

WRITING, RELIGION, AND WOMEN'S IDENTITY IN CIVIL WAR ALABAMA

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WRITING, RELIGION, AND WOMEN'S IDENTITY IN CIVIL WAR ALABAMA

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

WRITING, RELIGION, AND WOMEN'S IDENTITY IN CIVIL WAR ALABAMA

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This dissertation deals with middle and upper class, literate, Protestant, white Alabama women during the Civil War and their construction of personal identity through their religious beliefs. How did women cope with the course of the war? How did they deal with the massive death toll and the separation from their loved ones? How important to the demise of the Confederacy was disillusionment on the home front? These and many other issues are questions that this dissertation seeks to answer. The outbreak of the war catapulted traditional gender norms and values into turmoil. Women, with few other outlets available, turned to writing to express their feelings. Those writings left a wealth of insight into how women dealt with the war. Women used writing itself as a means of self-identification and self-realization. In writing about their daily lives and in trying to live up to the ideals both they and society set for themselves they revealed their deep

struggles. Women constantly turned to their religious beliefs as a source of comfort, yet at the same time, the religious ideal created a sense of inferiority and failure among some. It also remained a constant in women's lives even as everything around them changed. Indeed, religion provided women with a source of strength in their trials and allowed them to cope with the devastation caused by the war.

While religion provided one source of strength, the concept of the Confederate identity provided them with another throughout the war. Indeed, while some historians such as George Rable and Drew Gilpin Faust argue for a steady processes of disillusionment throughout the course of the war, the women examined in this study, while discouraged, did not transpose that discouragement into undermining the Confederate war effort. In fact, while women did become discouraged, their link to the Confederate cause--particularly for those who had lost loved ones in the conflict--created a stronger sense of cohesion and loyalty to the cause for which the Confederacy stood and helped many maintain faith in the Confederacy even in the face of discouragement. Had women turned their back on the ideas for which the Confederacy stood they would in essence be rejecting not only their personal sacrifices, but also the sacrifices of their loved ones throughout the war. As women attempted to reconcile their personal feelings and fears with the ideal they and society set for themselves as self-sacrificing women they turned to their religious beliefs and Confederate identity to sustain them. Thus, the Alabama women in this study became some of the most ardent proponents of the Confederacy even as the Confederate state collapsed around them.

Style guide used:

Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers* revised by Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams and the University of Chicago Press Editorial Staff, Seventh edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

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## Introduction

The Civil War brought cataclysmic changes to the United States and permanently altered the course of its history. It touched the lives of every American. It remains perhaps the most studied period in American history. Yet, there are still aspects of the war that historians are only beginning to examine in any depth. Indeed, from the end of the war until the 1960s, most histories of the war focused on the military conflict. Battles and leaders, strategies and tactics, were studied almost to the exclusion of other topics. As historians such as David Blight have recently argued, in the process of reunion, participants in the war deliberately altered the memory of the Civil War by focusing on the battlefield.<sup>1</sup> Stressing the noble character of soldiers and generals, Northerners and Southerners could reach an agreement that both fought bravely and acted in accordance with their respective belief systems. Thus the causes of the war and problems it created could be relegated to the far realms of discourse.

When writers included the story of women in the war it became a similar story of heroism, valor, sacrifice, and undying support for the war. Women in these works did not question what was taking place around them, but humbly submitted to their fate.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 209; David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> George Rable noted that “even the titles of scholarly works, such as Mary Elizabeth Massey’s *Bonnet Brigades*, published in 1966 as part of the Civil War

Reverend J. L. Underwood's 1906 narrative, *The Women of the Confederacy: In Which is Presented the Heroism of the Women of the Confederacy With Accounts of Their Trials During the War and the Period of Reconstruction, With Their Ultimate Triumph Over Adversity. Their Motives and Their Achievements As Told By Writers and Orators Now Preserved in Permanent Form*, offers a prime example of early accounts of women's roles in the war. The full title explained not only the thesis of the work, but also revealed the general nature of early historiography on women's roles in the Confederacy.<sup>3</sup>

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centennial, or H. E. Sterkx's more recent *Partners in Rebellion: Alabama Women in the Civil War*, communicate the image of Southern women fighting along side their men," praising their heroism. See George Rable, "'Missing in Action': Women of the Confederacy," in Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber eds., *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 173. While several books have been written on the Civil War in Alabama, few focus specifically on women or their experience in the war and those that do provide outdated analysis. Walter Fleming, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama* (Cleveland: Macmillan Company, 1911) provides an overview of the social and economic conditions during the war. H. E. Sterkx, *Partners in Rebellion: Alabama Women in the Civil War* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 1970) focuses specifically on the role that Alabama women played throughout the war. Katharine M. Jones, *Heroines of Dixie: Confederate Women Tell their Stories of the War* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1955) tells the story of Confederate women in their own words, but does not provide much analysis. It is literally a compilation of letters and excerpts from diaries. Walter Sullivan, ed., *The War the Women Lived: Female Voices from the Confederate South* (Nashville: J.S. Sanders & Company, 1995) is nothing more than a compilation of excerpts from women's diaries from across the South during the Civil War. It includes part of Kate Cumming's diary as well. See also Frank McSherry, Jr., Charles G. Waugh, and Martin Greenberg, *Civil War Women: The Civil War Seen Through Women's Eyes in Stories by Louisa May Alcott, Kate Chopin, Eudora Welty, and Other Great Women Writers* (New York: Torchstone, 1988); Malcom C. McMillan, *The Alabama Confederate Reader* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1963); Bell Irvin Wiley, *Confederate Women* (London: Greenwood Press, 1975).

<sup>3</sup> J. L. Underwood, *The Women of the Confederacy: In Which is Presented the Heroism of the Women of the Confederacy With Accounts of Their Trials During the War and the Period of Reconstruction, With Their Ultimate Triumph Over Adversity. Their Motives and Their Achievements As Told By Writers and Orators Now Preserved in Permanent Form*. (New York: Neal Publishing Company, 1906).

Confederate women in such studies fully supported the Confederacy and unquestioningly fulfilled their roles from the beginning to the end of the war. Drew Gilpin Faust has argued that such interpretations had a paternalistic aspect, for “articulate southerners, male and female, crafted an exemplary narrative about the Confederate woman’s Civil War, [that was] a story designed to ensure her loyalty and service.”<sup>4</sup> This focus should come as no surprise given the overall nature of historical scholarship up until the mid-twentieth century. Until then the history of women in general usually meant, as Catherine Clinton noted, the “biographical sketches of notable women who had made patriotic contributions to the nation.”<sup>5</sup>

The rising emphasis on social and cultural history that emerged beginning in the 1960s and 1970s opened new avenues for examining the lives of women in the Civil War. An emphasis on gender as well as race and class in the war has shed new light on the overall topic. Gender construction not only shaped the events leading up to the war, but the war and its aftermath as well, and particularly shaped the memory of women’s role in the conflict. LeeAnn Whites argued that gender factored into the outbreak of the war. Men, who identified themselves as the protectors of society, especially their families, ultimately felt that secession was the only way to ensure safety for their loved ones.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, “Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War,” in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, edited by Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992): 171-199, 172.

<sup>5</sup> Catherine Clinton ed., *Half Sisters of History: Southern Women and the American Past* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 1.

<sup>6</sup> “Gender matters as much across the racial and class lines of the social order as it does between men and women of the same race and class.” LeeAnn Whites, *Gender Matters: Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Making of the New South* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 1, 5. Rable encouraged historians to integrate gender history



Whites believed that the Civil War allowed gender and the constructed nature of the social order to become visible. The household was the basic organizational structure for gender, race and class relationships. By removing most men and leaving women to run the household the Civil War provided insight into the significant role of gender in the social order as the norms were challenged. The Southern soldier thus was forced to recognize, even “if only unconsciously, the extent to which his manhood and independence was relational – a social construction built upon the foundation of women’s service and love, out of the fabric of women’s ‘dependence.’”<sup>7</sup> Men were dependent on women for their positions in society, for example, without the cooperation of women’s subordination men could not have maintained their positions of authority.

While recent historians have begun to examine the significance of gender in the Civil War, religion, which was central to the construction of gender in the Old South, shared a similar fate as explorations of gender. Historiographically speaking, early accounts of religion in the war tended to follow in the same heroic vein as the tales of women. Reverend J. William Jones’s *Christ in the Camp* provided a template of religiously motivated tomes designed to promote the further expansion of the church in

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into the history of the Civil War. He noted that “more recently, the attention of professional historians to the social history of the Civil War in general and to women’s lives in particular has suddenly blossomed even as the battle studies and biographies continue to roll off the presses.” Rable, “Missing in Action,” 134, 146. After the war Northerners attacked Southern women for their support of the Confederacy. Nina Silber, “Intemperate Men, Spiteful Women, and Jefferson Davis,” in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, edited by Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992): 283-305, 283-84.

<sup>7</sup> Whites, *Gender Matters*, 5-6, 21.

post-war America.<sup>8</sup> Such works extolled the morality of Confederate soldiers and through them encouraged Christian living and values for readers in the post-war world. Only recently have historians begun to examine seriously the role of religion in the war. The editors of the path-breaking *Religion and the American Civil War* pointed out in their 1998 collection that “surprisingly little attention has been devoted to the war as a religious experience and event.” Hence, “Historian Maris Vinvoski’s prescient question – ‘Have social historians lost the Civil War?’ – applies with equal, and perhaps more urgent, force to historians of religion.”<sup>9</sup> As Harry Stout and Christopher Grasso also noted, “lying on the periphery of this social and cultural recovery of the Civil War is religion.”<sup>10</sup> Yet religion was central to the war and “stood at the center of the American Civil War experience.”<sup>11</sup>

Historians have recently focused more on religion as a result, studying not only its importance in the outbreak of the Civil War, but also in the daily lives of those who lived

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<sup>8</sup> Rev. J. William. Jones, *Christ in the Camp; Or, Religion in Lee’s Army. Supplemented by a Sketch of the Work in the Other Confederate Armies* (Richmond: B.F. Johnson and Company, 1888).

<sup>9</sup> Introduction to Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson, eds., *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3-18, quotation from page 3; Edwin S. Gaustad, *Religion in America: History and Historiography* (Washington D.C., 260 AHA Pamphlets, American Historical Association, 1966), 58-59; Maris A. Vinovskis, “Have Social Historians Lost the Civil War? Some Preliminary Demographic Speculations,” *Journal of American History* 76, No. 1 (Jun., 1989): 34-58.

<sup>10</sup> Harry S. Stout and Christopher Grasso, “Civil War, Religion, and Communications: The Case of Richmond,” in *Religion and the American Civil War*, edited by Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson (New York: Oxford Universtiy Press, 1998), 313-359, 313.

<sup>11</sup> Miller, Stout, Wilson, eds., *Religion and the American Civil War*, 3.

through it. Scholars such as Catherine Clinton, Drew Gilpin Faust, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, George Rable, and Sally McMillen related the centrality of religion in the everyday lives of women in the antebellum and Civil War South.<sup>12</sup> Yet as Catherine Breckus pointed out, “more than thirty years after the rise of women’s history alongside

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<sup>12</sup> Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman’s World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 95; Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); George Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Laura F. Edwards, *Scarlet Doesn’t Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 1, 5; Sally G. McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Infant Rearing* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990); Kimberly Harrison, ed., *A Maryland Bride in the Deep South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 20; Kathryn Carlisle Schwartz, *Baptist Faith in Action: The Private Writings of Maria Baker Taylor, 1813-1895* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003). Eugene Genovese argues that “Women loomed large in the proslavery ideology of the Old South.” See Genovese, “Toward a Kinder and Gentler America: The Southern Lady in the Greening of the Politics of the Old South,” in *In Joy and In Sorry: Women, Family, and Marriage in the Victorian South, 1830-1900*, edited by Carol Bleser (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 127. See also David B. Chesebrough, *Clergy Dissent in the Old South, 1830-1865* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 1, 24; Drew Gilpin Faust, ed., *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1869* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 10; John Patrick Daly, *When Slavery was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 136; Stephen V. Ash, *When the Yankees Came: Conflict and Chaos in the Occupied South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Emory M. Thomas, *The Confederate Nation: 1861-1865* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 16; “Church, Honor, and Disunionism” in Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1880s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); “Honor and Secession” in Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Yankee Saints and Southern Sinners* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 183-213; Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 122.

the feminist movement, it is still difficult to ‘find’ women in many books and articles about American religious history.”<sup>13</sup> Much remains to be done to fully understand gender and religion in the Civil War. A case study of one Southern state, Alabama, thus provides insight into this overlooked aspect of the Civil War.

While all Americans faced the catastrophic events raging around them, and in many cases turned to faith as a result, it is important to keep in mind that similar to men, women experienced the war in a gender specific manner that was defined in part by their religious beliefs. How did one subset of white, middle and upper-class, literate,

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<sup>13</sup> Catherine A Brekus, ed., Introduction to *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 1. This book, while providing an excellent coverage of various topics in American history, completely overlooks the American Civil War. See also Eugene D. Genovese, *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998); Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*; Rable, *Civil Wars*; Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson eds., *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), provides an initial example of a work on religion in the Civil War. Also see Harry S. Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006). Although several authors have focused on the role of religion in the soldiers lives and a few war journals have been published, generally speaking, women in relation to religion have been neglected. For examples of recent work on religion in the Civil War see Kenneth W. Noe, “The Fighting Chaplain of Shiloh: Isaac Tichenor’s Civil War and the Roles of Confederate Ministers,” in *Politics and Culture of the Civil War Era: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Johannsen*, edited by Kenneth W. Noe and Daniel J. McDonough (Seligs Grove, Pa., 2006): 240-64; Bruce Gourley, ““These Days are Fraught with Many Blessings’: The Clashing Worlds of Julia A. Stanford, Georgian Baptist, 1861” (Unpublished, 2004); Bruce Gourley, “Responses to Confederate Nationalism Among Baptists in Middle Georgia, 1861-1865” (Unpublished, 2004); Jennifer Newman, “God is on Our Side: The Religious Views of a Civil War Woman” (Unpublished, 2003); Sidney J. Romero, *Religion in the Rebel Ranks* (New York: University Press of America, 1983); Joseph T. Durkin, ed., *Confederate Chaplain: A War Journal of Rev. James B. Sheeran, c.ss.r. 14<sup>th</sup> Louisiana, C.S.A.* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1960); Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980); Walter Sullivan, ed., *The War the Women Lived: Female Voices from the Confederate South* (Nashville: J.S.Sanders & Company, 1995).

Protestant, Alabama women cope with the course of the war? How did they deal with the massive death toll and the separation from their loved ones? How important to the demise of the Confederacy was their discouragement and disillusionment? These and many other issues are questions that this dissertation addresses.<sup>14</sup> Analyzing one category of individuals, such as the women examined in this dissertation provides a unique perspective, just as exploring the lives of men, poor women, slaves, people of any other state in the North or South, and any other people. Focusing on the white Alabama women who left a record of their experiences in the war is an excellent way to better understand how one group of individuals experienced the war. Taking these women as a logical category of analysis does not dismiss the way that other groups of individuals experienced the war. It would be just as useful to ask the same questions of other individuals. For example, a study that examined how men coped with the war would be beneficial. In no way does this dissertation argue that there is anything uniquely “special” about this particular group of women. On the contrary, the author believes from preliminary research that these findings would probably hold true for other women across the South, if not the rest of the country as a whole. One area for further research in the

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<sup>14</sup> The women in the study represent a variety of different white women across the state of Alabama. While some were slaveholders, others were not. I use the term “middle and upper-class” when referring to the group of women studied for lack of a more concise term. They were middle and upper class in that they were often in better economic circumstances than those around them, but even if they were not, they were able to find enough free time to record their thoughts and feelings on paper. They were also educated enough to be able to do so.

future will be a comparative study of a subset of Northern women to see if they faced the same issues and if so how they dealt with them.<sup>15</sup>

The outbreak of the war threw conventional gender norms and values into chaos. Traditionally women were to defer to men who dictated not only the venues for expression open to women, but also controlled everything in society. This patriarchal society, one in which men were superior to women, led to a hierarchy in which everyone had an appropriate place in the world. Many middle and upper-class white women, with few other outlets available to them in the patriarchal, hierarchal Southern social structure, turned to writing to express their feelings. Those writings provide a wealth of insight into how women conceptualized and dealt with the war. They further used writing itself as a means of self-identification and self-realization. In describing their daily lives, and in trying to live up to the ideal image they and society had of womanhood, they revealed deep internal struggles. Faith in a higher power remained a constant in their lives as so much else around them changed. The women considered here continually turned to their religious beliefs as a source of comfort. Yet at the same time, the existence of a religious ideal simultaneously created a sense of inferiority and failure among at least some of them.

While faith provided one source of strength, the concept of Confederate identity provided another. Women did become discouraged by the hardships of the war, but that discouragement only served to strengthen their resolve to see the Confederacy emerge victorious from the conflict. The white Alabama women examined in this study became

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<sup>15</sup> For a good example of a comparative study between the North and South concerning gender see Nina Silber, *Gender and the Sectional Conflict* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

and remained ardent supporters of the Confederacy. Indeed their sense of personal identity in the Confederacy was strengthened by their connection to the events taking place on the battlefield. Those who lost loved ones in the conflict could not turn their back on the Confederacy as to do so would imply a rejection of not only their own sacrifices, but also the sacrifices of their loved ones.<sup>16</sup> Throughout the war women longed for the return of their soldiers, even though they believed that in the context of the ideal image they held of themselves, they should not feel that way. Their ideal image of self encompassed an “I” who was willing to give up anything – including their family members. Their faith dictated that they not question what was taking place around them because God controlled everything. The conviction that they should unquestioningly accept their fate because God had a plan for their lives often clashed with personal feelings, particularly with a desire to hold onto their loved ones. Tension developed accordingly as women attempted to reconcile their personal feelings and fears with the ideal they and society set for themselves as self-sacrificing women. Again, the women in this study turned to their faith to cope with the dissonance. It was not as if men did not turn to faith to face these same issues; they did. This study, however, focuses on women, not because their experience was necessarily dramatically different from that of men, but because it is essential to understand how some women dealt with the war through their faith.

By the outbreak of the war, of course, religion already occupied a prominent place in the lives of many Alabamians. When examining the position of women in the Old

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<sup>16</sup> Rod Andrew Jr., *Wade Hampton: Confederate Warrior to Southern Redemption* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), xiv.

South, two major interpretations exist. In Catherine Clinton's overstated view, women were nothing more than victims of a tragic social structure. They were not active agents in forming their personal identity but rather were forced by misogynistic white males to accept their subordinate place in society. The oppressive nature of Southern society made the Southern woman nothing more than a "slave of slaves" as the entire structure of Southern society was biased against white plantation mistresses. Planters manipulated the concept of Republican motherhood to restrict women and enhance their authority. They did so by perpetuating an idea of women as individuals whose duty it was to produce religious and educated young men who would run the country. The ideas preached from the pulpit further strengthened concepts of female subordination and submission. Compared to her Northern counterparts, the Southern plantation mistress "became a prisoner of circumstance" as planters, in fear of losing their authority, tightened controls on both slaves and women throughout the antebellum era.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Clinton argued that, "Ironically, the southern plantation mistress believed herself to be as trapped by the system as the slaves in her charge." Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 6-35, quotation from 198. Clinton believed that slavery did not create, but did perpetuate "women's subordinate status. A free woman's status within slave society was an extension of her family role; indeed, her status emphasized her dependency and inferiority. Without the oppression of *all* women, the planter class could not be assured of absolute authority." See Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 6, 9-10. She also argued that women were manipulated by concepts of myth, the ideal, and their sense of duty to create "prisoners in disguise" (109). Her study, focusing on women in households with more than 20 slaves between 1780-1835, argues that in the patriarchal, hierarchal Southern society, slavery was a system that subordinated women as well as blacks. She states, "Cotton was King, white men ruled, and both white women and slaves served the same master" (35). The plantation mistress was isolated from other members of her class simply by the physical distance between plantations and while black slaves experienced a sense of community because of shared hardships and their close living quarters, no common bond existed between white and black women. Thus, "every woman was an island, isolated unto herself and locked into the place by the stormy and unsettling seas of plantation slavery" (179). Clinton viewed her subjects as victims, stating that the



Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and many others have disagreed with Clinton. She argued that women did not oppose slavery, or advocate women's rights, but rather accepted their role in society. While some might have complained about the hardships of slavery they rarely opposed the system "that guaranteed their privileged position as ladies." Even the noted Mary Chestnut, whom some historians have claimed opposed slavery, "took slavery for granted as the foundation of her world." This taking of slavery for granted was key among the women examined here. Many of them found the institution of slavery so commonplace that it merited little mention in their diaries. While Fox-Genovese agreed with Clinton that the power of the master "constituted the lynchpin of slavery as a social system," Fox-Genovese also demonstrated that women played an active role in creating their personal identity even though they were limited in that construction. Although primarily concerned with the identity of women, Fox-Genovese illustrated the way that slavery and dominance over women "reinforced the identification" of males in the Old South. She emphasized, as does historian Stephen Berry, the ways in which the male construction of gender was completely dependent on women upholding the socially accepted gender norms for their sex, hence demonstrating the codependent nature of the male and female construction of gender identity in the Old South.<sup>18</sup>

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Southern obsession with color and gender allowed planters to "establish a hierarchy of social interaction [in which] white men wielded the power within society, and made all blacks, all slaves, and all women their victims" (221).

<sup>18</sup> Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 30-31, 48, 201, 236. There was protofeminism and protoabolitionism but there were no bonds of "sisterhood" because of racism in the South. Chestnut did point to the inherent evils of slavery (334, 359). See also Stephen Berry, *All That Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

The diaries and letters of the Alabama women examined here suggest that Clinton overemphasized the victimization of women and simultaneously removed their autonomy from them. Women in truth played an essential role in forming their own personal identity. They were not merely prisoners who were caught up in a system they opposed, but rather were active agents in that society and helped perpetuate it because they benefitted from it. The women examined in this study poured out their hearts to their diaries and revealed to them secrets that they felt were unfit to share with others. The private nature of diaries, compared to letters, provides unique insight into the personal lives of individuals. While diaries are heavily relied upon in this study, however, letters are used to supplement them. When comparing a diary with a letter one essential distinction must be made; diaries, for the most part, were private, while letters were intended for public consumption, as will be discussed in greater detail in chapter one.

Throughout the antebellum era, women in the American South conceptualized themselves in a particular way that combined the ideas of the Revolutionary Era with their strong religious convictions that dictated that they be willing to sacrifice. This conception of self, based upon ideas of resignation to what they perceived as the will of God and self sacrifice for the good of others, was put to the test as women were forced to face wartime separation from loved ones and the rising death toll all the while believing that they must perform their duty and accept these trials as a natural part of life without complaint. Yet at the same time, it was their conception of self as well as their faith and religious beliefs that ultimately allowed these Alabama women to cope with the course of the Civil War, through the conviction that no matter what happened, God was in control of everything taking place around them.

When considering socially accepted gender norms for antebellum and Civil War Alabama women, moreover, it is important to differentiate between ideas that society imposed on these women and ideas that women often created for themselves. Women internalized ideas of womanhood mandated by society. They then accepted views of womanhood and often combined these ideas with their religious convictions to form an unattainable ideal of womanhood. The process of self-revelation and self-identification involved both acceptance and internalization of ideals. Women both accepted and internalized their sense of identity through writing in their diaries, as will be discussed in detail in chapter one. Many of the women examined in this study knew that as women, they held a specific place in Southern society. Reflecting on the nature of womanhood, one Alabama diarist, Rebecca Vasser, recognized that while there were trials “common to humanity” there were also “deeper suffering[s] peculiar to my sex.” She added, “Do I not know The life of woman is full of woe?” She continued her reflection, “can I hope to meet a brighter fate than the thousands who have preceded me or than the thousands who tread with men the broad, beaten path of life?” Then, explicitly revealing her internalization of her religious beliefs she exclaimed, “Let me bear the cross that has rested on the shoulders of woman for nearly six thousand years.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Vasser appears to be taking a view of the world as being about six thousand years old in making this statement. She probably is referencing the story of the fall of man found in Genesis, in which the woman is essentially cursed with pain in childbearing in punishment for her sin of eating the forbidden fruit. Rebecca Vasser Diary, January 1, 1857, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

Examining the lives of Alabama women presents many surprising problems. There is a lack of source material available, which limits the scope to which a study can be conducted. And as George Rable has pointed out, when constructing the lives of women in the Civil War South, even for those whom ample evidence is available, there are still many missing pieces.<sup>20</sup> Historians who have tried to flesh out the lives of illiterate women have done so through reading between the lines on many sources such as wills, petitions to the government, what men wrote, and legal documents.<sup>21</sup> This dissertation thus focuses on the diaries of twelve women, as well as the letters of others.<sup>22</sup> They represent middle and upper-class white Alabama women who lived across the state. (See Appendix A – Maps, first map). Most of the diaries were examined in their manuscript form.<sup>23</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust based her book, *Mothers of Invention: Women of*

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<sup>20</sup> Rable, *Civil Wars*, 3; Susanna Delfino and Michele Gillespie eds., *Neither Lady Nor Slave: Working Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 1.

<sup>21</sup> See for example, Suzanne, Lebsack, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: Norton, 1984); Sally G. McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Infant Rearing* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990); Nancy M. Theriot, *Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-Century America: The Biosocial Construction of Femininity* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996); Elizabeth Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of Chapel Hill Press, 1998).

<sup>22</sup> All quotations throughout this dissertation retain the original spellings. Sic. has been omitted.

