shall We Give Up*

poor women of Mississippi as their husbands had in no way qualified for this exemption,

A few of our citizens who in contra-vention of your proclamation have planted large cotton crops and have their negroes busily engaged cultivating them, while in sight almost of their Good lands, the poor soldiers wives are plowing with their own hands to make a subsistence for themselves and children while their husbands are suffering bleeding and dying for their country.

Bringing the circumstance to light shows another side of the division amongst the classes that directly accounted for the suffering of poor women and their families, but also set poor women apart from the women of means on behalf of their own self-preservation.

Starvation

Starvation became a battle bigger than the war itself as inflation of provisions went up. Salt was lacking for proper preservation and food was spoiled in transport.¹⁴⁶ Mary A. Jones, a widow whose husband “give up his Life in defense of his Country,” wrote to Governor Pettus twice in 1862. In April, Jones, alone and caring for three small children, pleaded for her husband’s pension explaining that her husband willingly gave his life for his country and his family is now on the brink of starvation. The second letter followed in September, again requesting help to resolve the matter of her husband’s pension. Jones

¹⁴⁶ General James L. Alcorn to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; September 8, 1861, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrqm.org/item/mdah_757-939-07-15

wrote, "I had a Little moyney but it is gone now please let me know soon you ar all that I can call on for protection hope you will act a Fathers part towards me."¹⁴⁷ It is here that Jones not only calls upon her government official for the means to support her family to which she was entitled but also calls upon the patriarchal protection that was built into the code of southern honor. Mollie Nunnamaker also made her case to Governor Pettus claiming to be penniless, "We cant get the little that is due us. My rent is due and my landlady urgent for her money."¹⁴⁸ When Fannie A. Lovelady asked for help, she wrote, "I do not feel willing to lay here & die & see my child starve without making some effort."¹⁴⁹ But some of these cries for help would not be so passive. As provisions became scarce, panic would set in resulting in chaos.

Governor Pettus received a letter from George Wood on January 9, 1863, that would serve as a warning for how this chaos could manifest. Wood gave a very somber account of an unnamed Mississippi county as well as the city of Enterprise. Wood explains that the people of these areas are unable to obtain

¹⁴⁷ Mary A. Jones to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; April 16, 1862, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrgm.org/item/mdah_757-941-09-10; Mary A. Jones to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; September 6, 1862, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrgm.org/item/mdah_757-942-08-18

¹⁴⁸ Mollie Nunnamaker to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; Undated., Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrgm.org/item/mdah_757-945-09-15

¹⁴⁹ Fannie A. Lovelady to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; Undated, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, <https://cwrgm.org/item/52441>

access to corn that was being transported to Egypt, Mississippi. Due to the travel cost, they would no longer have the money to buy the corn when they arrived. The trains that contained these provisions traveled through the areas mentioned and Wood feared that if something was not done soon to bring these communities sustenance “it would result in acts of violence which we would deplore. Nor would I be surprised if the track of the road was destroyed.”¹⁵⁰ Bread riots began to sweep across the country and while most were small—more notable, were the riots in Salisbury, North Carolina, Mobile, Alabama and the Confederate capital, Richmond, Virginia. The riot in Richmond took place just a few months after George Wood wrote his letter. On April 1, 1863, groups of women looted stores taking food and much needed necessities. Accounting for the efficiency of this mob of desperation it was reported to have been a planned event. Though initially planned as a protest using the slogan “Bread or Blood,” upon denial of their requests to merely be able to feed their families, the protest turned into mayhem. Along with numerous “highly respectable” women, these women armed themselves with whatever they could find. The fear of starvation shed any semblance of the previously perceived delicate Southern Belle.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ George Wood to Mississippi Governor John J. Pettus; January 9, 1863, Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, https://cwrqm.org/item/mdah_757-943-07-30

¹⁵¹ Michael B. Chesson, “Harlots or Heroines? A New Look at the Richmond Bread Riot.” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 92, no. 2 (1984): 131–75. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4248710>.



Figure 4. Sowing and Reaping
 “Sowing and Reaping,” Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, May 23, 1863 (New York: F. Leslie). University of Virginia Library Online Exhibits ¹⁵²

The Richmond Bread Riot highlighted that starvation was not limited to the poor. Many women of means would find themselves with sharing commonalities with the poor by the end of the war. This was a condition that was seen all over the confederacy largely due to inflation:

Go to the free market, and you will there see squalid poverty and misery in the persons of old men, women and children who never knew distress

¹⁵² “Sowing and Reaping,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, May 23, 1863 (New York: F. Leslie). University of Virginia Library Online Exhibits.

until the spirit of extortion got abroad in the land.—With what the poor can earn, added to that they receive through charity, many of them are on the verge of starvation, if we may judge from their emaciated faces.¹⁵³

The expenditure of maintaining their status, the destruction of their homes and seeking refuge with their households was very costly. The ultimate price eventually being the loss of their affluence in society.¹⁵⁴ This combined with the rising cost of goods would bring a unification of the classes but not in the way that was expected. The honor of serving one's country began to take backseat to the honor of providing for one's family as word reached the soldiers of their families impending starvation.