<sup>23</sup> In the case of all of the sources used for the dissertation I photographed each document then carefully read, took notes on, and transcribed them. Almost all of the diaries were in bound books. Some were nothing more than notes written in plantation ledgers. None of the diarists were completely consistent in their writing. It seems as though they wrote when they had the chance to do so; sometimes this was once a day and in other cases weeks and even months lapsed between diary entries.

*the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*, on a comparable number of diaries from all across the Confederacy. George Rable meanwhile examined over fifty diaries from across the South for *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism*, but depended upon four to five per state.<sup>24</sup> In comparison, the twelve used in this dissertation, supplemented by letter collections and other sources, provide a thorough foundation for specifically examining one subset of Alabama women.

Other limitations of such a study are obvious. When referring to “women” sometimes in the generic manner, this study specifically examines the writings of the middle and upper-class, or at least literate, white Alabama women. While four women appear to have owned no slaves, one lived in a family with up to eighty. The average woman’s family owned fifteen slaves. The median number of slaves was six, and the mode was one slave with a standard deviation of twenty-four. Seven families owned six or fewer, while two owned more than fifty. Four women could not be identified as slaveholders in the 1860 Census records.<sup>25</sup> There were countless other Alabama women, black and white, rich and poor, who are not considered in this study simply because of the lack of comparable sources. Such studies would be of great benefit to broadening an understanding of the Civil War. This study, however susceptible to criticism for what it fails to do, represents an attempt to gain insight into the lives of middle and upper-class literate white Alabama women during the Civil War, which is important to understanding a broader picture of the war.

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<sup>24</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*; Rable, *Civil Wars*.

<sup>25</sup> For details on the number of slaves owned by each woman see the Prologue. This information was all compiled from the 1850 and 1860 US Census records found at [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com).

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In a brief prologue, the different women examined in this study are introduced with concise biographical sketches to provide an easily accessible point of reference. The length of each biographical sketch differs depending on the material available. Other historians have only briefly explored most of the women examined in this study and many historians have completely overlooked some of the sources used here. Two are unique cases and both are the only two that have been widely examined by other historians. Elodie Todd Dawson, the half sister of Mary Todd Lincoln and a native of Kentucky, found herself living in Selma during the Civil War. Although not a native Alabamian, her experience provides a perspective of a woman living in Alabama during the war.<sup>26</sup> Kate Cumming in contrast actually spent most of the war outside of the state of Alabama, but because of her roots in the state, she is included in this study as well. The

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<sup>26</sup> She wrote, "I just pine to be once more at home surrounded by the few who love me if it is to be but for a few moments, to feel and know that they still exist and time and absence has produced no change in their love for me would indeed be a consolation, but I do not doubt them, and believe that years hence in the hearts of some my memory will be as fondly and deeply enshrined, as theirs is now and ever will be in mine, but I must cease to think of that loved spot and those dear friends are." Elodie to Dawson, Selma, October 27, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC. See also Elodie to Dawson, Marengo August 19, August 24, 1861, 1861, Elodie to Dawson, Selma July 7, 1861, July 14, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC. She longed for Kentucky to join the Confederacy and for her family to support secession. She wrote, "Sometimes I feel perfectly despairing, but there is much hopefulness in my disposition, and it after a while will rise far above in the ascendancy of my other feelings. I hope Ellick has joined the Confederate Army, and that soon an entire reaction will take place in my loved old home, and altho' late she will write her destiny with that of the glorious Southern Confederacy." Elodie to Dawson, Selma, September 22, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

other women were all residents of Alabama before the war broke out, and although some travelled, they spent the majority of the war itself in the state. They provide a broad portrayal of life for middle and upper-class literate white Alabama women during the Civil War.

Chapter one examines the various ways in which the women constructed their personal identity. Through the lens of theories of gendered writing and the parallel idea of women envisioning themselves as a subjective individual, the chapter argues that women were not merely victims of circumstance, but rather played an active role in shaping and maintaining the ideal image of womanhood.<sup>27</sup> They turned to writing to sort through their personal sense of identity. As Catherine Kerrison argued, “literacy is directly linked with power and authority.”<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth Young further pointed out that not only did the Civil War shape women’s writing, but also that their writings helped create a cultural understanding of the war women wrote about it after the war.<sup>29</sup>

The concept of womanhood was embodied in the term “lady,” which implied both whiteness and privilege. Shaping the ideal image of womanhood were many influences, including family members, religion, advice manuals, and society in general, but also

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<sup>27</sup> “Females of the southern elite began to recognize that their notion of womanhood had presumed the existence of slaves to perform menial labor and white males to provide protection and support.” Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 7.

<sup>28</sup> Catherine Kerrison, *Claiming the Pen: Women and Intellectual Life in the Early American South* (London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 4.

<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Young, *Disarming the Nation: Women’s Writing and the American Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 1-23. This book focuses on public writing though, and mostly after the Civil War. Jeanne Perreault, *Writing Selves: Contemporary Feminist Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 2.

women themselves. Daughters were expected to be obedient and self controlled and all white women were expected to marry and raise families. Women who were supposed to be self-sacrificing and patient sufferers balanced loyalty to their families with their Confederate patriotism. The women examined in this study firmly supported the patriarchal hierarchy of the Old South and did not wish to see it undermined.<sup>30</sup> Nor did they welcome the changes caused by the Civil War as a chance to throw off the oppressive chains of patriarchy, as some historians such as Catherine Clinton and Anne Firor Scott would argue.<sup>31</sup> The Civil War did change the image of the Southern Belle.

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<sup>30</sup> The women examined in this study do not appear to have been dissatisfied with their position in society. They actively defended social norms as they were rather than complaining about their place in society. See Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 7; Kerrison, *Claiming the Pen*, 6, 13. Women were well educated and expected to act properly during the antebellum years. Jane Turner Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 1865-1895* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 12-23. Barbara Welter has noted that “obedience and self-control were the two virtues on which society relied to protect young girls from those forces which it could not legislate, like falling in love.” See Welter, *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976), 4, 7. See also McCurry, “The Soldier’s Wife,” 22. Lori D. Ginzberg argued that marriage “signals female dependence.” Ginzberg, “Pernicious Heresies: Female Citizenship and Sexual Repectibility in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Women and the Unstable State in Nineteenth-Century America*, edited by Alison M. Parker and Stephanie Cole (Arlington: Texas A&M University Press, 2000): 139-161, 141. “By the 1830s, the concept of female sexual purity provided the most salient rhetoric for advancing a view of the republic as Christian, for marginalizing particular groups with the use of sexualized rhetoric and fears of sexual chaos, and for justifying limitations on suffrage generally as natural and essential.” Ginzberg, “Pernicious Heresies,” 143. See also Rable, *Civil Wars*, x, 46, 50; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 32. Rable also has noted that from the beginning, the “war strained traditional definitions of gender by testing long-established customs in the fiery furnace of social revolution. A small but significant minority of Confederate women even participated in politics after a fashion. Besides sewing banners, cooking meals for campaign barbecues, or listening to stump speeches, few women in the Old South had played a public role in the political culture though better educated women often discussed elections and candidates at home.” Rable, “Missing in Action,” 135.

<sup>31</sup> Scott, “Women’s Perspective on the Patriarchy in the 1850s,” 78-82. Southern women did not oppose the system as did slaves as is evident from the fact that when the



“The ideal of womanhood, along with traditional values of self-sacrifice and duty, had come to include a more active, outspoken, and courageous aspect,” Jane Turner Censer has argued.<sup>32</sup> But even in writing public articles and in their private diaries they did so as “defenders of the status quo in a world seemingly beset by frightening and uncontrollable change,” in George Rable’s words.<sup>33</sup> Stephanie McCurry has argued that the “protection of white womanhood was a central feature of the call to secession and subsequently to arms in the American South and also to the gendered politics of the war itself and the political history of southern women.”<sup>34</sup> Yet, at the same time, as Rable further argued, “Southern women were familiar with several models of female behavior in wartime: the Spartan mother sending her sons off to fight the relentless foe; the daughter of Israel coming to her nation’s aid at the moment of greatest peril; the Christian woman praying for the defeat of Satan’s legions.”<sup>35</sup> The white Alabama women examined in this study took it upon themselves to sort through their personal sense of identity and the approved roles available to them while at the same time reconciling their personal fears and concerns with their ideal image of womanhood. Defining oneself meant reconciling and

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Civil War broke out, they did not run to the Yankees as did their slaves, but rather supported the Confederacy.

<sup>32</sup> Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood*, 12.

<sup>33</sup> Rable, *Civil Wars*, 32, 39, 46. “Women, like slaves, were an intrinsic part of the patriarchal dream.” If they did not support it or if they either consciously or unconsciously undermined the system it would have fallen apart. See Anne Firor Scott, “Women’s Perspective on the Patriarchy in the 1850s,” in *Half Sisters of History: Southern Women and the American Past*, edited by Catherine Clinton (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994): 76-92, 77.

<sup>34</sup> McCurry, “The Soldier’s Wife,” 22.

<sup>35</sup> Rable, *Civil Wars*, 136.

reaffirming socially acceptable norms and while images of womanhood changed over the course of the war, in the end the antebellum ideal was strengthened.

Chapter two expands upon the conception of identity by demonstrating the centrality of religion to its creation. Protestant Christian faith played such a significant role in the lives of these women that it cannot be separated from their daily existence. Whether in attending church, discussing sermons, reflecting on their personal religious beliefs and the Bible, or in falling back on their religion for strength throughout the war, religion provided the main essence and foundation of these women's lives. The majority of churchgoers, according to Ann Douglas, were women, who, George Rable argued, eagerly embraced their faith.<sup>36</sup> This faith dictated that women be subordinate to men and accept their lot in life without question. Religion thus became essential to the conception of self as well as the idea of the Confederacy. The God envisioned by the women in this study played a direct role in the world. As Rable has argued, He "directly intervened in human affairs: battlefield victories were signs of divine solicitude and defeats merely momentary chastisement for a sinful but still chosen people."<sup>37</sup>

Chapter three addresses the secession crisis and the ways in which the women examined attempted to make sense of what was taking place around them. They supported secession, but also faced an internal struggle, for they feared that secession would produce war. Women prayed for peace, yet at the same time supported the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 13-14. Women "comprised the bulk of educated churchgoers and the vast majority of the dependable reading public." Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977), 8.

<sup>37</sup> George Rable, *The Confederate Republic: A Revolution Against Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 75-76.

Southern right of secession. They participated in elaborate parties to send off their soldiers, and became caught up in the excitement of the time, even while they prayed that secession would not produce war. They worried about their future and the safety of their loved ones, but at the same time concluded that they had to be willing to sacrifice them for their cause. The dissonance that followed created a deep sense of failing among some women. The more they felt that they could not live up to the ideal, set for them by themselves as well as society, the more they turned to their religious beliefs for support, comfort, and assurance.

Chapter four discusses the war itself and the ways in which the women examined in this study dealt with it. Women faced the war with trepidation. News of battles, often inaccurate, increased the concern many felt. Yet they firmly supported the Confederate cause believing that they were backed by both God and the ideals of the American Revolution. As was the case for the “diehard Rebels” examined by Jason Phillips, these two beliefs combined to strengthen Confederate identity for the women explored in this study.<sup>38</sup> They cited Confederate victories as proof of God’s blessing on their cause and in the face of defeat still turned to God, believing that defeat was all a part of God’s master plan to perfect their holy nation. They did comment negatively on the Confederate government, but while doing so they were able to separate the actions of the Richmond government from the Confederate Cause. Although they faced the physical hardships and shortages caused by the war, these women finally concluded that their sacrifice was necessary. It only served to strengthen their belief in their cause.

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<sup>38</sup> Jason Phillips, *Diehard Rebels: The Confederate Culture of Invincibility* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 116-146.

Alabama women also expanded their conception of self as the war and the creation of the Confederacy encouraged them to view themselves as part of a larger whole rather than as merely individuals within their families. Faust and Sarah Ann Rubin argue that the reality of Confederate nationalism cannot be dismissed. Southerners created a coherent conception of identity, which relied heavily upon oral as well as written means of spreading these ideas. Religion, slavery, and the ideals of the American Revolution were all fundamental to Confederate identity. The creation of a Confederate identity was a conscious endeavor that was in turn shaped by the constraints of the realities of the war.<sup>39</sup> To be sure, beginning with the Tariff crisis of 1832-33, which emerged as a result of the economic changes of the 1820s, Southerners began to perceive their economic interests diverging from those of Northerners. John McCardell has argued that the “peculiar institution came to represent for Southerners a whole ideological configuration – a plantation economy, a style of life, and a pattern of race relations – which made Southerners believe that they constituted a separate nation.”<sup>40</sup> The belief that the South’s interests were different from those of the North, however, did not equate to a conviction that secession was necessary. Many Southerners even in 1861 viewed it as a

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<sup>39</sup> Specifically, Confederate identity, as used in this context refers to the creation of a separate Confederate nation. While there were many different Confederate identities, many of the women examined in this study use the term Confederacy to refer to a separate nation state. See Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, 4, 7, 14, 18, 21-26, 44-74; Rable, *The Confederate Republic*, 62, 70; Anne Sarah Rubin, *A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861-1868* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

<sup>40</sup> John McCardell, *The Idea of a Southern Nation: Southern Nationalists and Southern Nationalism, 1830-1860* (New York: Norton, 1979), 3-9.

last resort. Once that had been decided upon, however, the women examined in this study threw their full support behind the Confederate cause with surprising speed.

After the war began, as Faust argues, “Confederate nationalism had necessarily to prescribe future behavior as well as describe present reality.”<sup>41</sup> Having a relative fighting in the Confederate army linked women to the new nation and strengthened their sense of identity with its cause. While they constantly feared for the wellbeing of their loved ones, having those loved ones fighting encouraged their loyalty for the cause, which their loved ones were sacrificing. Women sought to define their place within the Confederacy. Opposition to the Union and their active support of the war effort through aid societies strengthened their sense of Confederate nationalism.<sup>42</sup>

Many women were forced to cope with a more permanent separation as the death toll rose dramatically. Chapter five examines death in the Civil War and especially the way that the white Alabama women examined in this study coped with the loss of their loved ones through relying on their religious beliefs. They believed in heaven and held a firm conviction that the temporary nature of their sufferings on earth would be one day rewarded with eternal bliss as they were reunited with those who had gone before. Faith in an afterlife provided a source of comfort for many and allowed them to cope with the massive death toll of the Civil War. Until recently death in the Civil War was a topic that was generally relegated to a few brief pages of historical works with a broader scope and purpose. Drew Gilpin Faust’s recent book, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* shed new light on the topic, but only briefly addressed the ways in

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<sup>41</sup> Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, 28.

<sup>42</sup> Rable, “Missing in Action,” 176.

which women, particularly Southern women, coped with death in the Civil War. Civil War death caused many to question their ability to understand the world in which they lived.<sup>43</sup> Yet at the same time women turned to their religion as a source of comfort and in many ways death epitomized the highest virtue one could attain.<sup>44</sup>

Chapter six explores the end of the war and demise of the Confederacy. The conclusions of this dissertation generally fall within those of historians such as Drew Gilpin Faust and George Rable, but with one major difference. They both argue for a steady process of discouragement that led to disillusionment and ultimately contributed to the collapse of the Confederacy. A causal relationship between the discouragement some felt, however, cannot be drawn to disillusionment. Women did become discouraged, but that discouragement, rather than causing distain for the Confederacy, actually strengthened their sense of loyalty to it. They had such a vested personal interest in the success of the Confederacy that they could not turn their backs on it just as the Carolina women examined by Jacqueline Glass Campbell.<sup>45</sup> If they did so, then all of their suffering had been for naught and the deaths of their loved ones had been in vain. Some historians argue that the nascent Lost Cause sprang up out of the ashes of defeat. The

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<sup>43</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2008), 210.

<sup>44</sup> As Barbara Welty has argued, the “death of a young girl was so celebrated as a triumph of beauty and innocence that a whole ritual grew up around it....The dying maiden is so highly regarded as the quintessence of female virtue, a being literally too good for this world, that one suspects the age and the young women themselves of a certain necrophilia.” Welter, *Dimity Convictions*, 11.

<sup>45</sup> See Jacqueline Glass Campbell, *When Sherman Marched North from the Sea: Resistance on the Confederate Home Front* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

Lost Cause Mythology was a way for many Southerners to deal with their sacrifice and reconcile that sacrifice with Confederate defeat. Strains of what would become the Lost Cause Mythology were actually present in the writings of the women examined here from the beginning of the war. The ideas of the Lost Cause became a way for women to cope with and face defeat, but at the same time it was nothing more than a continuation of the Confederate Nationalism that had developed during the war itself.<sup>46</sup>

Overall, this study explores the lives of a specific subset of middle and upper-class white, literate, Alabama women during the Civil War. Historians agree on the importance of expanding the scholarly examination of the Civil War beyond the traditional focus on battles and leaders, but much work remains to be done if we are to fully understand the magnitude of the Civil War's effect on the lives of individuals. While historians have recently begun recognizing the significance of religion and women in the war, few examine the juncture of the two. Thus, this study is intended ultimately as an examination of women, and religion in Civil War Alabama. It does not claim to make any generalizations for women in other states throughout the Confederacy, but I believe that the conclusions I draw concerning religion and identity for Alabama women will

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<sup>46</sup> Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980); Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003); Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001); Gary W. Gallagher, *Lee and His Generals in War and Memory* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998); Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan, eds., *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

hold true for middle and upper-class, white, literate, Protestant, women across the South during the Civil War. Faith was a central element in the lives of the Alabama women examined here. It provided a mainstay and a pillar of support for them as they struggled to cope with devastation and loss.



## **Prologue: Introduction to the Women in this Study**

The diaries of twelve women and letters of others provide the basis for many of the arguments made in this dissertation. These diaries and letters represent middle and upper-class, literate, white, Protestant Alabama women who lived across the state. (See Appendix A, first map). The heavy reliance on their writings necessitates a short introduction to these women. Brief biographical sketches are provided to give a contextual reference for each woman discussed. The length of each biography is based on the available sources on each woman.

### **Brandon, Zillah Haynie**

Born in the old Pendleton District of South Carolina on April 28, 1801, Zillah Haynie Brandon moved to Georgia, where she met and married Francis Lawson Brandon in 1822. In 1850 she lived in Seminole Georgia and had seven children. By 1851 they had moved to Gaylesville in Cherokee County, Alabama, where Francis Brandon became a prosperous mill owner. By 1860 the family owned four slaves and had numerous other employees living in their household. Four years after their move, in 1855, Zillah began writing about her life. She spent the first year writing about her childhood and early life, thus writing more of a memoir than a diary, but by 1856 she had completed relating her life up to that year and began to keep an actual diary. Zillah and Francis had a total of nine children who reached adulthood. Four of their five sons fought in the Confederate States Army and two of them were killed. Zillah wrote with the clear intention of having

her children read what she had written. She organized her diary, which included four bound volumes that looked like ledger books, into chronological chapters and opened most with “My dear children” before she proceeded to recount what took place. She detailed not only her strong Methodist religious beliefs but also her struggles to define herself and cope with the deaths of her children and loved ones. She also recounted in vivid detail the horrors of war including the Union occupation of Gaylesville. She poured out praise for the Confederate cause and the heroism of the soldiers, especially as the end of the war approached.<sup>1</sup>

### **Corry, Eliza**

Eliza MacDonald Harris, born Feb 22, 1837, in Cherokee Alabama (d. July 3, 1919) spent most of the war in Roanoke. On May 21, 1857 she married Robert Corry, born March 19, 1828 in Dekalb County Georgia (d. Dec 1913). By 1860 he was a farmer

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<sup>1</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon, SPR262, Alabama Department of Archives and History (hereafter cited as ADAH); 1850 US Census, Seminole, Chattooga, Georgia, found in ancestry.com, [http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1850usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-d&gsfn=zillah+&gsln=brandon+&rg\\_81004010\\_\\_date=1801&msbpn=43&msbpn\\_\\_ftp=South+Carolina%2c+USA&msrpn=3&msrpn\\_\\_ftp=Alabama%2c+USA&rs\\_81004010\\_\\_date=10&ne=2&pcat=35&fh=0&h=18545172&recoff=1+2](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1850usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-d&gsfn=zillah+&gsln=brandon+&rg_81004010__date=1801&msbpn=43&msbpn__ftp=South+Carolina%2c+USA&msrpn=3&msrpn__ftp=Alabama%2c+USA&rs_81004010__date=10&ne=2&pcat=35&fh=0&h=18545172&recoff=1+2) (accessed on December 1, 2008). In the 1860 Census Francis L Brandon was listed as a farmer with a personal value of \$3000 and property value of \$3300. See 1860 US Census, Cherokee, Alabama, found in ancestry.com, [http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=1860slaveschedules&f12=2801+536&hid=hh&dt=household&hco=1000](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-d&gsln=brandon+&rg_81004010__date=1801&msbpn=43&msbpn__ftp=South+Carolina%2c+USA&msrpn=3&msrpn__ftp=Alabama%2c+USA&rs_81004010__date=10&ne=2&pcat=35&fh=0&h=17729750&recoff=3) (accessed on December 1, 2008).

with \$8,000 worth of property, \$11,200 in personal property, and ten slaves. Between 1858 and 1876 they had nine children. During the war her husband served in the Confederate army. Many of the letters in this collection are from Robert to Eliza, but there are also some of her letters to him. She wrote of how much she missed him as well as the hardships of the war and her loneliness and the challenges of trying to raise their three children, born between 1858 and 1861, without him at home all the time. Robert Corry survived the war and in the 1870 Census was listed as a civil engineer.<sup>2</sup>

### **Cumming, Kate**

The celebrated Kate Cumming, born in Edinburg, Scotland in 1835, moved to Montreal, Canada and then to Mobile, Alabama with her family. In 1862 she volunteered to work as a nurse in the Confederate hospitals of the Army of Tennessee until the end of the war. In 1866 she wrote about her experiences during the war, *A Journal of Hospital Life in the Confederate Army of Tennessee from the Battle of Shiloh to the End of the War: With sketches of Life and Character, and Brief Notices of Current Events During*

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<sup>2</sup> Eliza Corry Letters, Robert E. Corry Confederate Collection, 1857-1913, RG84, Auburn University Archives and Manuscripts, Special Collections, Auburn Alabama (hereafter cited as AU); 1860 US Census, Western Division, Walker, Alabama, found at ancestry.com, <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=1860usfedcenancestry&indiv=try&h=12767239> (accessed on December 2, 2008); 1860 US Census, Western Division, Walker, Alabama, Slave Schedule, found at ancestry.com, <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=1860slaveschedules&f12=3601+812&hid=hh&dt=household&hco=1000> (accessed on December 2, 2008); 1870 US Census, Pollard, Escambia, AL, found in ancestry.com, <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1870usfedcen&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gsfn=Eliza&gsln=Corry&ne=2&gss=angs-d&pcat=35&fh=0&h=13131714&recoff=1+2> (accessed on December 1, 2008).

*that Period*. Throughout her life she was active in the Episcopal Church. She died in Birmingham, Alabama on June 5, 1909.<sup>3</sup>

### **Davis, Sarah Lowe**

Sarah Lowe Davis, born in 1845 (d.1937), lived in Huntsville and attended Huntsville Female College. Her family lived in Russell where her father was a merchant who owned six slaves. Sarah kept a diary in a bound volume sporadically from January of 1861 until September of 1862. Most of the diary related incidents from school and her lessons, but she also wrote about the war as well as the effects of the conflict. She defined herself in terms of her studies more than her religious beliefs, but they did play a role in her life. Although she kept an emotional distance from her diary, and rarely recorded her feelings, she still used it as a way to sort through her personal identity and life.<sup>4</sup>

### **Dawson, Elodie Todd**

Elodie Beck Todd, born on April 1, 1841 (d.1881), was the half sister of Mary Todd Lincoln. Elodie was visiting her sister Martha who had married and lived in Selma,

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<sup>3</sup> Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life in the Confederate Army of Tennessee from the Battle of Shiloh to the End of the War with Sketches of Life and Character, and Brief Notices of Current Events During that Period* (Louisville: John P. Morton, 1866).

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Lowe Davis, SPR113, Alabama Department of Archives and History (hereafter cited as ADAH); 1860 US Census, Southern Division, Russell, Alabama, found in ancestry.com, [http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-d&gsfn=sarah+lowe&gsln=davis&rg\\_81004010\\_\\_date=1845&msrpn=3&msrpn\\_\\_ftp=Alabama%2c+USA&dbOnly=\\_F000279F|\\_F000279F\\_x&rs\\_81004010\\_\\_date=10&ne=2&pcat=35&fh=0&h=17658569&recoff=1+2+3](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-d&gsfn=sarah+lowe&gsln=davis&rg_81004010__date=1845&msrpn=3&msrpn__ftp=Alabama%2c+USA&dbOnly=_F000279F|_F000279F_x&rs_81004010__date=10&ne=2&pcat=35&fh=0&h=17658569&recoff=1+2+3) (accessed on December 1, 2008); 1860 US Census, Southern Division, Russell, Alabama, Slave Schedule, found at ancestry.com, <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=1860slaveschedules&f12=3501+413&hid=hh&dt=household&hco=1000> (accessed December 2, 2008).

Alabama, when the war broke out. It was during this visit that she attended Jefferson Davis's inauguration. During the war, she lived in Selma, Alabama, and corresponded with Nathaniel (1829-1895) a Selma lawyer and politician who served as a Confederate officer in the 4<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment between 1861 and 1862. He had already lost two wives and had two daughters, one from each wife. By 1860 he was a prosperous lawyer who had \$40,000 worth of property and \$120,000 in personal property. It appears as though he owned up to 80 slaves.<sup>5</sup> They married in 1863. He then served as a member of the Alabama legislature between 1863 and 1865. Her early letters detail her love for him and her desire for him to serve the Confederacy well, while at the same time fighting her desire to be with him. She recounted her struggles with her family as well. Her half sister was married to Abraham Lincoln, president of the United States of America, while she was in love with a Confederate officer. This obviously caused tension. At one point she stated that she would renounce her family members who were loyal to the Union. She remained a loyal Kentuckian and it broke her heart that Kentucky remained in the Union.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The 1860 US Census, Selma, Dallas, Alabama, Slave Schedule, found at <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=1860slaveschedules&f12=2901+185&hid=hh&dt=household&hco=1000> (accessed on December 2, 2008) recorded Dawson as owning 9 slaves. The 1860 US Census, Old Town, Dallas, Alabama, Slave Schedules <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=1860slaveschedules&f12=2900+730&hid=hh&dt=household&hco=1000> (accessed on December 2, 2008) recorded Dawson as owning 71 slaves. It seems probable that he owned slaves in two different locations and owned a total of between 71 and 80 slaves.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Berry, *All That Makes A Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 200. Mary and Elodie were only half-sisters, but that is a term we use, not them. They considered themselves part of one family. See Stephen Berry, *House of Abraham: Lincoln and the Todds, A Family Divided by War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007), 24. Berry actually argues that the

## Espy, Sarah Rousseau

Born on December 7, 1815 near Madison in Morgan County Georgia, Sarah Rodgers Rousseau became the second wife of Thomas Espy in 1836. They moved from Cass County, Georgia, in 1849 to Cherokee County, Alabama. Thomas named the area Dublin and established himself as a respected businessman. Sarah lived in Dublin until November of 1896, when she moved to Albertville. She died two years later on March 8, 1898. Sarah and Thomas had seven children. Sarah was an active member at the Missionary Baptist Church for over 40 years. She kept her diary from 1859 until 1868 and she discussed in depth her religious beliefs and her struggles throughout the war. Her family owned two slaves before emancipation. She was listed as a seamstress while her husband was recorded as a farmer.<sup>7</sup>

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Todd family provided a metaphor for the entire nation. See Berry, *House of Abraham*, ix-xiii, 58. Nathaniel Dawson helped organized the Magnolia Cadets from Selma, which then became part of the 4<sup>th</sup> Alabama. See Berry, *All That Makes A Man*, 200-9; Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, #210, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, North Carolina (hereafter cited as SHC-UNC). For a more in depth discussion of Lincoln's early life see, Douglass Wilson, *Honor's Voice: The Transformation of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998). For a discussion of Lincoln's family and relations with the Todd family see Berry, *House of Abraham*; 1860 US Census, Selma, Dallas, Alabama, found in ancestry.com, [http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gsfn=nathaniel+&gsln=dawson&msrpn\\_\\_ftp=alabama&dbOnly=\\_F000279F|\\_F000279F\\_x&ne=2&pcat=CEN\\_1860&fh=0&h=16708006&recoff=1+4](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gsfn=nathaniel+&gsln=dawson&msrpn__ftp=alabama&dbOnly=_F000279F|_F000279F_x&ne=2&pcat=CEN_1860&fh=0&h=16708006&recoff=1+4) (accessed December 2, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, SPR2, Alabama Department of Archives and History (hereafter cited as ADAH); 1860 US Census, District 3, Cherokee, Alabama, found in ancestry.com, [http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gsfn=sarah+rogers+rousseau&gsln=espy&rg\\_81004010\\_\\_date=1815&msrpn=3&msrpn\\_\\_ftp=Alabama%2c+USA&dbOnly=\\_F000279F|\\_F000279F\\_x&rs\\_81004010\\_\\_date=](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gsfn=sarah+rogers+rousseau&gsln=espy&rg_81004010__date=1815&msrpn=3&msrpn__ftp=Alabama%2c+USA&dbOnly=_F000279F|_F000279F_x&rs_81004010__date=)

### **Gillis, Margaret Josephine Miles**

Born in Lowndes County, on December 23, 1839, Margaret Miles married Reverend Neil Gillis in 1863. He served as a Methodist Episcopal South minister in the Alabama Conference from 1855-1903. Margaret kept a diary from 1860 until 1868. She recorded in great detail her struggles with dealing with the death of her children and her resulting reliance on her religious beliefs. After the war she briefly taught school and died in 1868, ten days after the birth of her second son.<sup>8</sup>

### **Hunter, Carrie**

Caroline “Carrie” Elizabeth Hunter, born in 1839 in Georgia, lived in Tuskegee, and kept an extensive diary during and after the Civil War. In 1860 her father was a prosperous physician who owned ten slaves. Hunter ardently supported the Confederacy and recounted in detail events such as the presentation of a banner to the soldiers of Tuskegee and her feelings about the Confederacy. She had five siblings and two of her brothers served in the Confederate Army. One, James, died in 1863. The other brother, Hope, survived the war. She struggled to define herself as a young Southern lady amidst the turmoil of the Civil War and recounted her religious beliefs in detail. After the war, in

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5&ne=2&pcat=35&fh=0&h=17728124&recoff=1+2+3 (accessed on December 1, 2008); 1860 US Census, District 3, Cherokee, Alabama, Slave Schedule, found in ancestry.com, <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=1860slaveschedules&f12=2801+576&hid=hh&dt=household&hco=1000> (accessed on December 2, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, SPR5, Alabama Department of Archives and History (hereafter cited as ADAH). It was not possible to locate conclusively any census information on Gillis.

October 1867, Carrie married James Edward Cobb of Thomaston Georgia, whom she also discussed in the diary.<sup>9</sup>

**Jones, Martha M.**

This collection of letters between Martha M. Jones of Tuscaloosa County and her husband illustrate how a husband and wife dealt with physical separation both before and during the war. By the outbreak of the Civil War Martha was used to having her husband absent. In 1860, for example, he had travelled in Texas looking at land. Her husband was a farmer. In 1860 they had a one-year old child and one female slave.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, North Carolina (hereafter cited as SHC-UNC). This appears to be her father. J. W. Hunter was listed as a physician with a property value of \$4000 and a personal property value of \$1700. 1860 US Census, Tuskegee, Macon, Alabama, found in ancestry.com, [http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-d&gsfn=carrie&gsln=hunter&rg\\_81004010\\_\\_date=1839&msrpn=3&msrpn\\_\\_ftp=Alabama%2c+USA&dbOnly=\\_F000279F|\\_F000279F\\_x&rs\\_81004010\\_\\_date=2&ne=2&pcat=35&fh=0&h=11796362&recoff=1+3](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-d&gsfn=carrie&gsln=hunter&rg_81004010__date=1839&msrpn=3&msrpn__ftp=Alabama%2c+USA&dbOnly=_F000279F|_F000279F_x&rs_81004010__date=2&ne=2&pcat=35&fh=0&h=11796362&recoff=1+3) (accessed on December 1, 2008); 1860 US Census, Southern Division, Macon, Alabama, Slave Schedule, found at ancestry.com, <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=1860slaveschedules&f12=3202+068&hid=hh&dt=household&hco=1000> (accessed on December 2, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Martha M. Jones Papers, Rare Book, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Nicholas Perkins Library, Duke University (hereafter cited as Duke). This appears to be the correct Jones in the Census records, but there is a possibility that it is not. See 1860 US Census, Western Division, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, found at ancestry.com, [http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-d&gsfn=m&gsln=jones&msrpn=2936&msrpn\\_\\_ftp=Tuscaloosa+County%2c+Alabama%2c+USA&dbOnly=\\_F000279F|\\_F000279F\\_x&ne=2&pcat=35&fh=4&h=12745616&recoff=1+3](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-d&gsfn=m&gsln=jones&msrpn=2936&msrpn__ftp=Tuscaloosa+County%2c+Alabama%2c+USA&dbOnly=_F000279F|_F000279F_x&ne=2&pcat=35&fh=4&h=12745616&recoff=1+3) (accessed on December 1, 2008); 1860 US Census, Western Division, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, Slave Schedule, found in ancestry.com, <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi->



### **Mercur, Anna**

Anna Mercur lived with her husband, Macklon, in Towanda, Pennsylvania, when the war broke out. She had several sisters who lived in the South, including Lizzie Buford (Mrs. T. Buford) of Eufaula and Clayton, Alabama, and Caro, who operated a boarding school in Eufaula. Helen B. had at least two daughters, Lizzie, a teacher, and Helen. C. A. Swift had at least one daughter, Helen W. Swift, who attended Caro's boarding school. The collection includes twelve letters, August 1860-July 1861, received by Anna Mercur from her sisters, other relatives, and friends.<sup>11</sup>

### **Otey, Octavia Wyche**

Octavia Aurelia James Wyche, born in Alabama in 1832, married William Madison Otey, a merchant and cotton planter, in 1849 at the age of seventeen. After their marriage, they resided on their plantation, Green Lawn, outside Meridianville in Madison County. They had six children. In 1860, although the census noted William Otey as a farmer with \$25,000 worth of land and \$58,600 in personal property, but it only recorded him as owning one male slave. After her husband died in June 1865, Octavia continued to operate the plantation. She intermittently recorded her life in her diaries between 1849 and 1888. Her diary from 1864 recounted the hardships of the war, including the presence

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[bin/sse.dll?db=1860slaveschedules&f12=3601+305&hid=hh&dt=household&hco=1000](http://bin/sse.dll?db=1860slaveschedules&f12=3601+305&hid=hh&dt=household&hco=1000) (accessed on December 1, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Anna Mercur Papers #751-z, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (hereafter cited as SHC-UNC).

of the Union army. She notably relied on her religious beliefs to sustain her throughout her life.<sup>12</sup>

### **Rhodes, Elizabeth Daniel**

Born on 3 August 1834 near Greenville, Georgia, she moved with her family to Tuskegee in 1840. On 28 April 1852, at the age of seventeen, she married Chauncey Rhodes. After a failed attempt at running a general store, he became a prosperous bank teller in Eufaula, who owned one slave by 1860. Two of her children had died by the time she began her diary in 1858. She kept it faithfully until 1864, and then sporadically until 1900. She struggled to cope with the death of her children before the war and the death of others as the Civil War progressed. She particularly details her religious beliefs, which provided a mainstay of support for her throughout her life.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, North Carolina (hereafter cited as SHC-UNC); 1860 US Census, District 1, Madison, Alabama, Slave Schedule, found at <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=1860slaveschedules&f12=3003+446&hid=hh&dt=household&hco=1000> (accessed on December 1, 2008); 1860 US Census, District 1, Madison, Alabama, found in [ancestry.com](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-d&gsfn=octavia&gsln=otey&msrpn=1851&msrpn__ftp=Madison+County%2c+Alabama%2c+USA&dbOnly=_F000279F_F000279F_x&ne=2&pcat=35&fh=3&h=11878672&recoff=2), [http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-d&gsfn=octavia&gsln=otey&msrpn=1851&msrpn\\_\\_ftp=Madison+County%2c+Alabama%2c+USA&dbOnly=\\_F000279F\\_F000279F\\_x&ne=2&pcat=35&fh=3&h=11878672&recoff=2](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-d&gsfn=octavia&gsln=otey&msrpn=1851&msrpn__ftp=Madison+County%2c+Alabama%2c+USA&dbOnly=_F000279F_F000279F_x&ne=2&pcat=35&fh=3&h=11878672&recoff=2) (accessed on December 1, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diaries vol. 1-5. Transcripts in the author's possession. Vol. 1-3 at the Auburn University Library. Vol. 1-5 at the Carnegie Library in Eufaula, Alabama. Original hand written diaries in the possession of the Shorter Mansion and Museum, Eufaula Alabama; 1860 US Census, Slave Schedule, Eastern Division, Barbour, Alabama, found in [ancestry.com](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=1860slaveschedules&f12=2700+967&hid=hh&dt=household&hco=1000), <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=1860slaveschedules&f12=2700+967&hid=hh&dt=household&hco=1000> (accessed on December 1, 2008).

## **Strudwick, Anne**

Anne Strudwick, born in 1842 in Alabama, lived with her family in Demopolis, Marengo County. Her father appears to have died by 1860 because her mother, Elizabeth, was listed as being the head of the household with a land value of \$16,000 and a personal property value of \$56,000. Elizabeth also owned 52 slaves. Her oldest son was listed as a planter. Anne was one of eight children, and she kept a diary from 1862-1864. She recounted the daily occurrences of her life. She defined herself in her diary in terms of her lessons and reading, her sewing and knitting, and her church attendance. She did not write extensively about her personal struggles or feelings, although she did relate her worries that she would become a “heathen” because she failed to attend church on a regular basis. She struggled to become a better person and when unable to attend church she turned her attention to reading the Bible and trying to be a better person to ease her fears about her lack of religious fervor and commitment.<sup>14</sup>

## **Thompson, M. E.**

Mrs. Thompson, who only is referred to as M. E. Thompson, wrote letters from Marion throughout the war to her two sons who served in the Confederate army. Born

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<sup>14</sup> Annie Strudwick Diary and Letter # 1838, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, North Carolina (hereafter cited as SHC-UNC); 1860 US Census, Western Division, Marengo, Alabama, found in ancestry.com, [http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-d&gsfn=anne&gsln=strudwick&msrpn=1883&msrpn\\_\\_ftp=Marengo+County%2c+Alabama%2c+USA&dbOnly=\\_F000279F|\\_F000279F\\_x&ne=2&pcat=35&fh=1&h=11891066&recoff=2](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-d&gsfn=anne&gsln=strudwick&msrpn=1883&msrpn__ftp=Marengo+County%2c+Alabama%2c+USA&dbOnly=_F000279F|_F000279F_x&ne=2&pcat=35&fh=1&h=11891066&recoff=2) (accessed on December 1, 2008); 1860 US Census, Western Division, Marengo, Alabama, Slave Schedule, found at ancestry.com, <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=1860slaveschedules&f12=3100+771&hid=hh&dt=household&hco=1000> (accessed on December 1, 2008).

around 1807 she married and had a total of five living children by 1860 and owned two slaves. By the end of 1861 she was a widow. She wrote of her concern for her sons' salvation and was concerned about their religious beliefs, especially that they not turn their back on their religion as a result of the negative influences of army life and the war.<sup>15</sup>

### **Treadwell, Mattie C.**

Mattie C. Treadwell, born around 1840, married Dr. E. W. Treadwell and lived in Cherokee County, Alabama. The two corresponded during the war while E. W. Treadwell served in the Confederate Army with the 19th Alabama Volunteers, probably serving as a medical officer. They owned one slave in 1860.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Rare Book, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Nicholas Perkins Library, Duke University (hereafter cited as Duke). This appears to be her, but there is a possibility that it is another M. E. Thompson. See, 1860 US Census, Precinct 10, Butler, Alabama, Slave Schedule, found at <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=1860slaveschedules&f12=2703+057&hid=hh&dt=household&hco=1000> (accessed on December 1, 2008); 1860 US Census, Precinct 10, Butler, Alabama, found at [http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-d&gsfn=M&gsln=Thompson+&msrpn=3&msrpn\\_\\_ftp=Alabama%2c+USA&dbOnly=\\_F000279F|\\_F000279F\\_x&ne=2&pcat=35&fh=4&h=12805159&recoff=1+2](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-d&gsfn=M&gsln=Thompson+&msrpn=3&msrpn__ftp=Alabama%2c+USA&dbOnly=_F000279F|_F000279F_x&ne=2&pcat=35&fh=4&h=12805159&recoff=1+2) (accessed on December 1, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> E. W. Treadwell Papers, 1854-1864, Rare Book, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Nicholas Perkins Library, Duke University (hereafter cited as Duke). This appears to be the Treadwell family. 1860 US Census, Ranges 5, 6, and 7, Calhoun, Alabama, Slave Schedule, found at <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=1860slaveschedules&f12=2703+675&hid=hh&dt=household&hco=1000> (accessed on December 1, 2008); 1860 US Census, Ranges 5, 6, and 7, Calhoun, Alabama, found at [http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&rank=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gsfn=mattie&gsln=treadwell&msrpn=572&msrpn\\_\\_ftp=Cherokee+County%2c+Alabama%2c+USA&dbOnly=\\_F000279F|\\_F000279F\\_x&ne=2&gss=angs-](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&rank=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gsfn=mattie&gsln=treadwell&msrpn=572&msrpn__ftp=Cherokee+County%2c+Alabama%2c+USA&dbOnly=_F000279F|_F000279F_x&ne=2&gss=angs-)

## **Vasser, Rebecca**

Beginning her diary in 1856, Athens resident Rebecca Vasser worried that she would not accurately record the events around her. She struggled with the idea of recounting her feelings for fear of what people would think of her. She detailed her struggle to become the woman that she felt society and her religious beliefs dictated. She especially struggled with her love for a man she refers to only as “F.” Her parents did not want her to marry him because of a minor disagreement between one of his sisters and one of hers, which grew into an assault on the honor of Rebecca’s family. She struggled to deal with wanting to simply throw away what she sees as the pettiness of the concept of the Southern code of honor that prevented her from marrying the man she loved.<sup>17</sup>

## **Waring, Mary**

Mary Waring, born around 1847, and one of six children, lived in Mobile with her family. Although her father, Moses was born in Connecticut and her mother, Ellen was born in Washington DC. By 1860 the family owned up to seventeen slaves. Moses was a merchant with \$200,000 worth of property and \$30,000 worth of personal property in 1860. Mary Waring kept a diary in a bound volume sporadically from July 1863 to April 1865. Typed transcripts of her diary were closely checked with the originals. Her stated

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d&pcat=35&fh=13&h=12969327&recoff=3&fsk=BEEeEuMIgAA8wABbQQ-61-&bsk=&pgoff= (accessed on December 1, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, Rare Book, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Nicholas Perkins Library, Duke University (hereafter cited as Duke); 1860 US Census, Kingston, Autauga, Alabama, found at ancestry.com, [http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-d&gsfn=rebecca+&gsln=vasser&msrpn=3&msrpn\\_\\_ftp=Alabama%2c+USA&dbOnly=\\_F000279F|\\_F000279F\\_x&ne=2&pcat=35&fh=0&h=10392684&recoff=1+2](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-d&gsfn=rebecca+&gsln=vasser&msrpn=3&msrpn__ftp=Alabama%2c+USA&dbOnly=_F000279F|_F000279F_x&ne=2&pcat=35&fh=0&h=10392684&recoff=1+2) (accessed on December 1, 2008).

purpose in keeping her diary was to improve her communication skills, but she also recounted many of the events taking place around her, including the evacuation of Mobile in 1865.<sup>18</sup>

### **Weekly, Eliza Bedford**

Eliza Bedford Weakley, the wife of S. D. Weakley, lived in Florence, Lauderdale County. Born around 1816, she married and Samuel who owned thirteen slaves and was listed in the 1860 census as being in manufacturing with a property value of \$37,000, and \$30,140 worth of personal property. They had five children by the outbreak of the war.

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<sup>18</sup> Mary Warring Diary, SPR30, Alabama Department of Archives and History (hereafter cited as ADAH); Mary Warring Diary was published as *Miss Warring's Journal 1863 and 1865: Being the Diary of Miss Mary Waring of Mobile, during the final days of the War Between the States*, Thad Holt, Jr., ed. (Mobile: TheWyvern Press of S F E Inc. Chicago, Graphics, Inc., 1964). There were two records of this family, one in Ward 2 and one in Ward 4, but given the fact that Moses was a merchant means that he could have owned property in both places and might have been interviewed by two different census takers. See 1860 US Census, Mobile Ward 2, Mobile, Alabama, found at ancestry.com, [http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-d&gsfn=mary&gsln=waring&msrpn=2043&msrpn\\_\\_ftp=Mobile+County%2c+Alabama%2c+USA&dbOnly=\\_F000279F|\\_F000279F\\_x&ne=2&pcat=35&fh=0&h=11954947&recoff=1+2](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-d&gsfn=mary&gsln=waring&msrpn=2043&msrpn__ftp=Mobile+County%2c+Alabama%2c+USA&dbOnly=_F000279F|_F000279F_x&ne=2&pcat=35&fh=0&h=11954947&recoff=1+2) (accessed on December 1, 2008); 1860 US Census, Mobile Ward 4, Mobile, Alabama, found at ancestry.com, [http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-d&gsfn=mary&gsln=waring&msrpn=2043&msrpn\\_\\_ftp=Mobile+County%2c+Alabama%2c+USA&dbOnly=\\_F000279F|\\_F000279F\\_x&ne=2&pcat=35&fh=1&h=11964117&recoff=1+2](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-d&gsfn=mary&gsln=waring&msrpn=2043&msrpn__ftp=Mobile+County%2c+Alabama%2c+USA&dbOnly=_F000279F|_F000279F_x&ne=2&pcat=35&fh=1&h=11964117&recoff=1+2) (accessed on December 1, 2008); 1860 US Census, Mobile City Ward 2, Mobile, Alabama, Slave Schedule, found in ancestroy.com, <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=1860slaveschedules&f12=3300+746&hid=hh&dt=household&hco=1000> (accessed on December 1, 2008); 1860 US Census, Mobile City Ward 4, Mobile, Alabama, Slave Schedule, found at ancestry.com, <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=1860slaveschedules&f12=3301+023&hid=hh&dt=household&hco=1000> (accessed on December 1, 2008).

Eliza kept a brief diary in 1864 and 1865, in which she recorded little more than cursory notes of daily events and family matters.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Eliza Bedford Weakley Papers #1605, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, North Carolina (hereafter cited as SHC-UNC); 1860 US Census, Florence, Lauderdale, Alabama, found at ancestry.com, [http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-d&gsfn=eliza&gsln=weekly&msrpn=1696&msrpn\\_\\_ftp=Lauderdale+County%2c+Alabama%2c+USA&dbOnly=\\_F000279F|\\_F000279F\\_x&ne=2&pcat=35&fh=4&h=11379292&recoff=1+3](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1860usfedcenancestry&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-d&gsfn=eliza&gsln=weekly&msrpn=1696&msrpn__ftp=Lauderdale+County%2c+Alabama%2c+USA&dbOnly=_F000279F|_F000279F_x&ne=2&pcat=35&fh=4&h=11379292&recoff=1+3) (accessed on December 1, 2008); 1860 US Census, Florence, Lauderdale, Alabama, Slave Schedule, found at ancestry.com, <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=1860slaveschedules&f12=3101+594&hid=hh&dt=household&hco=1000> (accessed on December 1, 2008).

## **Chapter 1 “The Attainment of a Virtuous and Christian Life Ought to be Our Highest Aim, and the Only Sure Way to Happiness:” Writing, Womanhood, and the Construction of Self Identity**

In their diaries and letters the Alabama women examined in this study revealed to a great extent their personal identities. Socially imposed gendered norms did influence their images of womanhood. A hierarchically structured patriarchal society did not, however, completely force the construct of the Southern lady on women. Women themselves played an important active role in creating, shaping, and perpetuating the image of a woman’s place in society, albeit within the specific context of the Old South. While Catherine Clinton was correct to point out that, “myth, ideal, and duty weighed heavily on plantation women,” they were not merely “prisoners in disguise.”<sup>1</sup>

Women, moreover, not only recorded their ideas of self, but also discussed the process of writing itself. Indeed, before their conceptions of womanhood can be fully examined in this chapter the ways in which women of the Old South viewed diary keeping must be considered. Women revealed much about themselves and their image of womanhood in their diaries. They conceptualized themselves and defined what they believed it meant to be a proper Southern woman. In the construction of womanhood, moreover, a difference becomes evident between the older generation of women and the

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman’s World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 109.



younger one. While marriage and motherhood was expected of all women, perceptions of marriage and motherhood differed depending on the age of the diarist.<sup>2</sup> Women additionally held concrete concepts of the requirements of womanhood, which they recorded in great detail in their diaries. Their internalized religious beliefs and socially acceptable norms conformed to the ideal image that they partially set for themselves, yet they also struggled, believing that they constantly failed to live up to that ideal. When they did fail, they turned to their faith and religious beliefs for comfort and assurance.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge: And the Discourse on Language*, A.M. Sheridan Smith, trans. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 48-49, 107-11, 119-20, 182-84, 216; Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York: Norton, 1994), 214-215. An excellent example of the use of language in the construction of identity in the antebellum South can be found in Bertram Wyatt-Brown's discussion of the language of honor and dueling. Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1890s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 31-55. See also Kate Cumming, May 1, 1864, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>3</sup> Nancy M. Theriot, argues that in the nineteenth-century "women were active agents in forming and reforming feminine identity and female body experience within historically specific material and discursive conditions." See her *Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-Century America: The Biosocial Construction of Femininity* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 2. See also Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 163. Jane Turner Censer noted that mothers played an important role in teaching their daughters to fill their roles as wives and mothers. See her *North Carolina Planters and their Children, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 52, 149. Creating the concept of womanhood did not take place in a vacuum, but rather was heavily influenced by the entire world view of the Old South, which must be understood not only in terms of honor, as discussed by Bertram Wyatt-Brown, an honor that placed utmost importance on public perception, but also in light of the value placed upon religious beliefs. See Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture*.

While there was a long literary tradition among white Southern women dating from the colonial era, the paternalistic hierarchal nature of Southern society left most women few means through which they could express their thoughts and feelings publicly.<sup>4</sup> Hence, when women sought an outlet for expression and reflection, some turned to diaries because of their private and acceptable nature. All women were not literate enough to keep journals of course; in 1850, for example, the literacy rate for white women was approximately fifty percent. Not all literate women kept diaries either. Moreover, the ability to keep a diary required not only literacy, but also the availability of enough free time to be able to reflect on and record daily occurrences. The views expressed in diaries are also naturally limited to women whose diaries and writings have survived.<sup>5</sup> They were not only able to write, but also believed writing and reading was important.