Retreat and Disenchantment

As the war waged on some women started to feel the burden of the war, the weight on their shoulders started to outweigh their patriotism. Southern honor became a concept that one must survive through these hardships with patriotism at the forefront but as weariness set in many women were ready to trade that patriotism for their lives. Mary Ann Loughborough found herself under siege as the Federal armies began to invade the town of Vicksburg. In her account she notes the women in her community shaming Confederate soldiers as they ran away from battle, placing blame on General Pemberton as they retreated. "Oh!

¹⁵³ *The Clarke County Journal*, April 9, 1863.

¹⁵⁴ Faust, 77

Shame on you!’ cried the ladies; ‘and you running!’”¹⁵⁵ It was shortly after that the community bunkered down in a cave for forty-seven days while battle waged for their town. After a particularly frightening night Mary wrote of the ladies that continued to encourage the men, “Oh, never surrender!” To which Mary wrote in reply, “after the experience of the night, I really could not tell what I wanted, or what my opinions were.”¹⁵⁶ Upon the emergence from the cave, the group accepted defeat and the federal takeover. Rather than feeling sorrow for the defeat of the Confederate Army, Loughborough felt relief that it was over.¹⁵⁷ On August 26, 1864, Agnes writes a letter to Mrs. Pryor about the state of things, she notes, “There is a strong feeling among the people I meet that the hour has come when we should consider the lives of the men left to us.”¹⁵⁸ She goes on to say, “I am for a tidal wave of peace—and I am not alone.” No longer was she willing to sacrifice the men of the South for a feat that didn’t seem obtainable. There was no mention of honor, only the desire to retain what was left after so much loss. Mary Ann Harris Gay documented the surrender of Atlanta, Georgia with a heavy heart, “Dumbfounded we stood, trying to realize the crushing fact.

¹⁵⁵ Mary Ann Loughborough, *Heroines of Dixie* (Indianapolis Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1955). Mary Ann Loughborough, *In a Cave at Vicksburg*. 226.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 230

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid* 236.

¹⁵⁸ Agnes, *Heroines of Dixie* (Indianapolis Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1955). Mary Ann Loughborough. 316.

Woman's heart could bear no more in silence, and a wail over departed hopes mingled with the sounds without."¹⁵⁹ Gay continues this reflection by documenting the reaction of a soldier's mother, "The quiet fortitude and patriotism of his mother gave way in that dread hour, and she cried aloud in agonizing apprehension of never again."¹⁶⁰ This sentiment is in direct opposition to the directive that was issued by media sources that encouraged women to swallow their pain and Honor their patriotic duty to support the soldiers by keeping a cheerful disposition. Still this sorrow did not keep Southern women from providing continued support regardless of their openly expressed downtrodden emotions. Gay follows up in her journal telling of an act of loyalty that is laden with grief, "After mingling renewed vows of allegiance to our cause, and expressions of a willing submission to the consequences of defeat—privations and evil dire, if need be—with my morning oration."¹⁶¹ Now whether this kind of distressing outpour was frowned upon at this point in the war is speculative but there were also women who expressed their feelings at the end of the war with anger directed toward the Union and the oath that was expected of the Southern people. Catherine Edmonston wrote angrily in her journal, "We feel a deep & abiding resentment towards a nation who thus debases our sense of personal

¹⁵⁹ Mary A H. Gay, *Life in Dixie during the War: 1861-1862-1863-1864-1865* (Project Gutenberg, 2012), 103

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 103.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 152.

honour & weakens the heretofore sacred obligation of an oath taken in the name of Almighty God”¹⁶²

The invasion and surrender of Southern towns were not met with acceptance of defeat or rather they were not met with submission. In an encounter with Mary Curtis Lee on April 16, 1865, Judith Brockenbrough McGuire documents Lee’s cheery disposition and hopeful words, “‘The end is not yet,’ she said, as if to cheer those around her; ‘Richmond is not the Confederacy.’”¹⁶³ But like the beginning of the war, Mrs. Lee’s outward disposition was very different from the letters that were sent to her family members. On April 23, 1865 Lee wrote to her cousin detailing her thoughts as the war came to a close, “For my part it will always be a source of pride & consolation to me to know that all mine have periled their lives, fortune & even fame in so holy a cause.”¹⁶⁴ Lee seemingly maintained her patriotism and recognized the honor of the men who sacrificed themselves for the cause but Lee’s letter then takes a less than cheerful tone. “This place is an utter scene of desolation. So is our whole country

¹⁶² Catherine Devereux Edmondston, *Journal of a Secesh Lady: The Diary of Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston, 1860-1866*, ed. Beth G. Crabtree and James Welch Patton (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, Dept. of Cultural Resources, 2005), 716.

¹⁶³ Mary Brockenbrough McGuire, *Heroines of Dixie: Confederate Women Tell Their Story of the War*, ed. Katharine M. Jones (New York, NY: Konecky & Konecky, 1995), 397

¹⁶⁴ Mary Custis Lee, *Heroines of Dixie* (Indianapolis Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1955). Mary Ann Loughborough. 404.