Many of the women examined in this study spent a great deal of time reading and writing about what they read in their diaries.<sup>6</sup> Eulogizing her daughter Brandon noted that

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<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that women in the North were completely liberated. Far from it, they too faced challenges. This work is only focusing on Southerners though. See Mary Kelley, “‘The Need of Their Genius’: Women’s Reading and Writing Practices in Early America” *Journal of the Early Republic* 28 (Spring 2008): 1-22.

<sup>5</sup> Catherine Kerrison, *Claiming the Pen: Women and Intellectual Life in the Early American South* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 17; Barbara Welter, *Dimitry Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976).

<sup>6</sup> Vasser read Mrs Ellis’ “Women of the Revolution,” and noted her interest in the book. Rebecca Vasser Diary, September 30, 1856, June 11, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, August 2, 1860, SPR2 ADAH; Carrie Hunter Diary, January 7, 1861, in the Cobb and Hunter Family Papers 1745, SHC-UNC.

they had both “read the same books.”<sup>7</sup> While the Bible was the most commonly read book, both for religious inspiration as well as literary value, the range of books read varies greatly from religious to secular. Espy wrote that she was “reading *Mary Bunyan*, and am much pleased with it.”<sup>8</sup> She was most likely reading Sallie Rochester Ford’s, *Mary Bunyan, The Dreamer’s Blind Daughter: A Tale of Religious Persecution*, which was copyrighted in 1860. The book, written about the daughter of the famous John Bunyan, author of *Pilgrim’s Progress*, was designed to inspire personal faith.<sup>9</sup> She also noted that she read Virgil every morning.<sup>10</sup> Other women read more secular works. Gillis, for example cited Byron in her diary.<sup>11</sup> Rebecca Vasser was impressed with Charles Reade’s two volume “pithy novel” *Love me Little, Love me Long*, published in 1859 and she believed that “he should add a sequel.”<sup>12</sup> She also noted reading Sir W. Scott’s “Pirate” but then added, “I do not like to read too many light works at a time and therefore am reading Bishop Adams the Spectator and Ruskin at the same time as counter

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<sup>7</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, December 21, 1860, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>8</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, August 2, 1860, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>9</sup> Sallie Rochester Ford’s, *Mary Bunyan, The Dreamer’s Blind Daughter: A Tale of Religious Persecution* (New York: Sheldon, 1865). This book is out of copyright and can be found at <<http://www.archive.org/details/marybunyandreame00fordiala>> (accessed on January 15, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, August 2, 1860, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>11</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon, January 8, 1861, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>12</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, June 11, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke. *Love Me Little, Love Me Long* by Charles Reade can be accessed at <[http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk\\_files=6055](http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=6055) and at <<http://www.archive.org/stream/lovemelittlelove02read>> (accessed on January 15, 2009).

influences Every morning I read one hundred lines of Virgil.”<sup>13</sup> Hunter reflected on reading Oliver Wendle Holmes.<sup>14</sup> After her break up with “F” Vasser thought about Tennyson.<sup>15</sup> Carrie Hunter expressed her intrigue in the book *Household of Bouverie; or, the Elixir of Gold. A Romance*, written by a Southern lady and published in 1860 in New York by Derby and Jackson.<sup>16</sup>

Modern feminist scholars have examined in detail the meaning of women’s writings. Jeanne Perreault notes that the “process of self writing make the female body who says ‘I’ a site and source of written subjectivity, investing that individual body with the shifting ethics of a political, racial, and sexual consciousness.”<sup>17</sup> While Alabama women in the Civil War were by no means feminist writers, in either the contemporary or modern sense, this notion of writing as part of the construction of self and creating

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<sup>13</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, September 6, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke. *The Pirate*. By the Author of "Waverley, Kenilworth," &c. In Three Volumes. Vol. I (II-III) (Edinburgh: Printed for Archibald Constable and Co. And Hurst, Robinson and Co., London, 1822). This book can be found at <<http://www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk/works/novels/pirate.html>> (accessed on January 15, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> This is a poem called Album. Carrie Hunter Diary, July 6, 1862, in the Cobb and Hunter Family Papers 1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>15</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, June 11, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

<sup>16</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, January 3, 1861, January 7, 1861, in the Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC. *Household of Bouverie; or, the Elixir of Gold. A Romance*, written by a Southern lady (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1860). This book can be accessed at <<http://books.google.com/books?id=UgIeAAAAMAAJ&dq=The+Household+of+Bouverie&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=CA8mPEyxFj&sig=ApGfJGILWqMPJhdz6VIHYzYxQ3o#PPA7,M1>> (accessed on January 15, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Jeanne Perreault, *Writing Selves: Contemporary Feminist Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 2.

written subjectivity applies to them as well as to modern writers.<sup>18</sup> Literacy itself, as Catherine Kerrison maintains, “is directly linked with power and authority.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, as Lucinda Irwin Smith maintains, writing provides a way for people to “assert control over their world, to express their opinions, to create a new reality, to escape the old reality, to gain power, to become immortal.”<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Fox-Genovese argued that antebellum women specifically “kept journals as a means of coming to terms with their female identities within a particular society.”<sup>21</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust also believed that writing “about one’s experiences – even in letters, but more emphatically in a diary or journal – required self-reflection, the acknowledgement of self as an individual and subject.” It also required the “imposition of some narrative structure of direction and purpose on the variegated events of particular lives.” She claimed that, “writing is inescapably an act of discovery; autobiographical writing inevitably produces new exploration and understanding of the self. It is as much a process of self-creation as of self-description.”<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Young argued that not only did the Civil War specifically shape women’s writing, but also that their writings helped create a cultural understanding of the war, as

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<sup>18</sup> Faust believes that diaries, letters, and memoirs provide an “extraordinary window” into the “experience and consciousness” of the authors. See Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 5.

<sup>19</sup> Kerrison, *Claiming the Pen*, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Lucinda Irwin Smith, *Women Who Write: From the Past and the Present to the Future* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Julian Messner, 1989), 4.

<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 101, 252, 372.

<sup>22</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 162.

women's narratives of the Civil War became prominent in the post war years.<sup>23</sup> In many ways as women wrote about their lives in diaries they recognized themselves as subjects worth writing about. At the same time, writing did provide a way for some to essentially convince themselves that even though they sometimes failed to live up to the ideal that they were at least trying. Writing through incongruent pieces of the "self" often helped allay fears and anxieties about failings and shortcomings. While writing about "I" did become a part of myth-making, it also was a way for many of the women examined in this study to sift through life and their feelings.

There is no doubt that some women who kept diaries did so with the intention of having them read by future generations. Mary Chestnut's carefully edited diary is a one of the most famous examples. She wrote with an agenda. Zillah Brandon's diary offers another example of a woman who intended others to read what she wrote. This Alabamian addressed each entry in her diary as a chapter in the book of her life, one in which she also attempted to impart her knowledge and advice to her children. Most of the diaries examined for this study, however, were never intended for anything other than private consumption and personal reflection.<sup>24</sup> Women turned to their diaries, as they had

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<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Young, *Disarming the Nation: Women's Writing and the American Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 1-23; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 161-62.

<sup>24</sup> Mary Chestnut, *Mary Chestnut's Civil War*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981). Brandon wrote, "my dear Children I now deposit in your hands and the hand of a people justly renowned for their courage, love of liberty, love of history, and biography seventy years of their life and incidents connected with the life of a southern lady," and while she knew that her life did not necessarily form the "proper subject for delineation" she endeavored with a "humble hope that God may aid and own this one more effort for his glory." And while she realized that she would be recording many events she pledged to "endeavor to remember that I am under the eye of God" and hence had a duty to record events accurately. Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary,

before the war, because of the continuing need for self-revelation and reflection. They confided in their diaries when there was no one else for them to turn to, and recorded the innermost thoughts and feelings that they felt unfit to share with others. Letters, especially those written to a husband, son, sister, or friend, can also provide insight into the thoughts and feelings of the writers, for they were always written with the intention of public consumption, intended for the eyes of others even if it were only for the eyes of one other person.<sup>25</sup> Although many women worried that their letters would fall into the

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August 21, 1861, June 7, 1862, SPR262, ADAH. See also, Carrie Hunter Diary, January 7, 1861, February 3, 1862, February 5, 1862, May 28, 1862, September 28, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC; Elodie to Dawson, Selma May 15, 1861, June 16, 1861, August 4, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, February 9, Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, 1860, SPR2, ADAH; M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, July 7, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke. After Rebecca Vasser had cut off her relationship with her lover she sadly turned to her diary to write that because she had no “correspondent... I came to you, old journal as I used to do to pour out the usual regrets for another mis-spent year and the almost totally vain resolutions for the new one. But experience has at last taught me to resolve less and to watch and pray more. This half hour which I used to spend in writing to F has of late been most differently occupied.” See Rebecca Vasser Diary, June 8, 1862, September 24, 1856, January 1, 1857, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

<sup>25</sup> Faust noted that the “Civil War made thousands of white women of all classes into authors – writers of letters and composers of journals recording the momentous and historic events as well as creators of published songs, poetry, and novels. Thus the war preserved the women’s voices that serve as the most significant source for our understanding of them and their era. But writing not only reflected changed lives and eventful times; the very process of authorship itself nurtured new female self-consciousness.” Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 161-164. Sunday afternoons offered perfect opportunities for letter writing and women often utilized their free hours writing long letters to their absent loved ones. Yet, the very fact that they were writing to a loved one and not meditating on religious thoughts was a matter for concern among some women. Elodie, for example, in one of her letters to Nathaniel Dawson recorded her fear that she was committing a sin because rather than contemplating religious duties she wrote to him. At the same time she also tried to ease her conscious by writing to him of religious matters as she related her ardent hope that he was reading his Bible that she gave him rather than taking more naps over it. Elodie to Dawson, Selma June 16, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

hands of readers other than the recipient, and sometimes requested that their letters be destroyed, they were still intended for others to read. Indeed, wartime women who wrote letters were acutely aware that the letters could be tampered with. A diary on the other hand often provided a secret substitute for a face-to-face correspondent and could be trusted.<sup>26</sup>

Some of the diarists, in fact, referred to their diary as their closest confidant. Both Sarah Lowe Davis and Rebecca Vasser addressed their diaries as an “old friend” with whom they “communed,” while Margaret Gillis called her diary her “old faithful friend.”<sup>27</sup> Women “revealed” to their diaries feelings that they would not have shared with others, and were tormented with the fear of what others would think if they read what they recorded. Because a diary could not judge or impose any form of social ideal, women often felt free to express their uninhibited thoughts and feelings without concern for harsh critical judgment. A diary thus provides a glimpse into the heart and soul of the writer, because it provided a way for a woman to sort through their image of self and

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<sup>26</sup> Elodie asked her lover to destroy her letters lest they fall into the hands of anyone else. Elodie to Dawson, Selma May 15, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC. M. E. Thompson was convinced that her letters were being read before they got to her sons. M. E. Thompson to her son Dock, Marion, August 23, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, September 2, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke. As Faust noted, “if letters were vehicles of self-transformation with a significance women only partially comprehended, diaries evoked much more self-consciousness.” Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 163.

<sup>27</sup> Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, April 1-2, 1862, September 7, 1862, Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, SPR113, ADAH. Vasser also called her diary her “old friend.” Rebecca Vasser Diary, September 3, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, May 28, 1861, SPR5, Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, ADAH; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 161-66.



reconcile that image with reality.<sup>28</sup> While women were still trying to sort through an reconcile an identity imposed on them they also were able to reveal their internalized images of self to their diaries.

Moreover, while diary keeping was by no means a new phenomenon, many of the women who took up diary writing during the Civil War did so for specific reasons. Like men in uniform, Confederate women were acutely aware of the importance of the times in which they lived. They sensed that they were observing a significant juncture in history, the birth of their new nation. In that sense, all of the women cited used their diaries as instruments to preserve their part in that history, either for others or more often for themselves. Writing in a diary thus became a significant part of some women's wartime lives. Diaries were used for recording events, for reflection, for venting frustrations, and most importantly for working through the day-to-day events of life. Yet much of what women recorded remained simple recitations of events taking place around them. Every woman who kept a diary for any length of time during the Civil War could not help but mention the commonplace. The weather was a favorite topic amongst diarists. Some women recorded nothing more than their lessons and studying, which were often an important part of younger women's lives. Yet, many of them did far more than

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<sup>28</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, September 24, 1856, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke. When looking through the diaries from her youth Espy admitted that there were "many private remarks in those journal whose significance I have forgotten." See Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, February 9, Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, 1860, SPR2, ADAH. Women who wrote diaries during the Civil War had a sense that they were experiencing a great historical event. Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 346; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 162-64; Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 162-63; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, October 1, 1861, SPR5, ADAH; Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, April 13-25, 1862, Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, SPR113, ADAH.

simply record factual information. They also reflected on the world around them, and in the process revealed a great deal about their beliefs and conceptions of self.<sup>29</sup>

The physical characteristics of their diaries themselves differed, as did the frequency with which women wrote in them. All of the diaries examined here were kept in bound books. Some were in small notebooks with leather bindings while others were in large long ledgers. Entries were sporadic and appear to have taken place either when women found time to write or when they needed to reflect on something in their life. The conditions of the diaries in their present archival resting places also is varied. (For illustrations of some of the diaries see appendix B).

Women beginning diaries knew that keeping them would not be an easy task, and some reflected on the anticipated struggles and dilemmas they would face. Those fears illustrate their concern that they would not live up to their conception of self. Beginning her diary in 1856, Athens resident Rebecca Vasser recorded her concern that she would

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<sup>29</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, October 13, 1861, February 8, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, December 31, 1859, January 1, 1860, January 12, 1860, January 19, 1860, April 27, 1861, May 3, 1861, Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, SPR2 ADAH; Annie Strudwick Diary, January 2, 1862, January 20, 1862, January 29, January 30, 1862, February 1, 1862, Annie Strudwick Diary and Letter # 1838, SHC-UNC; Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, February 4, 1861, March 25, 1862, SPR113, ADAH. Carrie Hunter Diary, January 7, 1861, March 9, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC. After writing about a frustrating day Hunter turned to her diary writing, "I believe I shall vent my spite on my journal." See Carrie Hunter Diary, September 15, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC. See also Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, April 1-2, 1862, September 7, 1862, Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, SPR113, ADAH; Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, September 10, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, October 1, 1861, SPR5, ADAH; Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, April 13-25, 1862, Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, SPR113, ADAH; Annie Strudwick Diary, May 2, 1862, Annie Strudwick Diary and Letter # 1838, SHC-UNC. Catherine Clinton pointed out that there were female academies and many girls really enjoyed their years at school. See her *Plantation Mistress*, 132-36.

accurately be able to record the events around her. She felt “almost sad” at the “thought of commencing a journal” because she had attempted it once before and knew the difficulties she would “have to encounter.” She struggled with the idea of recording her feelings and pondered whether she should confine herself to writing about the simple events that took place around her, or if she should “also record the feelings, which these incidents draw forth and give the effects which they produce[ed]” upon her. Fearing that she would be “ashamed to write” about her feelings because of her “wicked emotions” and “silly thoughts,” she prayed that she would be able to “adhere to the truth” in all she wrote and not be tempted by her “vain imagination into exaggeration of any kind.” At the same time she was concerned that if she only recorded the events taking place around her and did not let her feelings come out, she would “soon cease to feel” anything at all. After careful consideration, however, she decided to “adopt the latter plan” and take the risk of revealing her emotions while trying “with God’s help,” to “govern” her “every word.” She also hoped that writing her emotions down would help her improve her character because if she saw her “foolish fancies on paper” she would feel “so ashamed of them” that she would be encouraged to “try to improve” herself.<sup>30</sup>

Her apprehensions about the trials of keeping a diary seem justified. She wrote a few months later that, “I look into my heart and all is vanity, vanity, vanity! My life is passing away as a tale that is told and nothing is done to signify that I have an immortal soul; any efforts to do good are like the struggles of one in a dream... sin rests on my soul and bears down its feeble aspirations into death bringing lethargy.” She then prayed,

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<sup>30</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, September 24, 1856, Duke; Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, January 30, 1861, SPR113, ADAH.

“Oh my Saviour cast off the fearful nightmare and give me strength to continue in well doing. Lift my soul on the wings of thy love... and make to live to work to die for Thee!” Her struggles with diary keeping did not dissipate and indeed, reflected a deeper sense of her struggle with defining herself. Attempting to reconcile her feelings with her reality was a challenge. By the middle of 1862 she decided that she was finished with the “disagreeable habit” of recording her feelings. She felt as though there were “few events” that were worth recording in her diary and added that, “if anything is going on in the arena of war, we do not hear of it, being completely shut in by the enemy.”<sup>31</sup> Yet despite her resolution, she continued recording her feelings in her diary, which illustrates the deep need among many women to work through their thoughts and feelings in their writing.

Women valued the ability to express themselves clearly and some believed that diary keeping would help them in that endeavor. Mary Waring also spent the beginning of her diary reflecting on the nature of her venture. She viewed her writing as a way to help her live up to the ideal image she had of womanhood. She believed that a woman should be accomplished and hoped that she would be able to improve herself “somewhat in the art of talking *well* and *accurately*.” Knowing the importance of using her “words well” she intended to “add a little item every day” to her journal and “to be careful in the *selection* and *use* of my words, and to express my ideas clearly and correctly, hoping by these means to cultivate what little conversational talent that lies in me.” Desiring that her talent might be “worthy of cultivation and may be improved,” she desired “at some future time” to “reap the rewards of perseverance” and “be able to converse well and easily,”

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, January 26, 1857, June 12, 1862.

which would not only be a “source of self-gratification and pleasure, but also of interest to others.”<sup>32</sup> She thus not only wanted to be able to write to become a better person herself, but also to be perceived as an educated intellectual woman.

Diary keeping created problems, however, as the busy nature of life sometimes prevented women from writing. The ability to read books and write in a diary obviously required leisure time, which differed depending at which point in the war women were writing. Just as the war began, Carrie Hunter lamented, “It has been nearly two weeks since I have written in my journal, but event after event has followed each other in such rapid succession that I couldn’t take time to write.”<sup>33</sup> Working for the relief of soldiers, sickness, or the death of a family member prevented women from writing in their diaries. When that happened they would often begin a new entry with some sort of lament about the length of time that had elapsed since the last time they had written and note the

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<sup>32</sup> Mary Warring Diary, July 26, 1863, Mary Warring Diary, SPR30, ADAH; The Mary Warring Diary was also published as *Miss Waring’s Journal 1863 and 1865: Being the Diary of Miss Mary Waring of Mobile, during the final days of the War Between the States*, Thad Holt, Jr., ed. (Mobile: Wyvern Press, 1964).

<sup>33</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, May 1, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC. Hunter lamented that she was not able to consistently write in her diary. She wrote, “my poor journal has been sadly neglected this week,” which she regretted because she could not remember everything that happened (March 9, 1861). She stated a few months later, “my entries in my journal are not very disjointed and meagre. We have so much to read now and talk about that there is no time to write it down. Incidents follow incidents in such rapid succession that it occupies us to keep up with them” (July 31, 1861). She wrote, “my journal gets but a meagre sham of my attention these days” (September 30, 1861). “I must write something in my journal tonight as a partial record of the days events” (November 16, 1861). “I am sorry I haven’t written more regularly in the past week” (January 1, 1862). “My journal gets but a meagre portion of my thoughts these times” (January 3, 1862). “I meant every day last week to write in my journal, but every night the candle would be nearly out by the time I would get ready” (August 18, 1862). “I haven’t written in my journal in several days and will do so to night” (September 28, 1862).

multitude of events that had taken place.<sup>34</sup> At other points in the war women were not able to get news of what was going on, which caused great angst.

Other women habitually wrote nonetheless, even when they thought that they had nothing important to write. Many entries were similar to the one made by Gillis, who recorded, “I have but little to record my life is so monotonous I sometimes think it scarcely worthwhile to keep up a journal” but, she added, it was “‘second nature’ so I keep writing little and little monotonous though it be.”<sup>35</sup> Women sometimes turned to their diaries only to admit that they again had “nothing but trouble to record.”<sup>36</sup> Davis, after two weeks of not writing in her diary, lamented that she had been “rather negligent” of her journal for the past two weeks, but added that the “events are so dark and gloomy” that she hated “to remember them.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Brandon explained that the reason she had not written anything from August of 1862 until January 1, 1863 was partly because the “press of business making cloth sewing and knitting comforts and stocking for the soldiers.” Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 1, 1863, SPR262, ADAH. See also Carrie Hunter Diary, July 9, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, May 28, 1861, February 7, 1863, SPR5, ADAH; Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, January 28, 1861, February 13, 1861, April 1-2, 1862, April 13-25, 1862, September 7, 1862, Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, SPR113, ADAH; Rebecca Vasser Diary, January 1, 1857, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

<sup>35</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, January 6, 1861, SPR5, ADAH. Gillis wrote, “I now begin my 6<sup>th</sup> volume in which I hope to have the pleasure of recording more of joy, more of goodness and less of sorrow and sadness.” See also Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, February 1, 1860, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>36</sup> She wrote of sickness not only among her family members, but also of having “twenty sick negroes.” Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, October 1, 1861, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>37</sup> Sarah Davis found after returning from a friend’s house, that there were Union soldiers with bayonets keeping guard and she was now living in a captured city. Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, April 13-25, 1862, Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, SPR113, ADAH. See also Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, November 232, 1861, SPR5, ADAH.

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A woman's place in Southern society was defined by her appropriate role within the household.<sup>38</sup> Many feared that they were not living up to the standard they and society set for themselves and related that concern to their diaries. Catherine Clinton correctly pointed out that "diaries abound in confession and self-recrimination."<sup>39</sup> Antebellum society imposed a gendered norm upon white women, which emphasized submission and subordination to men. Southern womanhood had many specific characteristics and evolved over time. Cultural ideals and social customs influenced the ways women identified themselves. A person's place in society depended not only on color but also on their gender.<sup>40</sup> Gender, as Joan Wallach Scott notes, "is the social organization of sexual

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<sup>38</sup> Angela Boswell noted that, "the roles of husbands and wives were defined not just by the ideals of the marriage relationship, but also by the ideals of members' places within the household. As the nineteenth-century South was predominantly rural and relied still upon agriculture, the household remained the main unit of production even after the Civil War. Although everyone was expected to contribute to the well-being of the household, the duties and obligations of each member varied according to age, race, and gender." See her work, *Her Act and Deed: Women's Lives in a Rural Southern County, 1837-1873* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001), 3. See also Rebecca Vasser Diary, January 31, 1857, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke. Honor also played a significant role in defining one's place in society. After rumors of Nathaniel's conduct at Manassas circulated, Elodie related her joy that his honor had been defended and that she had seen his "justification" in the paper. See W. S. Knox to N. H. R. Dawson, Selma September 19, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC. See also Elodie to Dawson, Selma, September 22, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC; Wyatt-Brown, *Shaping of Southern Culture*.

<sup>39</sup> Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 163.

<sup>40</sup> Clinton claimed that, "Because the slave South was obsessed with color and gender, the fate of individuals was drastically influenced by their particular classification.

difference.”<sup>41</sup> Fox-Genovese adds that gender “constitutes an indispensable category of analysis because it imposes the recognition that to be a woman or a man is to participate in a set of social relations in a specific way.” She also argues that the construction of gender is a “social, not biological, category and, therefore, fundamentally a historical category” that must be understood to fully comprehend Southern women. For Southern slaveholding women, “the self came wrapped in gender wrapped in class and race.”<sup>42</sup>

The construction of gender and gender specific roles in Southern society is evident in the way women defined themselves in part by age. When looking at how Alabama women constructed their identity in their diaries, a dichotomy emerges separating an older generation (those who were already in their mid-twenties or older when the war broke out) and the younger one (mostly girls in their teens). Indeed, the different issues that women faced illustrate the different roles they played based upon their age. The older generation (all married or widowed) claimed to be reconciled to their place in society. They used their faith as a coping mechanism by which they were able to deal with the tragedies of life, although they often fought against what they thought they

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Using this rigid grid to establish a hierarchy of social interaction, white men wielded the power within society, and made all blacks, all slaves, and all women their victims.” Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 221. See also Jane Turner Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 1865-1895* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 10.

<sup>41</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 2.

<sup>42</sup> Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 49, 29, 101, 372. Arguing that gender and race are central to understanding the Old South, Fox-Genovese claims that while white and black women experienced different gender norms they still both belonged to households which were ruled by white masters. Southern women, black and white did not share a common bond of sisterhood in a household, but were defined “by their specific and different relations to its master.”



should be doing because of their personal feelings. Younger women were less reconciled to their fate and struggled more with their ideas of self as they developed ideas of marriage and their future roles as wives. Both older and younger women, however, struggled with reconciling their personal as well as imposed beliefs with the reality of their lives. Society dictated a certain set of social and religious norms, but those gendered ideals were internalized by the women as they themselves attempted to live up to the standards that they set for themselves.

Older women who were already married could fulfil their perceived duty to society. Yet while they had accepted their social position, they also struggled with what they believed they should be, how they should act, and how they actually felt. Death and separation, discussed in more detail below, provide prime examples. Women knew that according to their ideal image of womanhood, a woman was to resign herself peacefully to whatever turmoil and struggles were thrown at her, whether separation from a loved one for a temporary time, or for a longer duration because of death. Yet they constantly struggled to suppress their personal feelings of loss. They professed to believe that all things worked together for good, but at the same time, the pain of loss tempted them to complain. Then when they did so, it only added to their sufferings, because of the added guilt. Many believed that it was their duty to resign themselves to their fate and to the will of God. This provided them assurance, but also caused grief as they believed that their personal feelings were evidence of their shortcomings.

Younger women were no less devoted to their religious beliefs, but they had a harder time resigning themselves to the apparent will of God and their place in society. This is not to say that they balked at convention. By and large, they were contented with

their social positions. Younger women, however, were often preoccupied with sorting through their sense of being as a young single woman who anticipated marriage in her future. They desired to live up to the belle image, but that required marriage, and marriage meant a great deal of uncertainty as they waited for the right man to marry.<sup>43</sup>

Society imposed gendered norms upon all women, which emphasized their submission as well as their subordination in all things public. A variety of mechanisms including religion and advice manuals bolstered this norm. Many of the manuals emphasized the important place of religion to daily life.<sup>44</sup> Women, according to Barbara Welter, were supposed to be “inherently more religious, modest, passive, submissive and domestic than men, and were happier doing tasks, learning lessons, and playing games

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<sup>43</sup> Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, April 1-2, 1862, September 7, 1862, Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, SPR113.

<sup>44</sup> Ellen M. Plante, *Women at Home in Victorian America: A Social History* (New York: Facts on File, 1997), 4; Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood*, 11. This is not at all to claim that women were subjected to the whims imposed by a male dominated hierarchal paternalistic society. Indeed, the women of Alabama played an active role in shaping their personal identity, socially as well as religiously.

that harmonized with their nature.”<sup>45</sup> Maintaining proper manners in public as well as in private settings often equated with good character.<sup>46</sup>

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Women recognized that in addition to the “trials common to humanity” were the “deeper suffering peculiar to [the female] sex,” and they lamented that “the life of woman is full of woe.” Yet at the same time, that recognition provided an avenue for them to practice the art of sacrifice and martyrdom as they embraced the “cross that has rested on the shoulders of woman for nearly six thousand years.”<sup>47</sup> The “troubles and cares of womanhood” must be borne without murmur or complaint.<sup>48</sup>

Marriage and motherhood were chief among those “deeper sufferings.” They were not only a woman’s “duty” but also her “sacred occupation,” proving her with a

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<sup>45</sup> Welter, *Dimity Convictions*, 4. Carrie Hunter admitted that a woman’s heart was a “strange thing.” See Carrie Hunter Diary, March 18, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC. See also Kerber, “The Republican Mother,” 188. Linda Kerber, “The Limits of Politicization: American Women and the American Revolution,” in *The American and European Revolutions, 1776-1848: Sociopolitical and Ideological Aspects*, edited by Jaroslaw Pelenski (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1980); 54-74, 56, 72. Clinton argued that “Southern planters divided women into two classes: ladies, always white and chaste; and whores, comprising all black women (except for the saintly Mammy) and any white woman who defied the established social constraints on her sexual behavior.” Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 204.

<sup>46</sup> Kerrison, *Claiming the Pen*, 11.

<sup>47</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, January 1, 1857, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

<sup>48</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, June 26, 1862, SPR5, ADAH.

position of honor and respect.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, according to Kerrison, many of the advice books that were written for young ladies throughout the 1840s and 1850s “extolled the virtues of marriage in mythical fashion.”<sup>50</sup> Moreover, as the concept of Republican Motherhood developed, Clinton writes, “maternity became the patriotic obligation” of women.<sup>51</sup> The South glorified motherhood and women responded; their role as “childbearers and nurturers” became considered the “linchpin of the nation’s future.”<sup>52</sup> Society did not provide an acceptable social place for unmarried woman, thus the majority of Southern women viewed marriage, motherhood, and its accompanying challenges as a duty not only to their family but also to society. Mothers played a central role in the upbringing of their children, essentially held the family together, and hence greatly influenced the conception of womanhood that was passed on to their daughters. From birth, Clinton maintains, parents and society “indoctrinated” girls in their “marital and reproductive roles” and society “expected every female to fulfill what has now been defined as sociobiological destiny – she was duty-bound to become a wife and mother.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, March 29, 1861, June 30, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC; M. E. Thompson to her son Dock, Marion, August 23, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke. Sally McMillen argues that, “motherhood was an antebellum woman’s sacred occupation.” See her *Motherhood in the Old South*, 24. Also see, Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 154; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*.

<sup>50</sup> Kerrison, *Claiming the Pen*, 13.

<sup>51</sup> Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 8.

<sup>52</sup> McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 6-8.

<sup>53</sup> Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 35-40, 86, 154-56, quotation from 59; Theriot, *Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-Century America*, 2; M. E. Thompson to Joe Thompson, Marion, December 22, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, June 7, 1862, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH.

Most women expected motherhood to bring happiness. Yet, while it anchored their social as well as personal identities, it was not always easy. Few women wrote about pregnancy and childbirth in great detail, but clearly it was a cause for great concern. They faced the possibility of not only losing at least one or more of their children, but also the possibility of their own death in childbirth. Even when they expected to survive, the entire process of pregnancy and childbirth was painful and frightening. Thus women, who were expected to resign themselves to this fate without question, but worried nonetheless often turned to their religious beliefs for comfort and assurance.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Welter, *Dimity Convictions*, 8; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 277. Mattie wanted to visit her husband, but was worried about taking her child, Ella, with her. Mattie C. Treadwell to E. W. Treadwell, September 7, 1861, September 15, 1861, E. W. Treadwell Papers, Duke. In one of the few instances where women discussed pregnancy, one woman related her fears as she approached childbirth. She feared traveling because it might bring on a miscarriage, but deferred to her husband who wanted her to visit him, while she begged him “not to think that I have written the above because I do not wish to be with you for God knows my heart’s first wish is to rest my weary head in your bosom once more and to tell you all my cares and to love” him. Mattie C. Treadwell to E. W. Treadwell, September 15, 1861, E. W. Treadwell Papers, Duke. In her book, *Motherhood in the Old South*, McMillen, discussed in great detail the issues surrounding motherhood in the Old South. Motherhood, while it had many positives, including the ways in which women became the center of attention “as female relatives, friends, and at least one medical assistant gathered to help her through parturition and to care for her immediate needs” (57), it also posed problems as “the constant care of young children was often the very reason women’s health declined” (140). Women leaned heavily on their mothers and other female support networks during pregnancy and childbirth. It was often “painful and life threatening” (110) and many women got depressed anticipating their “confinement” (54). Yet, “Child rearing had become their sacred occupation, to which they dedicated their lives. The rewards and risks were many, but most southern women accepted them all” (179). While touted as “a joyful duty,” childrearing “was often worrisome, exhausting, and difficult for mothers” (164). Yet most women turned to their religious beliefs because “A deep belief in God provided women with an enormous amount of strength, consistent with the importance that religion had in the lives of most southern women.... They turned to God for support, depending on divine mercy for a successful outcome and giving their Lord credit for a job well done. Yet God was not accountable if problems occurred. When mothers suffered or their children died, women blamed themselves or viewed their loss as part of

Such high expectations placed upon them by society but also by themselves, created tensions. Women worried that they were not living up to the ideal image of the Southern woman. Many who feared that they were failing also turned to their religious beliefs for comfort and petitioned God to help them live a better life. While some were sincerely concerned with doing right for the sake of doing right, moreover, the image they projected to the world was never far from their mind. Rebecca Vasser claimed that she struggled “to raise herself to that perfect ideal which almost every man has of womanhood” and hoped to “be more worthy” of her lover’s affection and love. She resolved to “learn and practice self-control which give dignity and grace to woman’s character.” She claimed that she would seek to “study and read,” so that she would become “worthy to be the companion of a noble minded man.” Yet while she sought to improve her intellect she also added that, “in my heart God alone shall reign.” She wondered if she could ever attain the “temperate will” which was an essential part of the “perfect woman.” Even if she could never “reach a poet’s ideal,” she believed that “God will help me to be pure and true and useful.”<sup>55</sup>

Women wrote about marriage and their futures at great length. Whether simply mentioning the engagement of others, how marriage “improved” a friend, or going into great detail about the meaning of love and marriage, it was something that was clearly on

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God’s plan. They learned to believe that the peace death brought their infant was worth more than any sorrowful life on earth” (186, 56, 76). Women did not usually blame God for the death of their children (172). “Death could be consoling in one believed that a far better world was to follow. Religion could mitigate women’s fears and provide strength during a tentative and painful experience” (78).

<sup>55</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, January 26, 1857, June 11, 1862, September 1, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke; Elodie to Dawson, Selma, April 1, 1862, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

the minds of the Alabama women examined for this study.<sup>56</sup> Married women reflected on marriage in a variety of different ways that revealed the way they conceptualized themselves within it. Elizabeth Rhodes wrote of how happy she was in her marriage. She knew her place in society and was content with her position. Throughout her life she recorded her devotion to her husband, which only grew stronger as the years passed. Of their relationship she wrote, “Our hearts are strongly united by chords which nothing can sever.” A few days later, on the day of her anniversary, she reflected on how “just six years ago I took my present name,” and other than the loss of her children her married life had “been one continual scene of harmony.” She added that they “never disagree in the least matter but have been united in all things” and she could have never asked for a more affectionate, “gentle and considerate” husband who attended to her “every wish,” as she added, “I do trust it may ever be thus with us.”<sup>57</sup> Sarah Espy also recorded her marital bliss. Writing twenty-sixth years after her wedding date, she reflected how another year had passed with all of its cares as well as joys and many sorrows as she hoped that the next year would find her family “as happily situated as we are now.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, March 9, 1861, March 29, 1861, May 12, 1862, June 22, 1862, June 30, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC. Elodie Dawson wrote of her own engagement. See Elodie to Dawson, Selma May 15, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

<sup>57</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, January 7, 1858, January 12, 1858, April 17 1858, April 28, 1858, Elizabeth Rhodes Diary. After receiving a letter from him when he was away, she wrote, “How letters lighten the pain of absence. Nothing affords me more pleasure than reading the words of affection from my husband when away from him” (August 3, 1860). Bertram Wyatt-Brown ed., *The American People in the Antebellum South* (West Haven, Connecticut: Pendulum Press, 1973), points out the degree to which the elites in the Antebellum South stressed “submissive femininity” (63).

<sup>58</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, February 25, Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, 1860, 1862, SPR2 ADAH. In the face of widowhood, Thompson knew that

Other older women, when reflecting on their image of self, identified themselves in relation to their family.<sup>59</sup> After spending the afternoon looking through her past diaries Sarah Espy reflected that she “hardly realized” her “present state of existence” as a mother of six children, four of whom were adults.<sup>60</sup> Sometimes, however, the changes that time brought were not all good. In June of 1862, after attending the commencement exercises from the school she had attended as a child, Margaret Gillis wrote about how much had changed in her life since her childhood. She revealed her depression, noting that she had truly experienced the “troubles and cares of womanhood.” As a schoolgirl “all was bright sunshine and happy triumph,” but now her life was filled with “heartsickness and humility.” She added that she had gone from those beloved halls of her school as a “happy child just budding into womanhood” with only one regret – the separation from schoolmates and teachers, my much loved companions,” but now she was seated among the audience a “changed and melancholy woman.” She then added the verses, “Friend after friend departs/ Who hath not lost a friend/ There is no union her of

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she was to be thankful for her lot in life and tried to reflect on the blessings of widowhood. M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, September 26, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Rare Book, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Nicholas Perkins Library, Duke University.

<sup>59</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, September 8, 1861, December 27, 1862, January 19, 1863, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC; Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, August 23, 1863, SPR262, ADAH; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, March 18, 1864, May 30, 1864, SPR5, ADAH; Helen Swift to Anna Mercur, Eufaula Alabama, March 16, 1861, Anna Mercur Papers #751-z, SHC-UNC; Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, September 12, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, June 21, 1861, SPR2 ADAH; Lizzie to Anna Mercur, Eufaula Alabama, December 17, 1860, Anna Mercur Papers #751-z, SHC-UNC.

<sup>60</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, February 9, Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, 1860, SPR2 ADAH.



hearts/ That hath not here or been an end.” And while she was writing about the numerous friends who she had lost, the death of her mother was never far from her mind. A few lines later she revealed the extent of her depression when she wrote, “I am young very young to be weary of life, but it would be such a relief to be placed by the side of my darling mother, and such a happy ‘change’ to join my dear mother and sister in their praises at the throne of Glory.” She however, acknowledged her submission to what she viewed as God’s will adding “but the Lords will be done – may he fit me for that world where I long to be.”<sup>61</sup>

Women to be sure also revealed their image of self when writing letters to their husbands. Wishing that hers was at home, Mattie C. Treadwell wrote to him that she felt bad for “indulging in such thoughts” when her “Country demands a sacrifice of all of her children” because she believed she should pray for strength and “willingly and cheerfully” do her “duty in the present crisis of our dear bleeding Country.”<sup>62</sup> Her belief that “our heavenly Father is with us and that he does all things for the good of those who love him and trust him” brought her “much consolation” in his absence. Although she longed for him to return to her, she revealed her self-resignation to his absence, which comprised a large part of her self image – that of the sacrificing Republican mother. She continued to divulge her view of herself as a mother while making known her fears of her

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<sup>61</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, June 26, 1862, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>62</sup> She continued that she had hoped for peace but realized that “the present conflict will be long and bloody and many happy hearts and homes be made desolate ere we gain the boon for which we fight - Freedom and Liberty,” but, she continued, “let that be as it may our cause is just and God will be with us in this our hour of need if we will only look unto him with faith and love.” See Mattie C. Treadwell to E. W. Treadwell, October 27, 1861, E. W. Treadwell Papers, Duke.

shortcomings. She told him that she prayed that God would help her and petitioned him to pray for her as well that she might “live up to the discharge of my duty as a wife and mother.” Then in one of the rare instances in which any of the women examined here discussed pregnancy, she added that “I feel that it will not be long until I shall become a mother a second time.” She longed for him to be with her in “that hour of trial and suffering” and did not know how she would bear his “absence at such a time,” but would try “to bear it the best I can for your sake.”<sup>63</sup> Wondering when “these cruel separations” would end, another woman emphatically wrote, “Oh! how inexpressibly sad I feel to night and every thing conspires to make me so,” because she missed her husband so much.<sup>64</sup>

Separation from husbands became more difficult for women during the war. Women wrote to their absent loved ones of the pain caused by separation from them and especially about the dangers of the war. Yet, many, like Elodie Dawson attempted to bear up stoically. She wrote of how she fought back her tears because she believed it was her duty to do so. Throughout the war she related her love for Nathaniel and how she missed him because of his absence due to his service in the Confederate Army. She lamented the “many long and weary miles” that separated them. After marrying Nathaniel and delivering her first child by 1864, Elodie wrote to him of how lonely she was with him gone.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Mattie C. Treadwell to E. W. Treadwell, October 27, 1861, E. W. Treadwell Papers, Duke.

<sup>64</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, February 12, 1864, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>65</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Marengo August 19, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC. Elodie wrote of her love and devotion for

There is no question that women did feel lonely, especially during the war with the absences of their husbands. They missed not only the help, but also the companionship provided by their husbands. The lives of Alabama women examined here do not exactly support Clinton's conclusion that "Every woman was an island, isolated unto herself and locked into the place by the stormy and unsettling seas of plantation slavery."<sup>66</sup> They wrote often of visiting with friends and family. When they felt as though they could take no more, women often turned to their religious beliefs and their belief that "God is infinite and man finite."<sup>67</sup> Women were not above admitting that they turned to their faith for comfort and to keep them going. As Zillah Brandon wrote, were it not for the "inspiration of faith in the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ" they would be "enveloped in a thicker gloom than was ever revealed by heathen mythology, for in the language of Byron my soul would be dark."<sup>68</sup> Brandon was clearly well versed in literature and held it in high esteem.

While some women faced the temporary separation caused by the war, many others faced a more permanent form. When women experienced the death of a husband they took on a new identity – that of a widow. The numerous deaths caused by the Civil War greatly increased the number of widows in America and Alabama women were no exception. Yet as with other aspects of their life, although they faced new challenges,

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Nathaniel. See Elodie to Dawson, Selma June 2, and May 19, 1861, Selma July 14, 1861, Selma July 22, 1861, April 15, 1862, September 4, 1864, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

<sup>66</sup> Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 179.

<sup>67</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 8, 1861, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

women accepted widowhood as they did their other positions in society. The trauma of losing a husband was cause for great trial and deep and utter despair among some, while others related to their diaries the many blessings that they experienced in widowhood. Widowhood, however, was a state that thousands of women experienced during the war.<sup>69</sup>

Younger, unmarried women meanwhile turned to their diaries to express their thoughts about marriage and discuss their love interests. They seemed to enjoy gossiping about the latest love affairs in the area, whether they involved the women or the men involved. While they struggled with their role in life and with accepting their duty, these women did not fundamentally question that role. As Carrie Hunter observed, “every young girl looks toward marriage as the very probable course her life will take.”<sup>70</sup> None questioned the concept of marriage, and the idea of remaining single never made it into their diaries. Deciding on a spouse was one of the most important decisions a person could make, hence many young women spent a great deal of time reflecting on potential lovers.<sup>71</sup>

In discussing how young women looked for their chosen spouse, Carrie Hunter wrote, that “every girl generally has one set apart from the rest and one that is accessible

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<sup>69</sup> M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, September 26, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Jennifer Lynn Gross, ““Good Angels’ Confederate Widowhood in Virginia,” in *Southern Families at War: Loyalty and Conflict in the Civil War South*, edited by Catherine Clinton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 133-153.

<sup>70</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, March 21, 1861, May 10, 1861, June 7, 1861, June 30, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>71</sup> Censer has argued that North Carolina planters believed that “one’s spouse should be the most important person on earth,” and Alabama women clearly believed this also. See Censer, *North Carolina Planters and their Children*, 73.

to her as ‘the one’ chosen above all others.”<sup>72</sup> Upon hearing of the visit of a Dr. Johnson who had apparently previously expressed interest in her, Hunter revealed to her diary that, “I don’t think I could love him and I don’t think I ever could.”<sup>73</sup> Margaret Gillis often wondered if she could love various young men who expressed an interest in her. She recorded at great length her rejection of an offer of marriage writing how her suitor told her that “he loved me – that he couldn’t promise me wealth, or worldly honors, but he could promise me the wealth of one heart’s pure affections – in fact that he almost worshipped me.”<sup>74</sup>

Women believed primarily in marrying for love rather than for money or social status, but those were factors in their decisions. While women admitted that a woman’s heart was “a strange thing” as they struggled through the relationship process, ironically, the courtship process also gave women more power than they probably would ever have at any other time in their lives.<sup>75</sup> Upon writing about rejecting an offer of marriage,

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<sup>72</sup> Hunter added that “and such I believe I have had all my life until now – but now what is the course I must pursue they cut adrift.” Carrie Hunter Diary, June 30, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>73</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, March 9, 1861, July 19, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>74</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, February 28, 1860, November 30, 1860, Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, SPR5, ADAH. She must have rejected him because he wrote her a note saying that he hoped to see her somehow somewhere and begged her to take back her negative answer. She did marry Rev. Gillis. Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, December 9, 1860, February 7, 1863, Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>75</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, March 18, 1861, May 7, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC. While parents preferred to have their children marry people they knew well, Censer argues that North Carolina planters did not arrange marriages on a regular basis for their children, but rather, parents, “like other close friends and

Hunter revealed that she did so because despite the fact that she admired “his good qualities” she did “not love him enough to enter into such an agreement as he proposes.”<sup>76</sup>

Women often had a good idea of who and what they were looking for in a man.<sup>77</sup> Vasser wrote in her diary that, “I am not a timid, nervous, woman, but I would have [a husband] stronger than myself to look to in times of trouble.”<sup>78</sup> Hunter acknowledged that the question of “who the life long companion shall be” was a matter of “vital importance,” which “every girl is obliged to think about it a great deal.” She added that she was not “an exception to the common rule.” She believed that she must guard her heart and not succumb to flattery. The “soul of a woman craves companionship”

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relatives, played only an indirect role in courtship.” See Censer, *North Carolina Planters and their Children*, 68, 78.

<sup>76</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, November 11, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>77</sup> Companionate marriages were important and most of the time children chose spouses that their parents approved of because they had been socialized to do so. Indeed, “marriages arising from sons’ and daughters’ choices influenced by parental views had a predictable pattern: choices generally were prudent but showed a certain level of personal preference.” Cousin marriages were not to secure family holdings of property, but rather were found in long-settled communities where most of the local gentry was related and in places with social and economic isolation. See Censer, *North Carolina Planters and their Children*, 83, 86, 94. After writing about the emotions that a daquerreotype “stirred” in her heart for another man she had feelings for, but who was interested in another woman, Hunter proclaimed “I don’t know what is coming over me. I am growing indifferent to the whole male tribe. Where I could love I was not loved in return, and where I am loved it seems I cannot love in return. Sad state! I don’t know what is to become of me.” She added, “I don’t know my own mind and fear he will be disappointed I am like a ship with no rudder or compass in respect to my earthly destiny the future alone will reveal where the waves of destiny will land me.” Carrie Hunter Diary, March 18, 1861, before June 22, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC. See also Lizzie to Anna Mercur, Eufaula Alabama, December 17, 1860, Anna Mercur Papers #751-z, SHC-UNC.

<sup>78</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, September 3, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

particularly “that of a intellectually good man.” Her love life, however, was falling apart around her and she lamented that she felt “like a ship cut away from its moorings drifting whither? And where shall I find a harbor a resting place.” After writing about a young man she liked who did not share her feelings she confided, “You my dear journal are the only one that must ever know of the birth growth and burial of such folly I hope it is past.” Then she continued that she believed it was the duty of single women to “strive to make others happy be conciliatory towards the faults and problems of others” and to “make as many friends” as possible. She realized that “a single woman is naturally dependent on society as to her acceptance or standards” and it is her “duty to conform to it, and to pandor in some degree to its tastes.” Yet she lamented that, “In all of these particulars of late I have been very faulty.”<sup>79</sup>

Jane Turner Censer argues that for North Carolina planters, parents, while they influenced their children’s choices in partners, tended to take a hands-off approach and not force their children into marriages. This also seems to be the case for most of the Alabama women examined in this study. Yet they also clearly took into consideration their parents wishes when choosing a partner. Daughters were expected to be obedient and self-controlled. It was those two virtues “on which society relied to protect young girls from those forces which it could not legislate, like falling in love.”<sup>80</sup> This idea

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<sup>79</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, June 30, 1862, January 7, 1861, March 9, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>80</sup> Quotation from Welter, *Dimity Convictions*, 4. Censer, *North Carolina Planters and their Children*, 70-72. The issue of marrying those whom parents wanted one to marry were important, but parents did not exercise total control over their children’s choice in marriage as is evidenced from Elodie’s belief that her mother would eventually get over her trivial objections to her marriage. Elodie to Dawson, Selma May 23, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC;

seemed to be the case with Alabama women who believed that even though they loved a certain young man, it was still their duty to obey their parents' wishes in the matter.

Rebecca Vasser's reflections on her love life illustrate how young women were both independent and yet also took their parents wishes into consideration when deciding who they would marry. She was deeply in love with the man referred to throughout her diary only as "F." Her parents had forbidden any contact with him after a family dispute. She struggled with it, but eventually obeyed her parents despite her personal feelings and desires to the contrary. At one point she even wished that her and "F" had remained only friends, writing "Oh! Happy if we had never been more." Yet giving him up was a long painful struggle for her. At one point she almost decided to defy her parents and marry "F." There were often times when she wrote that she "cannot cannot endure this!" and questioned, "Why do I suffer so? Have I been so selfish: truly my punishment seems greater than I can bear." She fantasized about "F" taking her away or else leaving her alone forever, because either case would make her happier than she was at the moment: "This struggle is much for me: if it would kill me soon I could be patient I think: but to bear years of this pain I cannot I cannot." As she thought about what to do she turned to God, writing "I pray God to help me do what is right regardless of my own inclinations," concluding, "If my parents are unreasonable or even wicked in their unforgiving pride I am not their judge, but their child and must submit." She then added "Oh blessed Savior send thy peace into my heart: give me submission to thy hold will and from

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Censer, *North Carolina Planters and their Children*, 19, 41, 67. Gillis wrote, "well the die is cast and our Pollie is anothers – subject to anothers will. It is hard, very hard for me to give her up, but it seems that we have given her to a good man and one that she loves and respects." Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, September 21, 1861, SPR5, ADAH.



contemplation of thy saying learn to suffer patiently O let the weary ache, the smart of life's long tale of pain and lose be gently stilled within my heard at thoughts of Thee and of thy cross.”<sup>81</sup>

Vasser noted that after her parents had cut off all contact with her beloved, her feelings varied when she wrote about her emotional afflictions surrounding her conflicting opinions of her lover. “It is strange how I can bear so long,” she reflected, “without giving way to any feelings” going about her entire day working and visiting “without any dreariness at my heart till the light is out” then “covered by the darkness tears flow in an irresistible torrent. I writhe and can scarcely keep from crying out with the pain.” Although she sometimes tried to “resist these nocturnal spasms,” she felt that “it may be best to indulge them; they seem to ease my heart and make me to begin the next day anew.” She then prayed, “God help me to do right an put aside all selfishness.”<sup>82</sup> After she finally ended the romance she resolved to “enjoy the many blessings God has given” her convinced that “surely with the sweet sunshine, trees and grass and all the books that I could command I can be happy without F! Ah me! I don't believe in the love of the novelists and poetry, but it seems to me that life would have no joy should I banish him from my dreams of the future, yet it must be.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, September 1, 1862, September 21, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke. I was unable to identify “F”.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., September 14, 1862.