& the cruel policy of the enemy has accomplished its work too well. They have achieved by *starvation* what they never could win by their valor.”¹⁶⁵

The people of the south felt the humiliation of defeat, Eliza Frances Andrews expressed this as she prepared for the invasion of Irvin Artillery, “everyone is cast down and humiliated, and we are all waiting in suspense to know what our cruel masters will do with us.”¹⁶⁶ With a society that is centered around honor, humiliation is the result of this loss. As the war came to a close the women of the South found themselves in mourning and were determined to honor the soldiers that lost their lives. In an address to the women of the South, Fannie Downing declared the following:

Let us remember,” her broadside cried, “that we belong to that sex which was last at the cross, first at the grave...Let us go now, hand in hand, to the graves of our country’s sons, and as we go let our energies be aroused and our hearts be thrilled by this thought: It is the least thing we can do for our soldiers.”¹⁶⁷

Determined to honor the dead, women of the South rose again. In this case memorial associations were formed. Mrs. Charles J. Williams of Georgia asserted that:

Legislative enactment may not be made to do honor to [Confederate] memories,” as it had to those of the Union dead, “but the veriest radical that ever traced his genealogy back to the deck of the Mayflower, could

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 404.

¹⁶⁶ Eliza Frances Andrews, *Heroines of Dixie* (Indianapolis Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1955). Mary Ann Loughborough. 404.

¹⁶⁷ Cited from Drew Gilpin Faust. *This Republic of Suffering* (Vintage Civil War Library) . Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle Edition. 3818

not refuse us the simple privilege of paying honor to those who died defending the life, honor and happiness of the Southern women.¹⁶⁸

Lucy Breckinridge wrote in her diary, “there were so many ladies here, all dressed in deep mourning, that we felt as if we were at a convent and formed a sisterhood.”¹⁶⁹

Women of the area were horrified and insisted that the Confederate dead be “protected from a promiscuous mingling with the remains of their enemies.”¹⁷⁰

In Richmond, Virginia, Phoebe Yates Pember, a matron who served in Chimborazo hospital commented on the reactions to the presence of Federal soldiers:

There were few men in the city at this time; but the women of the South still fought their battle for them: fought it resentfully, calmly, but silently! Clad in their mourning garments, overcome but hardly subdued, they sat within their desolate homes, or if compelled to leave that shelter went on their errands to church or hospital with veiled faces and swift steps. By no sign or act did the possessors of their fair city know that they were even conscious of their presence.¹⁷¹

The practice of Southern honor did not end with the war but continued in a way that did not let the deaths of confederate soldiers become meaningless or

¹⁶⁸ Ibid 3818

¹⁶⁹ Lucy Gilmer Breckinridge and Mary D. Robertson, *Lucy Breckinridge of Grove Hill: The Journal of a Virginia Girl, 1862-1864* (Columbia, SC: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1997), 80.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid 3834

¹⁷¹ Phoebe Yates Pember, *A Southern Woman's Story* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2009), 177.

forgotten. Southern civilians, largely women, mobilized private means to accomplish what federal resources would not. Their efforts to claim and honor the Confederate dead—and the organizations they spawned—became a means of keeping sectional identity and energy not just alive but strong.¹⁷²

Conclusion

Eventually the sentiment of self-preservation would encompass all of the classes. The mortality of the Southern woman and her family became a bigger concern than southern honor. This was not a question of patriotic duty anymore. The women of the South vehemently supported the war and proved it repeatedly through deeds and it was the loss of resources that ultimately served as the start of the breaking point. No longer did they have material to sew clothes for the soldiers, all the jewelry had been sold and the lack of food were part of the downward spiral to this grim ending. There has been plenty of evidence to dispel Wyatt-Brown's belief that the primary sources at the time may not have been entirely candid as to protect the practice of Southern Honor. However, it is within the correspondence that we see towards the end and post war that is questionable. I have found women that could be considered outliers. But are they truly upholding Southern Honor after years of devastation or are these examples of sources that are not entirely honest? The breakdown of society through the

¹⁷² Faust, Drew Gilpin. *This Republic of Suffering* (Vintage Civil War Library) . Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.3752

destruction of property, starvation, loss of wealth, sickness, and death had suspended this virtue. The scope changed with the overwhelming loss, and in many cases, there was nothing left to give. Still, I do not consider any of these deviations to be without honor. Honor can manifest in many ways, if patriotism was abandoned it was only for upholding the honor of protecting one's family. It is undeniable that the suffering was great for all persons involved and it can not be discounted simply because of someone's financial station.

Despite the suffering, after the war there was a newfound independence amongst the women of the South. Southern honor still dictated that the patriarchy would remain relevant, but I believe that because of the wartime results of this social construct, women were unknowingly given the opportunity to rise to the occasion and explore their true capabilities. Societal structure changed as many women emerged into careers that had previously been reserved for men. In the end, the patriarchal standard of honor that was applied to women during the war, inadvertently contributed to burgeoning of the fight for women's rights.

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