<sup>83</sup> She was convinced that “God's cures would be added to my mother's should I persist a course so disagreeable to her. Sometimes I think I will propose to F to move away to some distant land where this feud between our families is unheard of: where nobody know that his sisters wronged me and I was unable to forgive them [or weak enough to forgive them]: where he could follow his profession and I would made him so

While most women followed conventions and obeyed the wishes of their parents, Elodie Todd Dawson, who ardently supported secession, used some of the ideas espoused during the secession crisis as a justification for a fulfilment of the personal desires. She wrote to her future husband Nathaniel Dawson that her mother, who was visiting from Kentucky, opposed her marriage to anyone except someone her family chose for her. She proceeded to resolve that “in this age when Secession, Freedom and rights are asserted, I am claiming mine and do not doubt but I shall succeed in obtaining them, as I have someone to help me in my efforts.”<sup>84</sup>

When marriages did occur they were events of great importance to be recorded and rejoiced over. After months of not writing, Gillis again picked up her diary to record what had taken place, noting that she would only “go back a month in my record as the most important event of my life has taken place since that time.” She then revealed that a month prior to her entry she had engaged herself to Mr. Gillis who had been “appointed chaplain in a Reg.” and after accepting the appointment “insisted on a speedy alliance so I gave way and last Tuesday night Fed. 3<sup>rd</sup> saw me a bride.” “I can scarcely realize it,” she added a little bemused. She then reflected on her husband, writing that “Mr Gillis is different in many respects to the heir of my old day dreams – yet I never have and never expected to meet one to come up to those dreams life is real.” “I don’t think,” she continued, “I could have found a man in the world (except him) to suit me. I think he must be different from all other men in the things that he suits me.” She felt as though she

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happy that he could not regret what he had left. Fool that I am! Men do not love so.” Rebecca Vasser Diary, October 3, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

<sup>84</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Selma May 9, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

could “place implicit confidence” in him. She concluded, “I am now the wife of a Methodist minister and may the good Lord help me to do my duty He is now awaiting orders and does not expect to remain with me long.”<sup>85</sup>

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Marriage and motherhood were not the only things expected of women. Women were to perform the other duties of womanhood faithfully and “always endeavor to do what was right.”<sup>86</sup> These duties ranged from culinary skills to acting in a ladylike manner.<sup>87</sup> One woman, after returning from church, wrote to her future husband that she wished all of her duties were as “agreeable, for then I know they would all be performed with the most cheerful alacrity of a ready and willing heart.”<sup>88</sup> Yet, most of women’s duties were not as pleasant as writing to their lovers. Indeed many of their perceived duties were challenging and women constantly struggled to perform them. They were to control their emotions, especially around others, demonstrate strength of character, not flirt, succumb to flattery, or draw unnecessary attention to themselves. Dawson revealed

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<sup>85</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, February 7, 1863, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>86</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Selma July 7, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC; Rebecca Vasser Diary, June 11, 1862, September 3, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke; Annie Strudwick Diary, January 13, 1862, Annie Strudwick Diary and Letter # 1838, SHC-UNC; Kerber, “The Republican Mother,” 202; Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood*, 12-23.

<sup>87</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, January 23, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC; Mary Waring Diary, July 31, 1863, Mary Waring Diary SPR30, ADAH.

<sup>88</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Selma, September 15, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

her scorn at the girls who publicly cried and let their emotions show in public.<sup>89</sup> Writing of some female acquaintances, Vasser wondered, “Why will they be so excitable and silly and selfish and make every body ridicule and censure them?”<sup>90</sup> Women also feared what Carrie Hunter called the “problems of the heart.”<sup>91</sup> Vasser admitted her fear that women were “becoming too fond of dress and society” in their diaries and recorded their honest desire to “do right” and “keep [themselves] pure.”<sup>92</sup> They wrote about performing duties that were appropriate to their gender roles, such as playing music, reading, or enjoying evenings filled with discussions and visiting.<sup>93</sup> Vasser desired to be of use at home and the thought that she was a “little use at home” added to the simple fact that “above all I have at last found “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ!” and now experienced the “sweet peace which ‘passeth understanding.’”<sup>94</sup>

Women further wrote of needing to aspire to what Vasser called “high thoughts and noble deeds.”<sup>95</sup> They were well aware of the “dangers of a careless life.” M. E.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., May 27, 1861, March 16, 1862, August 19, 1861; Carrie Hunter Diary, March 9, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC. Women were concerned with acting properly in public settings. See Rebecca Vasser Diary, November 25, 1856, September 3, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

<sup>90</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, September 3, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

<sup>91</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, June 30, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>92</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, November 25, 1856, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

<sup>93</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, November 20, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>94</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, June 11, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

Thompson ardently proclaimed in her diary that, “the attainment of a virtuous and Christian life ought to be our highest aim, and the only sure way to happiness.”<sup>96</sup> Clinton argues that, “Virtue was the most prized feminine characteristic throughout the United States.”<sup>97</sup> The virtues women were expected to demonstrate ranged from exhibiting patience and longsuffering to accepting their lot in life without complaint to upholding their religious beliefs and being a good member of society.<sup>98</sup> Writing about taking communion, Gillis explained why she felt she could not partake in it. “I feel that I am unworthy myself,” she wrote, “I know there is no one worthy, but I am less worthy now than ever, for if I have not fallen from grace no I have not fallen from grace but I have back slidden terribly, and I do believe it is enmity towards some people that caused it I know it but I don’t know how to remedy the matter.”<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> M. E. Thompson to Joe Thompson, Marion, December 22, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke. Thompson wrote, “It has been my most conscious desire to train my children to honest, upright and just principles, as well as Christian” then asked her son if it was not worth striving for a better life in the future. M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, February 9, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke. See also Elodie to Dawson, Selma, April 1, 1862, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

<sup>97</sup> Clinton noted that, “in the North, female virtue was synonymous with industriousness and epitomized by the ‘frugal housewife,’ while in the South, the plantation aristocracy celebrated virtue in the cult of chastity.” Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 137.

<sup>98</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, May 8, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 17, 373; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 188-192; Emory M. Thomas, *The Confederate Nation: 1861-1865* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1979), 22; McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 78, 172, 186; Rable, *Civil Wars*, 69; Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 152-154; Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, November 21, 1860; Wyatt-Brown ed., *The American People in the Antebellum South*, 15; Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, December 21, 1860, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>99</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, July 14, 1861, SPR5, ADAH.

Vasser likewise was concerned with keeping herself “pure” because she had convinced herself that she was “acting the hypocrite.” “A woman may be agreeable and yet a hypocrite,” she warned herself, proceeding to hope that those words would help her “to be sincere by inspiring me with a desire to prove that women are sometimes better than they are usually thought to be.”<sup>100</sup> Women prayed for God to help them “put aside all selfishness.”<sup>101</sup> The thought of the trials others were enduring, especially other loved ones, evoked sympathy from women and also helped them bear their own problems. “I do not forget when I am enduring all my great trials,” Elodie wrote to Nathaniel, “that you have so much to discourage and try you.”<sup>102</sup> Some women believed that their purpose in life simply was to serve God and comfort others.<sup>103</sup>

Brandon, in extolling the virtues of her deceased daughter further revealed many of the characteristics that were important to Alabama women. She wrote of her daughter’s religion, “truth and purity,” as well as her “noble conduct, her happy smile and pleasant conversation” and added that “I loved her not alone because she was my child, not alone for her beauty of person and cultivated mind” but because she was “refined in the fullest sense of the word, she was genuinely hospitable... she was a child

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<sup>100</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, November 25, 1856, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., September 14, 1862.

<sup>102</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Marengo August 19, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

<sup>103</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 8, 1861, SPR262, ADAH.

of many prayers and her life commenced in such offerings as we trust was like holy incense offered upon an alter that sanctified the gift.”<sup>104</sup>

The women examined in this study wrote often of performing their duties and spending their time usefully. After writing of an uneventful day, Waring lamented that she should have spent it more profitably.<sup>105</sup> Strudwick recorded one morning that she had “determined to [be] better, work more, and altogether be more useful.”<sup>106</sup> After writing about how she had been unable to finish her studies Vasser wrote that “this morning I arose determined to accomplish my duties faithfully.”<sup>107</sup> Gillis reflected at the end of 1860 that “this has been a very profitably spent year, fraught with a few joys and some disappointments.”<sup>108</sup>

While women were expected to perform their domestic duties they were not completely “cut off from society” as Clinton claimed.<sup>109</sup> A delicate balance, however, had to be achieved between socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. In August of 1863, Mary Waring claimed that she was concerned she was becoming “quite a ‘gad about’ to use a very common expression” because of how much time she was spending

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<sup>104</sup> She added that her daughter’s “whole life was concentrated by prayer.” Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, December 21, 1860, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>105</sup> Mary Waring Diary, July 26, 1863, August 11, 1863, Mary Waring Diary, SPR30, ADAH.

<sup>106</sup> Annie Strudwick Diary, January 13, 1862, Annie Strudwick Diary and Letter # 1838, SHC-UNC.

<sup>107</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, January 3, 1857, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

<sup>108</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, December 31, 1860, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>109</sup> Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 165.

time in visiting and in going downtown.<sup>110</sup> Vasser confessed to her diary, “I am afraid I am becoming too fond of dress and society.”<sup>111</sup> After talking about a funeral Hunter stated that she was sitting up rather late sewing a party dress, but hastily added that, “it is the first one I have bought for several years and I thought I almost absolutely needed it.” Yet as she sat sewing that evening, she kept thinking about how it was nothing but vanity and the Bible verse “vanity of vanities! All is vanity has recurred to me several times.”<sup>112</sup>

Women noted visiting friends and family, tending to the sick (both in their own family and their friends), and receiving visitors and family members.<sup>113</sup> In many ways the outbreak of the Civil War actually strengthened social connections among some white women as they united to help support their soldiers. When preparing for her part in a flag presentation ceremony, Hunter revealed her concern that she would fail to “meet the expectations of my friends,” but at the same time she illustrates the fact that she was not isolated.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Mary Waring Diary, August 4, 1863, Mary Waring Diary SPR30, ADAH; Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, February 13, 1861, Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, SPR113, ADAH.

<sup>111</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, November 25, 1856, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

<sup>112</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, March 18, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>113</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, January 3, 1857, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke; Elodie to Dawson, Marengo August 19, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC; Annie Strudwick Diary, May 2, 1862, Annie Strudwick Diary and Letter # 1838, SHC-UNC; Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, February 1, 1861, SPR262, ADAH. Gillis wrote to a friend about how she had to choose between tending an unnamed sick friend and stated, “I have to go and if the negro dies I shall have to lose her that is all.” Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, February 12, 1864, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>114</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, March 18, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.



Women also were expected to be patriotic, and they demonstrated their patriotism in a variety of different ways. Many viewed providing solace to others as a part of their moral duty. As Rable aptly points out, “self-sacrifice and patient suffering had long been considered female attributes and, in the South, essential elements for maintaining both the honor of the woman and her family, especially during a crisis when the man of the house had to be away from home.”<sup>115</sup> Some women actively wished for trials so that they could prove their willingness to sacrifice. As one Alabama woman stated, “How apt I am to wish for great trials that I may prove my strength thereby.”<sup>116</sup> While women were expected to sacrifice their personal feelings, they also sought to comfort those who suffered.<sup>117</sup> This did not however mean that women always humbly submitted to what they saw as the will of God in the deaths of their loved ones without questioning what had taken place.

Providing for their soldiers became a matter of pride for many women. After writing about how she had been sewing winter clothes for the soldiers, guards, and cadets, Dawson announced that they would all soon receive their boxes. She hoped that another town’s woman who had apparently been making negative comments about the appearance of the soldiers would no longer “be ashamed of her ragged friends, and the people of Selma.” She added, however, that rather than being so critical that woman

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<sup>115</sup> George Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 50; Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 181.

<sup>116</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, January 3, 1857, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*; Rable, *Civil Wars*, 50.

<sup>117</sup> Annie Strudwick Diary, May 2, 1862, Annie Strudwick Diary and Letter # 1838, SHC-UNC.

should use her “fingers more in trying to mend for them and [her] tough less, were I her.”<sup>118</sup>

Not all women willingly accepted their positions in society, not without at least desiring something different for themselves. Vasser recorded how after discussing with a friend his continuation of his studies that she “almost hated” herself because of her dull life, and added that she “longed more than ever to be a man” so that she “might conquer difficulties” and achieve fame, but she quickly reproached herself for such thoughts writing “but this was wrong; I have my duties which if performed, will bring me a reward more precious than the loved wreath of renown. How apt I am to wish for great trials that I may prove my strength thereby and succumb to the petty annoyances of every day life. And when I attain even a little mastery over myself what a sense of self congratulation it is; instead of attributing all the honor to the Spirit which enabled me to conquer, I am glorifying my own strength. Oh, for humility!”<sup>119</sup>

As women wrote about their ideas of self in their diaries it is evident that older and younger women naturally faced different issues. Yet, despite the different issues women faced, they shared the fact that they all struggled with living up to standards that not only society imposed on them and that they accepted and set for themselves. While women accepted their place in society, the existence of the ideal Southern woman that they promoted and shaped themselves, caused a point of contention and caused them grief as they struggled to live up to the ideal. Yet through all of their struggles women

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<sup>118</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Selma, September 15, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC; Rodgers, Ward, Atkins, Flynt, *Alabama: The History of a Deep South State*, 198-99.

<sup>119</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, January 3, 1857, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

turned to prayer and their religious beliefs to provide themselves a sense of comfort and assurance, even though those same religious beliefs were also the source of the many of their feelings of failure.

## **Chapter 2 “God Alone Can Help Us; But Only the Women Think So: But the Prayers in Faith of Woman May do Much More in Such Dire Emergencies as This:” Faith and Religious Beliefs**

Religion has for many years been relegated to a subject of relative unimportance among scholars despite its centrality to not only the outbreak of the war and the creation of the Confederacy, but also to sustaining individuals. Even though attempts to explore the era’s social aspects have greatly enhanced the understanding of the past, religion still fell by the wayside, as the authors of the groundbreaking *Religion and the American Civil War* pointed out in 1998. Religion played an integral role in the way that Americans experienced life and the Civil War. Religious metaphors provided a language that had a common meaning for all Americans.<sup>1</sup> Recently, historians have begun to focus more on religion and its importance in not only the outbreak of the Civil War but also in the daily lives of those who lived through it. Historians such as Drew Gilpin Faust and George Rable included discussions of women’s religious beliefs in their studies of Confederate women. Yet, in general, more than thirty years after historians have worked to

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<sup>1</sup> Introduction to Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson, eds., *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3-18, quotation from page 3; Edwin S. Gaustad, *Religion in America: History and Historiography* (Washington D.C., 260 AHA Pamphlets, American Historical Association, 1966), 58-59; Harry S. Stout and Christopher Grasso, “Civil War, Religion, and Communications: The Case of Richmond,” in Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson, eds., *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 313-359, 313.

incorporate women into an analysis of the past, it “is still difficult to ‘find’ women in many books and articles about American religious history” as Catherine Breckus noted.<sup>2</sup>

Religion, however, played an essential role in the antebellum South that gave rise to the Confederacy.<sup>3</sup> As Mitchell Snay has argued, evangelical Protestantism “was central to the culture and society of the antebellum South” and also provided the moral foundations of the Southern public order.<sup>4</sup> Historians nonetheless take a variety of different approaches to understand religion’s place in society. Many have looked at the social aspects of religion, interpreting them differently. Catherine Clinton, for example, focuses on its function as a mechanism of oppression and as a tool by which the white male slaveholding population of the South subjugated everyone else in society. Religion not only supported the subordination of slaves, but also upheld the oppression of white

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<sup>2</sup> Catherine A Brekus, ed., Introduction to *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 1. Yet, Brekus’s collection, while providing an excellent coverage of various topics in American history completely overlooks the American Civil War. See also Eugene D. Genovese, *Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998); Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religious Separatism in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); George Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Steven E. Woodworth, *While God is Marching On: The Religious World of Civil War Soldiers* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 6; John Boles, *The South Through Time: A History of an American Region* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995), 154-155. In Alabama, religion grew rapidly between 1819 and 1860. See Malcolm C. McMillan, *The Land Called Alabama* (Austin, TX: Steck-Vaughn, 1968), 162.

<sup>4</sup> Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 3.

women.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, Donald G. Mathews argued that evangelical Protestantism in the Old South allowed a “rising lower-middle/middle class to achieve identity and solidarity, rewarding its most committed religious devotees with a sense of personal esteem and liberty.”<sup>6</sup> Still other historians, such as Anne C. Loveland, focused on Southern clergymen and the social order, arguing that they viewed themselves as the moral guardians of Southern society. Hence, many Southern ministers, although initially shunning politics, became actively involved in the secession movement and justified the Southern cause, as historians Eugene Genovese and Mitchell Snay also have argued.<sup>7</sup>

Churches ultimately had to appeal to individuals on a broad basis to be successful. Faith both bolstered the social order and served a fundamental need among the

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<sup>5</sup> Clinton believed in the oppressive nature of antebellum Southern society and claimed that, “religion was an effective tool for this oppression – perhaps more so with women, trapped within the white male bastion, than with slaves, segregated into separate communities.” See Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman’s World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 162. A variety of different approaches have been taken to attempt to examine Southern religion. A documentary history was published on religion in the colonial and early revolutionary period in American history. See, for example, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller, eds., *Women and Religion in America, Volume 2: The Colonial and Revolutionary Periods* (Cambridge: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1983); John B. Boles, “The Religious Mind of the Old South: The Era of the Great Revival, 1787-1805” (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 1969); Mabel Ponder Wilson et al. compilers, *Some Early Alabama Churches (Established before 1870)* (Birmingham: Alabama Society Daughters of the American Revolution, 1973). For an examination of the Churches of Christ in the Alabama area see, George H. and Mildred B. Watson, *History of the Christian Churches in the Alabama Area* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1965). For a discussion of the religious worldviews of Civil War soldiers see, Woodworth, *While God is Marching On*, x.

<sup>6</sup> Donald Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), xv.

<sup>7</sup> Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), ix; Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*; Genovese, *Consuming Fire*.

population. As Samuel Hill has argued, “for a rationalized system of thought-action to take hold, it must capture the moods, needs, and interests of a substantial sector of the population.”<sup>8</sup> In order for a specific interpretation of Christianity to become dominant, in other words, it had to objectify both the pains and the basic self-assertions of a given society in its structure. As religious beliefs began to take the foreground in the public as well as private spheres, they helped people formulate their social ideals and cope with the problems they faced.<sup>9</sup> Religious beliefs fulfilled a fundamental place in the lives of individuals and provided them with a source of strength and reassurance even as their lives were filled with uncertainty and turmoil.

While religion strongly reinforcing the traditional gender norms assigned to women in the Old South it also elevated their position in society. Women often epitomized Christian virtues. Hill, for example, argues that, “precisely the virtues which were attributed to the perfect woman were those demanded of the perfect Christian. The church effectively reinforced the cultural image of woman.”<sup>10</sup> Yet, as noted in the previous chapter, the images of virtues and piety were not enforced upon women without their willing cooperation.<sup>11</sup> Men and women both shared religious concerns, but women

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<sup>8</sup> Samuel S. Hill, Jr., et al., *Religion and the Solid South* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1972), 66, quote from page 38; Boles, *Religious Mind of the Old South*, 10.

<sup>9</sup> Hill argued that, “by becoming a public universe of discourse it formulates what they prize and what they need to cope with. The process is circular: Social sentiments generate an ideological formulation which in turn attracts people’s loyalty by reflecting what they feel deeply, in both positive and negative ways.” Hill, *Religion and the Solid South*, 38.

<sup>10</sup> Hill, *Religion and the Solid South*, 94; Rable, *Civil Wars*, 13.

<sup>11</sup> Rable, *Civil Wars*, 13-14.

in the Old South tended to be more “intensely preoccupied with personal piety, with the need for salvation and for godly behavior.”<sup>12</sup> Women also tended to comprise the majority of the educated church goers.<sup>13</sup> Religion, not surprisingly, came eventually to permeate every aspect of life for many in the Confederacy, not merely church corridors. Many women viewed everything through the lens of faith. One diarist, Rebecca Vasser, for example, saw God in everything around her. After describing a field, she remarked on “the administration of the heavenly around us, our thoughts and words arise to the mighty Architect who stretched out . . . and I longed to know and love Him more.”<sup>14</sup>

The importance of religion in the daily lives of many antebellum Southerners meant that religion naturally held a place of prominence as well in the creation of the Confederacy. Indeed, Emory Thomas has suggested that Southern churches might be the best place to begin a search for understanding the origins of cultural nationalism in the South. Confederates wanted to believe that they were divinely chosen. They sought an identity with God and with religion as a justification for its cause as Jefferson Davis invoked Christianity to support the Confederacy.<sup>15</sup> Religion according to Drew Gilpin

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<sup>12</sup> Hill added that, “men of the time had similar concerns, but except for ministers of the church a man’s daily behavior was not expected to reflect so fully the depth of his religious commitment.” Hill, *Religion and the Solid South*, 92.

<sup>13</sup> Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977), 8. This book focuses specifically on the Northeast rather than the South.

<sup>14</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, September 25, 1856, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

<sup>15</sup> Emory Thomas, *The Confederate Nation: 1861-1865* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, Harper and Row publishers, 1979), 21; Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 4-18, 21-26, 44-74; George Rable, *The Confederate Republic: A Revolution Against Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 62, 70-76.



Faust, then provided the “most fundamental source of legitimation for the Confederacy” and “provided a transcendent framework for southern nationalism.”<sup>16</sup>

Religion became important when sending soldiers off at the beginning of the war. Diarist Elodie Dawson wrote of going out to witness not only the presentation of a flag, but also Bibles, and observing a “beautiful prayer” and a “solemn scene” with “every member of the Company kneeling, their Bibles in hand, in God’s first temple which was just overshadowed enough by the faint rays of the setting sun to make the scene more impressive and in harmony with the saddened and tearful faces of many.”<sup>17</sup> The scene was so moving that she added, “I feel like shedding tears over every soldier I see and think they are entitled to everything on Earth, and if I had my way they should have it.”<sup>18</sup> In this simple presentation ceremony an act of presenting soldiers with Bibles in addition to a flag illustrated the interconnectedness between communities, their soldiers, and individuals’ faith. The belief that God would protect loved ones who left for war also reassured many that they could witness the departure of their loved ones with a sense that God would watch over them.

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<sup>16</sup> Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, 22, 26-28.

<sup>17</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Selma July 22, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid; Carrie Hunter Diary, before June 22, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

The Civil War both challenged and reaffirmed the traditional systems of belief for many Southerners, particularly their religious beliefs. As Drew Gilpin Faust has argued, “from the opening day of the war, Confederates found both justification and consolation in religion. Governmental officials and church leaders alike nurtured belief in the divine purpose of the Confederate experiment.”<sup>19</sup> Such notions had a profound impact on Southern women as with other Southerners. Religion had long been considered the central aspect of the female sphere. When religion and politics fused together into Confederate ideology, many women automatically felt a strong connection to the Confederate cause. The heavy reliance on religious beliefs as a general justification for the Confederacy thus assumed a profoundly important personal role in individual women’s lives as it provided them with a comfortable, familiar framework to understand and cope with the ordeals of the war. As Faust maintained, “women used divine language and belief to explain the frightening new circumstances that confronted them, and to provide themselves as well with the strength and consolation that derives from faith.”<sup>20</sup> In order to understand the experiences of the Alabama women examined in this study during

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<sup>19</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 179. Faust also noted that “although the United States had been established as a secular state by founders wary of religious influences upon government, religion defined the values and assumptions of most mid-nineteenth-century Americans.” Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 172.

<sup>20</sup> Faust argued that, “the convergence of religion with politics, of the sacred with the terrestrial, had significant implications for white women of the wartime South, for it offered them a new legitimacy and a new language with which to approach public affairs. Religion, long regarded as a central component of the female sphere, opened an avenue into the male world of politics and public action. At the same time, it assumed profound personal import, serving as an essential intellectual and emotional resource and providing a framework for understanding and coping with the ordeals of war. Women used divine language and belief to explain the frightening new circumstances that confronted them, and to provide themselves as well with the strength and consolation that derives from faith,” see Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 180.

the war, which provides insight into how some women in one Southern state experienced the war, in short, it is essential to examine in greater detail the role of religion in their lives.

Religion in both the antebellum and Civil War South cannot be viewed as uniform. People of different races belonged to various denominations that held different beliefs. Those beliefs routinely engendered stormy debates about theology. At the same time, while the nuances of each denomination must be taken into account, many similarities existed. Mathews notes that the Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians all shared the common conviction that the religious conversion began with a realization of one's personal sin and unworthiness.<sup>21</sup> Emory Thomas likewise argued the "mass of Southern whites acknowledged a fundamental religious emphasis upon sin and salvation."<sup>22</sup> Nearly all Southerners, in other words, were influenced to some degree by evangelical Protestantism and the Second Great Awakening.

The first major inroads of the evangelical movement into the South began in 1740. Even the Episcopal Church, commonly viewed as the "most ritualistic and least emotional, was not immune to the growth of evangelical piety," in Matthew's words.<sup>23</sup> The Second Great Awakening had the most profound impact, however, on the expansion of the three major denominations prominent in Alabama: Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians. As Wayne Flynt has pointed out, the Methodists and Baptists "profited

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<sup>21</sup> Donald G. Mathews, "Evangelicals in the Old South," 4.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas, *The Confederate Nation*, 21.

<sup>23</sup> Donald G. Mathews, "Evangelicals in the Old South," 4; Jane Turner Censer, *North Carolina Planters and their Children, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 6.

most from the religious excitement of the ‘second great awakening.’”<sup>24</sup> The Alabama Methodist Conference was organized in 1832, and by 1837 the Methodist church in Alabama had reached 40,600 members. The Baptists formed a state convention by 1823 with about 5,000 members, which had expanded to over 65,000 black and white members by the outbreak of the Civil War. There were also Presbyterians, members of the Episcopal Church, other Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, but they remained minority denominations. From the 1840s through the Civil War, Methodists and Baptists made up the majority in Alabama.<sup>25</sup> One consequence of the prominence of these denominations is that none of the women examined in this study belonged to the Catholic Church or were Jewish, although both faiths were mentioned. Kate Cumming, for example, noted receiving goods from the Hebrew Military Aid society in Mobile. M. E. Thompson, who was an Episcopalian, wrote about burying a Catholic soldier in her church’s graveyard. Overall, however, Catholics, Jews, and other religious groups are not discussed here. In addition, Mathews has criticized the emphasis on white’s evangelical beliefs to the

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<sup>24</sup> J. Wayne Flynt, “Alabama,” in *Religion in the Southern States: A Historical Study*, edited by Samuel S. Hill (Macon, GA.: Mercer University Press, 1983), 5-26, 9. Woodworth listed the three major denominations in the South in order of largest to smallest as the Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians. See Woodworth, *While God is Marching On*, 15.

<sup>25</sup> By the eve of the Civil War the Episcopalians as well as the Presbyterians also had a foothold in Alabama. Flynt, however, claimed that “other denominations were limited by geographical or ethnic factors. The Cumberland Presbyterians and Disciples of Christ established congregations mainly in the mountainous northern counties. Catholics were generally confined to the extreme south, where families of French and Spanish extraction held defiantly to the old faith. Flynt, “Alabama,” 9-14. See also Thomas, *Confederate Nation*, 21.

exclusion of African-American's influences on shaping Southern Christianity.<sup>26</sup> This is a valid criticism, yet because of the nature of this study and the rarity with which the women in this study mentioned the religious beliefs of their slaves, this chapter focuses on white evangelical Southern Protestantism particularly as pertaining to the women in this study.

Church attendance held a place of vital importance for many women. Many people felt a strong bond to the church at which they pledged membership. Attending a church service also contained a social aspect. It was an acceptable way for women to socialize with others in the community. Belonging to a particular church often became a part of a person's identity. The women in this study internalized religious ideas they heard at their churches and made them a part of their everyday lives. Yet, at the same time, while the women cited here tended to belong to a specific faith, they often attended other churches.<sup>27</sup> Although some historians argue that Protestant denominations "were sharply competitive with each other, white denominations with each other and Negro denominations with each other, and all with the Catholic 'enemy,'" that did not hold true for the women examined in this study.<sup>28</sup> To be sure some occasionally wrote about how

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<sup>26</sup> Kate Cumming, March 10, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*; M. E. Thompson to her Elias Thompson, Marion, December 22, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke. By the early 1800s blacks were being pushed to the periphery of the organized religious groups. See Donald G. Mathews, "Evangelicals in the Old South – Communitas and Apocalypse," in *Religion in the South: Conference Papers* (Birmingham: Alabama Humanities Foundation, 1986): 3-15, 3, 9.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas points to the ease with which people attended churches of different denominations as evidence of the general religious homogeneity in the South. See Thomas, *The Confederate Nation*, 21.

<sup>28</sup> Hill, *Religion and the Solid South*, 75.

they disagreed with a sermon or the wider beliefs of churches they visited, but they did not condemn those who belonged to other groups.<sup>29</sup>

Diary Elizabeth Rhodes, for example, regularly attended various churches even though she was a member of the Baptist church in Eufaula. While she sometimes disagreed with the teachings of the other churches, she still enjoyed the sermons. She nonetheless held opinions about the practices of other religious groups. After listening to a sermon in a Methodist church that was intended to “prove infant baptism” she did methodically refute the preachers arguments, concluding that, “it was perfectly sacrilige. I never want to hear anything so purely irreligious again while I live – I felt mortified for the Methodist people.” She later recorded her approval of her own Baptist preacher’s sermon on the importance of adult baptism. On December 16, 1860 she again wrote about hearing a sermon on the importance of “baptism in water” and added that their church had a “baptistry in the church” that was supplied with water from a well. Her belief in adult baptism illustrated the way in which she took teachings she received in her church home with her, contemplated them, and then came to her own conclusions about which of the teachings were correct: those of her church. Still she continued to attend other churches. After visiting a Presbyterian church she noted how much she enjoyed it. At

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<sup>29</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, January 4, 1857, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, August 1, 1860, April 8, 1860, SPR5, ADAH; Elodie to Dawson, Selma July 7, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SCH-UNC; Eliza Bedford Weakley Diary, May 1, 1864, Eliza Bedford Weakley Papers #1605, SHC-UNC; Kate Cumming, June 1, 1862, September 7, 1862, October 19, 1862, November 1, 1862, April 5, 1863, August 8, 1863, September 13, 1863, September 20, 1863, January 24, 1864, March 26, 1865, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*; Annie Strudwick Diary, December 13, 1862, Annie Strudwick Diary and Letter # 1838, SHC-UNC.

another point, while visiting family members in Columbus, she again attended a Methodist church in the morning and a Baptist one in the evening.<sup>30</sup>

Diarist Margaret Gillis also recorded attending Baptist and Presbyterian churches.<sup>31</sup> Kate Cumming went to Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches even though she was a devout Episcopalian. Cumming sincerely desired all Christians to unite and end factional striving. She added that she did not believe that her church, the Episcopal Church, was the only true church. Rather, she reflected on how she had seen good in many denominations. If the Episcopal church was the only one providing guidance, the South would be in darkness since there were so few Episcopal chaplains in the field. “I am so much rejoiced when a man tells me he is a professor of religion,” she wrote, “and trying to be a follower of the lowly Jesus, that I never think or care of which Christian church he is a member.”<sup>32</sup>

The basic fundamental beliefs of the Alabama women examined in this study, rather than their denominational differences then, are important to comprehending their worldviews. This is not to argue that there was anything uniquely different between the beliefs of people living in Alabama compared to those in other states. Indeed all American evangelical Protestants were heavily influenced by the common belief that God

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<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, January 5, 1858, January 6, 1858, December 2, 1860, December 9, 1860, December 16, 1860, transcripts in author’s possession. Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, January 17, 1858, transcripts in author’s possession.

<sup>31</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, April 8, 1860, August 1, 1860, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>32</sup> Kate Cumming, June 1, 1862, September 7, 1862, October 19, 1862, November 1, 1862, April 5, 1863, August 8, 1863, August 16, 1863, September 13, 1863, September 20, 1863, January 24, 1864, March 26, 1865, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

actively controlled the events in the world. When they constantly wrote of God's will, women highlighted the influence of the concept that they had no control over the events that took place around them. They thus should live every moment as if it could be their last. These pious women viewed life as temporary and brief – as “made up in passing moments” – that put them closer to reaching their goal of living in heaven for eternity. Belief that they would one day reap a reward in heaven provided a sense of comfort for many of them.<sup>33</sup> They did not usually blame God for painful events such as death, but felt as though it was all a part of His plan for the world.<sup>34</sup> In writing about the death of the local bishop, for example, M. E. Thompson believed that it was God's will that the bishop had been spared the subsequent troubles the nation would face.<sup>35</sup> Death, as with everything else in life, was a natural part of God's plan for humanity.

These middle and upper-class white women embraced faith eagerly, as it gave many a feeling of personal worth and provided what Barbara Welter described as the “core of woman's virtue, the source of her strength.”<sup>36</sup> At the same time, however, as

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<sup>33</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 1, 1861, August 5, 1864, SPR262, ADAH; Transcription by Zillah Brandon attributed to W. C. B., Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 8, 1861, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>34</sup> McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 172. The death of one child often “opened afresh the fountain of tears that had not ceased to overflow” for other departed loved ones. See Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, June 7, 1862, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH. Clinton noted that “most mothers of the planter class learned to cope with their grief in a more moderate manner, combating it with a combination of spiritual strength and family support, and returning to their household routines,” see Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 157.

<sup>35</sup> M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, January 2, 1861, January 14, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

<sup>36</sup> Barbara Welter, *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976), 21; Rable, *Civil Wars*, 13-14.



George Rable has argued, they really had no choice anyway. “Evangelical religion also stressed obligations over rights,” he wrote, “and pious women learned to tolerate what they could not change.”<sup>37</sup> Many women thus reconciled themselves to their subordinate position in society because they believed that they were filling the role prescribed to them by God and society.<sup>38</sup> They believed themselves, in Welter’s words, “inherently more religious, modest, passive, submissive and domestic than men.”<sup>39</sup> Many of the advice manuals to young women reinforced the importance of religion and submission in daily life.<sup>40</sup> When searching for identity, most young women relied heavily upon their families as well as their churches. Indeed, according to Welter, the “attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors, and society, could be divided into four cardinal virtues – piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife – woman.”<sup>41</sup>

The manner in which women actively shaped their personal religious beliefs meant that while those beliefs provided a sense of security they also were the source of

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<sup>37</sup> Rable, *Civil Wars*, 10-11.

<sup>38</sup> “Reconciliation to a limited role in the home and in the larger society reflected women’s often ambivalent attitude toward the world, an ambivalence that grew out of their religious beliefs.” Rable, *Civil Wars*, 12.

<sup>39</sup> Welter, *Dimity Convictions*, 4.

<sup>40</sup> Ellen M. Plante, *Women at Home in Victorian America: A Social History* (New York: Facts on File, 1997), 4.

<sup>41</sup> Welter, *Dimity Convictions*, 21. Welter noted that for most young women, other than their family, the other “major institution with which the young girl had contact in her search for identity, and which contributed to that identity, was the church” (17).

constant anguish. The Omnipotence and Omniscience of God did not remove free will from individuals. Although they believed that God was everywhere and controlled the world, this did not mean that He forced individuals into perfection. Quite to the contrary, the individual was engaged in a constant struggle to choose to live the Christian life and not give in to their personal desires. Many were convinced that if they were to fulfil their role in life they must daily strive to improve their religious nature. Internal turmoil emerged as women questioned their righteousness and their ability to live as Christians. That internal struggle in turn led to a sense of inferiority, for they feared that they could not live up to the expectations they and society had for womanhood. Gillis, for example, worried that she was not a good Christian. She realized that the decision to live a godly life depended upon God's help, however as she prayed, "Great God, show me the road, and give me the faith and firmness of purpose to keep to it, and not wander out into the broad road that leads to destruction."<sup>42</sup> Vasser meanwhile often questioned her own worthiness of being a Christian. During the war she wrote, "It seems so presumptuous for me to claim a hope in Christ, and brother seems to inclined to be so skeptical on religious subjects that I am afraid my imperfect Christian life will do more harm than good to the cause I ought to honour."<sup>43</sup> When Zillah Brandon questioned her future life she wrote, "But if the Lord Jesus Christ and the purchase of his death was not about the prerogative of the devil, our trust in Him would not only prove a failure but we should be lost to

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<sup>42</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, June 22, 1860, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>43</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, September 6, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

every virtue.”<sup>44</sup> Many could fall back on the belief that, as M. E. Thompson wrote, the Savior was “always willing and ready to forgive” the many shortcomings of humanity.<sup>45</sup>

Wartime heightened these tensions. Drew Gilpin Faust noted that, “as the unimagined horrors of war began to reveal themselves, women turned to religion to make sense of their anguish and to find the courage to endure.”<sup>46</sup> It provided a sense of security while at the same time creating conflict for many women who feared that they were not living up to the religious standards they set for themselves. Feelings of inadequacy and fear often followed. Indeed, Faust argues that Christian doctrines of resignation helped support the “psychological process of numbing and denial” even as submitting to God’s will “remained a severe trial for those struggling to accept the pain of bereavement.”<sup>47</sup>

Church attendance was a central part of religious devotion. The frequency with which church attendance was mentioned in diaries (almost weekly for most women) illustrates the centrality of this gathering to their lives. Many of the women examined in this study believed that church attendance was important to their spiritual wellbeing. It also was one of the few public activities in which women could freely engage. Indeed, as Rable has noted, “religion linked women to the world (even as it led them to shun

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<sup>44</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, April 25, 1861, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>45</sup> M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, July, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

<sup>46</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 181.

<sup>47</sup> Faust added, “each new loss, each new horror threatened to break through the protective shell. Women invoked religious doctrines and texts almost as incantations in their efforts to transcend suffering and grief, to wean themselves from the cares of this world.” Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 191.

worldliness and materialism) but at the same time left traditional sex roles intact.”<sup>48</sup> In essence, church attendance created a sense of a shared religious community – women were not merely practicing their religious beliefs alone in the world, but were a part of a larger social network of believers. Churches provided support networks and became an important part of a woman’s personal identity and sense of self. Participation in church as a social event included congregating with others who shared their religious beliefs, participating in services as members of the congregation, and receiving religious instruction, which many then contemplated long after the end of the sermon.

Women wrote about attending church throughout the war and it sometimes lifted their mood and morale.<sup>49</sup> This morale boost came not only from the religious instruction received, but also from the social aspect of feeling connected to a shared religious community. After noting that she had “been vexed” and “had the blues for two days”

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<sup>48</sup> Rable, *Civil Wars*, 13.

<sup>49</sup> Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, April 18, 1861, March 14-15, March 23, 1862, 1862, May 7, 1865, SPR113, ADAH; Elodie to Dawson, Selma, November 23, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SCH-UNC; Rebecca Vasser Diary, October 20, 1856, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, January 22, 1860, December 1, 1860, April 26, 1861, April 27, 1861, September 26, 1861, October 5, 1861, December 13, 1861, SPR2 ADAH. On March 22, 1863 Espy wrote that there was “still but one preacher.” On August 2, 1863 she noted that “there was a large congregation.” See also Kate Cumming, June 8, 1862, June 13, 1862, August 31, 1862, July 5, 1863, July 18, 1863, July 19, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, July, 11, 1860, September 1, 1860, June 26, 1861, SPR5, ADAH; Annie Strudwick Diary, January 5, 1862, January 12, 1862, March 30, 1862, April 27, 1862, May 4, 1862, May 11, 1862, June 8, 1862, June 15, 1862, June 22, 1862, Annie Strudwick Diary and Letter # 1838, SHC-UNC. Eliza Bedford Weakley Diary, July 19, 1864, January 8, 1865, January 29, 1865, February 12, 1865, Eliza Bedford Weakley Papers #1605, SHC-UNC; Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, December 21, 1860, SPR262, ADAH; Eliza Corry letter, September 3, 1864, Robert E. Corry Confederate Collection, 1857-1913, RG84, AU; M. E. Thompson to Elias Thompson, Marion, January 25, 1862, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

Carrie Hunter attended church and promptly claimed to feel better.<sup>50</sup> Many churches also held religious revival meetings throughout the war. Revivals both challenged and encouraged those in attendance.<sup>51</sup> After writing about attending a revival meeting, Octavia Otey noted that, “we have not been disheartened by the Yankees at all so far which has been a great blessing.”<sup>52</sup> Meetings did not always provoke enthusiasm from women, however. Eliza Corry wrote to her husband that when the quarterly meeting began at their church many hoped that a revival would break out, but she was “afraid there will not be much good accomplished here” because both the old and the young seemed “really hardened.”<sup>53</sup> She did not disclose her reason for this belief, but her wording reveals her sense of depression, which she, in turn, projected onto the social events taking place around her.

Before the war, more often than not church services were traditionally held in church buildings, even in rural areas where services were sporadic and contingent on a preacher’s availability. The war altered the physical location of some services, which

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<sup>50</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, January 12, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>51</sup> Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, September 11, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, September 2, 1859, October 26, 1860, January 31, 1863, SPR2 ADAH; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, August 11, 1861, SPR5, ADAH. Cumming noted that there was a religious revival, “which the citizens take very little interest, but the soldiers a great deal.” Kate Cumming, April 10, 1864, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*. See also Eliza Corry letter, September 3, 1864, Robert E. Corry Confederate Collection, 1857-1913, RG84, AU.

<sup>52</sup> Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, September 11, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC.

<sup>53</sup> Eliza Corry letter, September 3, 1864, Robert E. Corry Confederate Collection, 1857-1913, RG84, AU.

often could not take place in familiar structures. As she traveled around with the hospital, for example, Kate Cumming sometimes attended services in the open air when there were no buildings available.<sup>54</sup> The church body itself, however, was of vital importance to many. Women wrote about new members of the church with great joy, especially if the new member was one of their relatives. Writing of her daughter joining the church Otey rejoiced stating, “Imogen joined the Church and I am very glad about that – when she was a baby we gave her to God in baptism and now in her 14<sup>th</sup> year” she was ready to publically join the church.<sup>55</sup> When women were unable to attend they lamented that fact in their diaries. As the war progressed and more and more preachers took up arms in the service of the Confederacy, it became common for women to mention going to church only to find no preaching or preacher present.<sup>56</sup> At the beginning of the war Espy wrote that she went to church to find that the preacher had enlisted and was out drilling. Later in

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<sup>54</sup> After Cumming wrote of hearing preaching under a large tree, because the chapel had not yet been built, she exclaimed, “O, how earnestly I prayed that we, with all the warning of that unhappy race before us, might not forget the Lord our God, and he cast us wanderers over the earth.” Kate Cumming, August 16, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>55</sup> Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, September 28, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC.

<sup>56</sup> Espy wrote about both interest in the church and in the lack of preachers during the war. See Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, September 3, 1859, January 1, 1860, September 1, 1861, January 3, 1862, March 1, 1862, March 2, 1862, July 6, 1862, August 7, 1864, August 10, 1864, May 7, 1865, SPR2 ADAH. See also Kate Cumming, October 19, 1862, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*; M. E. Thompson to Elias Thompson, Marion, July 22, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, September 12, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC; Eliza Bedford Weakley Diary, April 24, 1864, June 22, 1864, January 22, 1865, Eliza Bedford Weakley Papers #1605, SHC-UNC; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, August 11, 1861, SPR5, ADAH; Annie Strudwick Diary, August 31, 1862, Annie Strudwick Diary and Letter # 1838, SHC-UNC; Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, January 31, 1861, SPR113, ADAH.

the war, she wrote that she “went to church but so few people that there was no preaching.”<sup>57</sup> While this caused disappointment, it did not cause women to lose their faith. Indeed, while women lamented the dearth of preachers, having preachers at the front to minister to the wounded and dying soldiers was a matter of greater importance to many. Brandon, for example, was glad that so many preachers had gone as soldiers to tell their brethren in arms of God’s love and sympathy and “to point them to the Lamb on which they may lean when their feet staggers in death” as she exclaimed, “Oh the condescension of the Almighty to permit man to be instrumental in the salvation of his brother man.”<sup>58</sup> With the army, Kate Cumming was upset by the fact that her hospital sometimes lacked a chaplain, and noted that “we profess to be a Christian people, and should see that all the benefits of Christianity are administered to our dying soldiers.” She sometimes spent Sunday talking to the wounded rather than attending church.<sup>59</sup>

When women were absent from church, they offered excuses to their diaries, almost as if they were trying to justify their actions to themselves. Sarah Davis, for example, wrote that she did not go to church one Sunday because she did not want to

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<sup>57</sup> Many churches were forced to close during the course of the war, hence women relied even more heavily upon their own religious beliefs as well as prayer meetings. Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 184-85; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, May 4, 1861, August 1, 1863, July 24, 1864, SPR2 ADAH. Gillis also wrote about attending church only to find that no preacher was present. See Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, April 7, 1860, April 7, 1861, May 5, 1861, June 2, 1861, SPR5, ADAH. See also Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, January 29, 1860, February 1, 1861, March 16, 1862, SPR2 ADAH; Kate Cumming, November 23, 1862, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*; Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, September 11, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC.

<sup>58</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, August 21, 1861, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>59</sup> Kate Cumming, May 5, 1862, January 11, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

“entertain the congregation by my cough,” but she quickly added, “I fasted in the morning.”<sup>60</sup> When she was unable to attend church, Margaret Gillis sat in her room and read the Bible and biographies.<sup>61</sup> Annie Strudwick, unable to attend church because of an illness and a broken carriage also noted that she tried to spend the day as she knew she should. Although she read “a good deal” in her Bible, she still reproved herself because she “might have read more.” She not only lamented that she was tired of staying at home, but also exclaimed, “I am afraid we will all become heathens” because of her lack of church attendance.<sup>62</sup> Kate Cumming was sometimes too busy attending the sick and wounded to attend church, yet she still read the Bible when she could.<sup>63</sup> Women valued and relied on the Bible as a source of comfort and instruction. Brandon wrote about how she appreciated the Bible not only because “it is the word of Jehovah” but also “because it is the foundation of all social order, it fashions all our mortal and religious modes of life, it determines all our habits of thought and feeling.”<sup>64</sup>

Observing the Sabbath resting and reflecting on religion became a way for some women to recharge for the week. Vasser, for example, wrote, “I am beginning to

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<sup>60</sup> Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, February 28, 1862, SPR113, ADAH; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, June 1, 1861, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>61</sup> Because she could not go to church she amused herself in her own darkened chamber reading the Bible and some biographies. See Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, May 5, 1861, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>62</sup> Annie Strudwick Diary, January 19, 1862, January 26, 1862, February 2, 1862, February 23, 1862, March 2, 1862, March 16, 1862, April 20, 1862, Annie Strudwick Diary and Letter # 1838, SHC-UNC.

<sup>63</sup> Kate Cumming, April 27, 1862, March 1, 1863, October 26, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>64</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 1, 1861, SPR262, ADAH.



appreciate the privilege of resting for one day from worldly care, and laying in a new supply of good resolutions and holy thoughts for the coming week.”<sup>65</sup> Sunday afternoons offered perfect opportunities for letter writing and women often utilized their free hours writing long letters to their absent loved ones. Yet, the fact that they were writing to a loved one and not meditating on religious thoughts became a matter for concern among some women. Elodie Dawson, for example, in one of her letters to her husband admitted her fear that she was committing a sin, by writing to him. She tried to ease her conscious by writing to him of religious matters, expressing her ardent hope that he was reading his Bible that she gave him rather than taking more naps over it.<sup>66</sup>

While women were barred from preaching within the church, they actively participated in the services because of their deep devotion to their faith. Participation in services on Sunday morning included not only listening to sermons and singing, but also partaking in communion when it was offered.<sup>67</sup> The ways in which the women examined in this study wrote about communion speaks to their deeply personal faith. In order to take communion they believed that they needed to be right with God and hold no outstanding grudges against other people or have sins from which they had not repented. Vasser, for example, mentioned in her diary that she felt guilt for partaking of the Lord’s

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<sup>65</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, September 6, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

<sup>66</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Selma June 16, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

<sup>67</sup> M. E. Thompson to Elias Thompson, Marion, November 3, 1861, January 25, 1862, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, September 18, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC; Eliza Bedford Weakley Diary, January 15, 1865, Eliza Bedford Weakley Papers #1605, SHC-UNC.

supper because of something she had done.<sup>68</sup> This illustrates the depth of her personal belief in that she was the only one who knew she had done something wrong. Were she to have merely been acting out religious motions she would not have felt the necessity to reveal to her diary her shortcomings. Gillis likewise wrote about how she hated attending the Baptist church on the sacrament day because she did not like to have to refuse communion because of her sins. At the same time she was in a dilemma. She wrote that “I cannot commune I would commit a sin to commune and I fear I commit a sin in not communing.” She continued, “I feel that I am unworthy myself. I know there is no one worthy, but I am less worthy now than ever, for if I have not fallen from grace no I have not fallen from grace but I have back slidden terribly, and I do believe it is enmity towards some people that caused it I know it but I don’t know how to remedy the matter.” She finally refused to take the sacrament when it was offered because she “could not take it with a clear conscience” as there were members of the congregation with whom she refused to speak and she could not “commune with those I would not fellowship.”<sup>69</sup>

While communion was important, sermons provided the backbone of worship services in most churches. As women wrote about sermons in their diaries they demonstrated the ways in which they actively intellectually participated in services. They were not merely recipients of religion, but indeed, also contemplated their religion. Women sometimes mentioned that they heard good sermons.<sup>70</sup> Other times, they

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<sup>68</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, October 20, 1856, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

<sup>69</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, April 8, 1860, July 14, 1861, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., February 13, 1860, September 19, 1860, October 27, 1860, August 11, 1861; Elodie to Dawson, Selma, November 23, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson

recorded the topic.<sup>71</sup> Some wrote about poor sermons they heard. After a series of bad sermons Annie Strudwick lamented, “I wish I could hear good preaching once more.”<sup>72</sup> Kate Cumming meanwhile became upset after hearing poor sermons and wondered why “ignorant men” were allowed to preach in some churches.<sup>73</sup> The very act of passing judgement on a sermon and condemning some as “poor” meant that these women knew what they expected in a “good” sermon. Women often reflected on the messages of the sermons they heard, enjoyed discussing them with their loved ones, and internalized them. Eliza Corry wrote to her husband that the quarterly meeting had just started at their church and added, “I wish you were here to go with me, for I am sure preaching would do

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Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SCH-UNC; Kate Cumming, December 29, 1863, April 10, 1864, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*; Annie Strudwick Diary, August 10, 1862, Annie Strudwick Diary and Letter # 1838, SHC-UNC; Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, March 9-10, 1862, April 29, 1863, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>71</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, September 21, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC. Cumming wrote that she went to an Episcopal church and heard a sermon on the text “The Lord has arisen indeed” (April 5, 1863). She also noted listening to a sermon on the Sermon on the Mount. See Kate Cumming, May 4, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*. Gillis wrote about attending a Baptist church and hearing a sermon from the text “Give me Thy heart.” See Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, April 7, 1861, SPR5, ADAH. Hunter wrote about her cousin Mark’s sermon: “Isaac went out at the eventide to meditate,” and added, “I think I will try to remember it.” See Carrie Hunter Diary, before June 22, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC. Otey wrote about hearing a very good sermon from James 1:27, that lasted, with prayers over an hour and a half. See Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, September 25, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC.

<sup>72</sup> Annie Strudwick Diary, August 3, 1862, November 16, 1862, Annie Strudwick Diary and Letter # 1838, SHC-UNC.

<sup>73</sup> Kate Cumming, August 16, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

me more good if you listened to the same sermon, and we could speak of them afterwards.”<sup>74</sup>

Sermons often emphasized the importance of Christian living and religious actions; messages that resonated with women congregants. After writing about attending church, Espy prayed, “May the Lord have mercy on us and direct us, for we are weak, and know not what to do for the best.”<sup>75</sup> After listening to a sermon on Christian faithfulness, with the text from II Timothy 3:5, “Having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof,” Hunter stated, “I fear there are many skeleton Christians in the Churches.”<sup>76</sup> Sarah Davis recorded hearing a sermon on the same text, and noted that it was “very touching.”<sup>77</sup> She continued that living an active Christian life and publicly professing faith were “absolutely necessary in religion.”<sup>78</sup> Cumming wrote that in a

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<sup>74</sup> Eliza Corry letter, September 3, 1864, Robert E. Corry Confederate Collection, 1857-1913, RG84, AU.

<sup>75</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, July 14, 1860, SPR2 ADAH. Before the outbreak of the war, Rhodes recorded sermons that helped her cope with the loss of her first two children. Throughout 1858, the sermons she reflected on dealt with hope and assurance that she would one day be reunited with her children. On March 14, 1858, she attended church and heard “a cheering sermon from these words, ‘Ye are Christ’s.’” She rested in the assurance that she would be protected by her faith in Christ. On March 20, 1858, she attended the Methodist church where she heard a sermon “on the resurrection of Christ.” Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, February 22, 1858, March 14, 1858, March 20, 1858, Elizabeth Rhodes Diaries, transcripts in author’s possession; Thomas, *The Confederate Nation*, 245-246.

<sup>76</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, January 19, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>77</sup> Davis wrote about hearing a sermon from II Timothy 3:5; “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof; from such turn away.” Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, April 13, 1861, SPR113, ADAH.

<sup>78</sup> Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, April 13, 1861, SPR113, ADAH.

sermon, “we were warned, as we have often been before, to try and live in obedience to God’s commands, so that we might get his blessing instead of his curse. The ministers of the gospel seem to have done their part in this respect; so, if we go astray, it will be wilful blindness.”<sup>79</sup> Hence, Christian living was essential to a Christian life.

As Anne C. Loveland has argued, evangelicals viewed themselves as the moral guardians of the Southern people, and thus sometimes became actively involved in political issues before the war. After Fort Sumter, Southern clergymen actively involved themselves in creating a civil religion that supported the Confederacy, while Jefferson Davis routinely called for days of fasting and prayer. As Rable has argued, “the God preached in Southern churches directly intervened in human affairs: battlefield victories were signs of divine solicitude and defeats merely momentary chastisement for a sinful but still chosen people.”<sup>80</sup>

The secession crisis and the outbreak of the war thus led to a shift in the type of sermons women wrote about in their diaries and letters. Toward the end of 1860, Rhodes recorded sermons that reflected the excitement of the times, yet also portrayed the possible horrors a potential war could bring upon the South. She noted one sermon that she felt indicated the possibility of the coming “war and bloodshed” which “would be the result of our present troubled times” as “life of course was much more uncertain at such times [such as the present] than when no dangers threatened us.” On January 6, 1861, she wrote that the sermon came from Romans 12:11, “Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” That was to “be our motto and watch word thru the year which

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<sup>79</sup> Kate Cumming, October 19, 1862, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>80</sup> Rable, *The Confederate Republic*, 75-76; Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*;

had just begun,” she added. Rhodes quickly internalized and applied the sermon to current political events. The South could not let its guard down in any area, she believed. “My heart was filled with gratitude,” she wrote, “that our pastor had been spared to us and the world, and my sincere prayer is that he may prove a great blessing to the people and be instrumental in bringing many souls to the foot of the Cross.”<sup>81</sup>

Rhodes believed that God stood firmly behind the southern cause even when her preacher David Reeves preached jeremiads on the sins of the nation. After one meeting, Rhodes agreed that it was little wonder that “God has chastised us by bringing upon us the great calamity of War.” Aware particularly of the sin of pride, which she believed could bring punishment, she related that her “sincere prayer to the Almighty God is that He keep us as a people humble.” Discussing the present situation of the country, her pastor put forth the idea that the present “affliction [had been] sent because of our sinfulness as a nation.” The country had not looked to God and thanked Him for the “blessings of Freedom and a glorious Republican government,” instead giving “too much of the credit to the credit to the wisdom and protection of our forefathers – and our own Statesmen.” Yet while Rhodes might have agreed at one point with Reeves on the possibility that the Civil War came about as a result of the sins of Americans, she remained unconvinced. It was never a common theme throughout her diary. Rather than blindly accepting the teachings of her preacher she sorted through what she heard and came to her own convictions. Although she feared God’s chastisement, she still believed that “the sincere prayers of God’s people will bring upon us His Divine blessings.”

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<sup>81</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, January 6, 1861, January 13, 1861, Elizabeth Rhodes Diaries, transcripts in author’s possession; Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order*; Thomas, *The Confederate Nation*, 245-246.

Indeed, she continued to believe in the righteousness of the Southern cause. At one point, she wrote, “how bad to think what this unjust and unholy war is costing us of Southern blood.” She still believed, however, that God ordered the world according to His plans. Hence she praised Him for victories and accepted defeats as part of His divine plan for the Confederacy.<sup>82</sup> She did not seem to blame God for the loss of Southern lives, but rather saw that as a part of His plan. She referred to the war as “unjust and unholy” not because she questioned what she saw as the will of God. Quite to the contrary, she blamed the North. She believed that it was part of God’s will that the South become an independent nation. The North was defying God’s will and hence creating an “unjust and unholy” situation.

As preachers began to tune their sermons to the crises at hand, it is telling that women recorded those sermons in their diaries. At the beginning of the war Carrie Hunter recorded a sermon based on Psalm 144:1, “Blessed is the Lord my strength which hath taught my hands to war and my fingers to fight.” A year later Hunter described one of the best sermons she had ever heard preached; “Watchman! What of the night! Watchman! What of the night? The watchman said the morning cometh.” She added, “Would that the morning light were ready to dawn on our beloved Southern land and our loved ones relieved from their toilsome night – watch.”<sup>83</sup> Hence some of the sermons women like Hunter internalized served to bolster her belief that God was backing the Confederacy.

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., March 4, 1861, June 13, 1861, July 28, 1861, October 13, 1861.

<sup>83</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, July 13, 1861, February 23, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

As the war progressed, sermons became more somber. Eugene Genovese explored the way that Southerners dealt with the war and reconciled its course with their religious beliefs, arguing that Southern preachers not only supported and justified fighting, but also continued to support the war and claim God's backing for it even when the war turned against the South. They claimed that the South was merely being tested by God so that it could become a more Christian nation. Southerners in reaction, not only needed to demonstrate humility, but also acknowledge God's authority.<sup>84</sup>

Sermons and religious teachings often focused on justifying the suffering of the people by drawing metaphors between current turmoil and Biblical events. As Faust pointed out, comparisons to Job became commonplace in Southern religious discussions. In 1863, Espy recorded that she was reading Job in her Bible class at church. While she did not record any of her thoughts on it, Job is about God allowing a righteous man to suffer as a test. Related to the Confederacy, it suggested that God was allowing it to be subjected to trials.<sup>85</sup> In another sermon, in the midst of the increasing death toll, Espy recorded the minister preaching from Hebrews 9:27, "And as it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment."<sup>86</sup>

By 1863, with the tide of the war turning against the Confederacy, many preachers changed their tune and joined David Reeves in calling for repentance for the sins committed by Southerners: factional political infighting, pride, covetousness, and

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<sup>84</sup> Genovese, *Consuming Fire*; Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, 33.

<sup>85</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 181, 192; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, June 14, 1863, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>86</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, April 29, 1863, SPR2 ADAH.



extortion. Materialism, however, was the major issue criticized by preachers. Perhaps these women mentioned this more because they feared they were guilty of being materialistic. Many now believed that the Confederates were being justly chastised for their sins. As Rable has argued, “national sin offered a convenient theological explanation for the anguish and despair of the war’s final months.”<sup>87</sup> Faust agreed that many believed that the war was God’s way to chastise and purify His people. When writing about a “solemn sermon on the judgment” Rebecca Vasser added that everyone was “sadly demoralized” because of the course of the war and she suspected that more people were thinking about what was going on with the Confederate army than were paying attention to the sermon. “I suspect many more minds in the assembly were wondering where Genl B was and praying God to protect our capital, than listening to the learned arguments used to prove the judgments,” she wrote, adding that, “the presence of the enemy in our most holy places does not add to the feeling of devotion.” Then, upon leaving the church, she heard a rumor that Richmond had fallen but refused to believe it, quickly adding, “God alone can help us; but only the women think so: but the prayers in faith of woman may do much more in such dire emergencies as this.”<sup>88</sup> This simple statement illuminates the depth of conviction that some women held in not only their faith, but also in the power of their active involvement in their faith – in the form of prayers. Vasser implied that some of the men had essentially lost their faith in the ability

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<sup>87</sup> Rable, *The Confederate Republic*, 184-85, 208-9, quotation from page 277; Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, 40-44.

<sup>88</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, June 8, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

of God to preserve the Confederacy. She believed, however that the faith and prayers of the women would pull the Confederacy out of its precarious position.

Yet, as the war drew to a close, women did not reject their faith. Indeed, they adapted their religious beliefs to their situations and believed that it was somehow a part of God's bigger plan for the Confederacy to be defeated. At the end of the war Kate Cumming wrote about hearing a sermon on the text "Thy will be done," noting that

it fell upon our saddened ears with a mournful cadence, as if warning us to prepare for some calamity soon to come, and telling us that, no matter what befell us, we must bow in meekness to 'Him who doeth all things well.' 'For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth: that the trial of our faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried by fire, might be found unto praise, and honor, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.... This is a severe ordeal... may God in his mercy give us comfort through it.<sup>89</sup>

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Religion was not confined to church, but also played an active role in many women's daily lives. Southern Protestantism place high demands on individuals and required a strict code of conduct. Religion was "essentially personal" and did not directly dictate the rules by which society functioned.<sup>90</sup> In other words, personal religious beliefs influenced the way that people perceived society. Many women discussed it with their loved ones, and when they were worried about them they turned to their religious beliefs for comfort and assurance. Women also wrote avidly of the duties of a Christian life.

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<sup>89</sup> Kate Cumming, April 30, 1865, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>90</sup> Woodworth, *While God is Marching On*, 11; Thomas, *The Confederate Nation*, 22-23.

Training their children to live by Christian “honest, upright and just principles” was an important part of a mother fulfilling her Christian duties.<sup>91</sup> Many mother worried about the path their children would take. Writing to her son, for example, M. E. Thompson warned him to “remember the dangers of a careless life. The attainment of a virtuous and Christian life ought to be our highest aim, and the only sure way to happiness.” She reminded him to rely on his conscience.<sup>92</sup>

Daily Bible reading, prayer, and serving God all were a part of the Christian life.<sup>93</sup> Clinton suggests that most Southern women were preoccupied with “their own souls” because they were “encouraged to concentrate exclusively on personal salvation: to redeem themselves, accept Christ, and become faithful servants of the Lord.”<sup>94</sup> In so doing, they necessarily refrained from confronting the bias of their society. Women indeed emphasized the complete depravity of human nature in their writings. For many, the only hope “lay in God’s mercy, and they prayed fervently for Christian

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<sup>91</sup> M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, February 9, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, August 7, 1862, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>92</sup> M. E. Thompson to Joe Thompson, Marion, December 22, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

<sup>93</sup> McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 76; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 16; Carrie Hunter Diary, January 7, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, October 20, 1859, SPR2 ADAH; Elodie to Dawson, Marengo August 24, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SCH-UNC; Kate Cumming, April 13, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*. Rebecca Vasser Diary, June 8, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke; M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, November 15, 1860, M. E. Thompson to Elias Thompson, Marion, September 8, 1861, M. E. Thompson to her sons, Marion, September 22, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, December 21, 1860, January 1, 1861, August 21, 1861, January 21, 1863, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>94</sup> Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 162.

deliverance.”<sup>95</sup> Thompson viewed humanity as “blind creatures” who “must trust” that everything that took place in the world was for some good.<sup>96</sup>

Hence, prayer was an essential element in Christian living for many women. The women in this study viewed prayer as an active expression of their faith and as a part of their daily lives. While God was in control of everything taking place around them, they could petition Him for assistance and protection of loved ones. In this way, prayer assured many and gave them a sense of control over situations that they otherwise had no control over. As she faced the turmoil of the Civil War, Zillah Brandon turned to prayer to comfort her, writing that, “neither sorrow of heart nor changes has the power to suspend my communion with heaven.” Later she wrote that in “God alone we put our trust and humbly pray.” Her prayers for the health of her sons reassured her, for she believed that God would interpose on their behalf. “He heard, and answered” her prayers and “He delivered their soul from death,” she wrote. “In reflecting upon His mercy,” she continued, “I am led to exclaim, What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits. While I repeat the prayer, ‘Open to me the gates of righteousness and I will go into them and I will praise the Lord.’”<sup>97</sup> When Rebecca Vasser faced similar challenges she prayed that that she would be able to “labor earnestly, and cheerfully” waiting “Thy will in all

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 163. “Christian fortitude brought occasional comfort, if only through the prospect of martyrdom.” Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 152.

<sup>96</sup> M. E. Thompson to her Elias Thompson, Marion, December 22, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

<sup>97</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, April 25, 1861, May 8, 1862 January 15, 1863, January 21, 1863, SPR262, ADAH.

things.”<sup>98</sup> Writing of her deceased daughter, Brandon noted that “she was a child of many prayers and her life commenced in such offerings as we trust was like holy incense offered upon an alter that sanctified the gift.” “Her whole life was concentrated by prayer,” she added, “she left the world amidst a gust of prayers, she entered the very gates of heaven surrounded by the prayers of her family and friends. Her sympathies and genial spirit led her while in life to agonize in prayer for others.”<sup>99</sup>

Prayers to keep their loved ones safe became a staple part of women’s daily lives during the war.<sup>100</sup> When hearing that a loved one was ill, women petitioned God. They not only prayed for the physical wellbeing of their loved ones, however, but also for their spiritual protection and prayed earnestly that they “may be delivered from temptation” and “kept from the evil” which surrounded them.<sup>101</sup> Women accordingly gave God the credit for preserving their lives of their loved ones. In 1862, when Hunter received word that her brothers were safe she wrote “we this day have cause to be truly grateful to God for the preservation of our loved ones, while [others crossed out] at the same time we have cause for wonder that others have been afflicted and bereaved, while we have been spared we received a dispatch today that our boys were safe.”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, September 5, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

<sup>99</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, December 21, 1860, January 21, 1863, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>100</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Selma May 27, 1861, July 28, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

<sup>101</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, September 2, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

<sup>102</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, July 1, 1862, October 5, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

Many women closed each one of their letters to their loved ones by committing them to the safekeeping of God. This was a common literary convention, but also held religious significance for the women in this study as they wrote to their distant loved ones who constantly stared danger in the face. Dawson concluded many of her letters to her lover with endings similar to this: “Goodbye may heaven bless you and your cause, watch over and protect you from danger and harm, is the ever constant prayer of your devoted Elodie,” or with the petition, “May God watch over and protect you always, restore you home again is the prayer of your ever affectionate and sincere Elodie.”<sup>103</sup>

Faithfully reading the Bible was another important part of daily life. It was not only a place where births and deaths were recorded, for women also valued the words written therein. Brandon reflected on how she had used the Bible as her “chart” for life.<sup>104</sup> She also prized it because it was the “word of Jehovah” and “the foundation of all social order, it fashions all our mortal and religious modes of life, it determines all our habits of thought and feeling” and she continued to instruct her children to uphold its teachings. She regularly read through the entire Bible and noted that “though we read it carefully though each year yet it but increases its value, each reading presents new beauties, new charms ever varying, and as the circle upon the waters ever widening and increasing until its light illumens our whole soul.”<sup>105</sup> Vasser also wrote about her plan to

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<sup>103</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Selma July 14, 1861, August 4, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., April 29, 1863; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, July 3, 1864, SPR5, ADAH; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, April 3, 1861, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>105</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 1, 1861, SPR262, ADAH.

read through the entire Bible in one year as her sister had done for several years.<sup>106</sup>

Cumming believed that “with religion, as with many other things, that which is the most stable and makes most use of the Bible, must certainly be the best.”<sup>107</sup>

Women looked to an image that they felt they should aspire to match one that they believed God Himself had set for them. While there were nuances to the image of the ideal woman, there were basic overarching essential qualities for womanhood. Women, as noted in the previous chapter, were to be submissive, gentle creatures who served those around them untiringly. Kate Cumming, for example, read part of a sermon that encouraged all women to serve their country by binding up the wounds of its soldiers.<sup>108</sup> They also were to be models of Christianity and the preservers of morality. Their depictions of themselves as they worried about failing to conform to the image of Christianity they and society set for womanhood illustrate how women actively participated in religion as they internalized the Christian conceptions of womanhood and made them part of their personal identity. Some women reprovved themselves when they felt that they had failed to live up to the moral standards of Christianity. For example, after dancing Gillis felt as though she was “drawing reproach on my beloved church and this thought took away all the enjoyment for me.”<sup>109</sup> Sarah Espy lamented one day that she had allowed herself to become vexed which led her to be both “petulant and

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<sup>106</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, September 29, 1856, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke; Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 20, 1863, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>107</sup> Kate Cumming, August 16, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, September 8, 1862.

<sup>109</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, April 15, 1862, SPR5, ADAH.

unreasonable.” She admitted that she was “too excitable, and prone to give way to passion,” then prayed, “May the Lord help us all, that we be not led into temptation.”<sup>110</sup> Elodie Todd Dawson fervently prayed that God would help her crush out all jealousy and negative feelings.<sup>111</sup> Rebecca Vasser reflected, “how happy must the man or woman be who can control their affections always keeping them from selfishness.” She then mused, “I wonder if anyone as impulsive as I am can form habits of perfect self-control, and always from principle, and not from transient enthusiasm.” She had been reading an advice manual that gave “sound excellent rules,” and she resolved to “try with God’s blessing to follow them.” Yet, she worried because, as she admitted, “even such moderate self-denial as fasting and early rising are considerable trials to such a lover of ease as myself.” Then taking a bit of a congratulatory tone she concluded that even the author of the literature she was reading would “be satisfied with my affection for brother.”<sup>112</sup>

Many women thus sought to perfect their lives and to live up to their image of Christian womanhood. Attending to personal religious beliefs was essential as well to their daily spiritual well being. Zillah Brandon wrote in some detail about how she felt closer to God after she had renewed her dedication to him. She believed it was important to “walk humbly with God.” Women turned to God for support and strength in their sorrow. Brandon prayed “God Almighty help us” and “God Almighty cheer us with the

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<sup>110</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, March 29, 1860, September 20, 1860, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>111</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Selma July 22, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

<sup>112</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, September 6, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.



news of peace.”<sup>113</sup> Rhodes meanwhile wrote of attending a “Covenant Meeting” where the members of the church prepared for “our Communion which was to come off the following day.” During the meeting many people shared their religious experiences with each other and “we all endeavored to renew the covenant made our God and to each other when we united with the people of God.”<sup>114</sup> In the process of gathering with others, Rhodes felt her commitment to God as well as to the Southern cause bolstered.

Public prayer meetings and the new days of fasting and prayer proclaimed in Richmond became an important part of life for those on the home front during the war, especially for women. Faust argued that, “the assumption that underlay such a sense of mission and structured the fast-day ritual was the existence of a covenant between God and a particular people, a reciprocal agreement that offered a nation God’s special favor in return for adherence to a particular national version of his larger design.”<sup>115</sup> She added that, “the wartime fast day became a recurrent occasion for clerical solemnization of this marriage of the sacred and the secular.”<sup>116</sup> Attending prayer meetings or participating in a day of fasting and prayer offered individuals on the home front an opportunity to unite and show their support for the Confederate cause and demonstrate their social cohesion. These prayer services were a way for women to actively participate in their religion but

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<sup>113</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 1, 1861, January 8, 1861, April 25, 1861, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH. See also Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, March 11, 1860, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>114</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, October 5, 1861, transcripts in author’s possession; Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, 28, 33.

<sup>115</sup> Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, 28; Rable, *The Confederate Republic*, 75-76.

<sup>116</sup> Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, 26.

also reassured many. After one such meeting, for example, Elizabeth Rhodes wrote, “I felt the God of all the world was with us to bless [us].”<sup>117</sup>

Women respected Jefferson Davis for calling days of fasting and prayer and believed that because he did so, God was more likely to look favorably on the South and its cause. Faust argued that the Confederacy had to be linked to eternity “as an instrumental part of God's designs.”<sup>118</sup> The days of fasting and prayer, ironically a Puritan creation, legitimated the concept of a covenant between God and the Confederacy. After noting that the president had set aside a particular day for “universal worship” Sarah Davis noted that the Confederacy, “born with the energy and patriotic spirit which I feel confident that all and with the help of Him who ruleth all things Our Cause must triumph.”<sup>119</sup> Writing of a fast day, Carrie Hunter similarly prayed, “God grant that it may be as successful in turning aside his wrath from us as did the humiliation and prayers of the ancient Israelites.” After the observation she reflected, “today has been one of the most solemn days I ever spent in my life as we all know it was the day set apart for

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<sup>117</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, April 19, 1861, April 22, 1861, Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, Transcripts in author's possessions. See also Carrie Hunter Diary, January 9, 1861, May 4, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC; Elodie to Dawson, Selma July 22, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC; M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, January 2, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, March 27, 1863, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>118</sup> As Faust noted in *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, Christianity was the “most fundamental source of legitimation for the Confederacy.” Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, 22, 27-33. Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, June 13, 1861, November 15, 1861, transcripts in author's possession; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, June 16, 1861, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>119</sup> Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, February 26, 1862, SPR113, ADAH.

fasting and prayer by President Davis. I never fasted before.”<sup>120</sup> Even though she felt unwell, Espy still went to church because it was a “fast-day” and heard a good “war-sermon.”<sup>121</sup> Sarah Davis wrote that school was cancelled in honor of the day of fasting and prayer appointed by President Jefferson Davis, and added that she thought every Friday should be designated as such.<sup>122</sup> During fast days Cumming noted that “all united in fasting” and they prayed for victory. When possible she spent fast days at church but also noted that on some of them there was just too much to do in the hospital for that to be possible even though those in the army observed it.<sup>123</sup>

From the beginning, Confederates argued that God was on their side and early victories seemed to back that assumption. Many believed that the divine justice of God guaranteed their victory. The Confederacy bolstered the image of female support for the war effort by portraying sacrifice for the Confederacy as one of the Christian duties of the Southern lady.<sup>124</sup> Throughout the war, women themselves turned to God and believed that He could “order the Yankees to their own land.”<sup>125</sup> Espy prayed that the Lord would

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<sup>120</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, June 12, 1861, June 13, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>121</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, June 13, 1861, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>122</sup> Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, February 28, 1862, SPR113, ADAH.

<sup>123</sup> Kate Cumming, May 16, 1862, May 21, 1862, August 21, 1863, October 19, 1864, March 10, 1865, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>124</sup> Rable, *Civil Wars*, 202-3, quote from page 202; Welter, *Dimity Convictions*, 19; Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*; Geonvese, *Consuming Fire*; Kate Cumming, June 24, 1864, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>125</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, July 29, 1864, SPR2 ADAH; Kate Cumming, May 21, 1862, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

“strike confusion in the hearts of our enemies, and turn them back to their own country.”<sup>126</sup> She would not have recorded such a prayer if she did not believe that God could perform such an action. The depth of reliance on religion is evident in M. E. Thompson’s statement that, “there is a Power who has promised to be our friend and in whom we must trust.”<sup>127</sup> Vasser also turned to her conviction that “God alone” could help the Confederacy.<sup>128</sup> Belief that God would cause the Confederacy to win was a belief that the women examined held throughout the war. While many women hated the Yankees, blamed them for the war, and believed that God supported the Confederacy, none of the women examined in this study claimed that Christians were absent from the North. They firmly believed that God supported the institution of slavery and their attempts to attain Confederate independence, but this did not mean that Northerners were heathens.<sup>129</sup>

While some became discouraged, as will be discussed below, they still fervently prayed for God to bring them victory. Defeat did not cause them to lose faith or question God’s ultimate plan for bringing about good in the world. After the end of the war many found strength in religious belief and observance. Faust argued that, “defeat was simply another burden to be borne with the unwavering patience that Job had exhibited in the face of divine afflictions.”<sup>130</sup> While she found some women who rejected God as a result

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<sup>126</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, June 3, 1863, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>127</sup> M. E. Thompson to her sons, Marion, January 1, 1862, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

<sup>128</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, June 8, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

<sup>129</sup> Kate Cumming, November 8, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>130</sup> Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 192-93.

of the demise of the Confederacy, none of the Alabama women examined in this study did so. To be sure women had a hard time reconciling the course of the war with their firm conviction that God was on their side. Yet, as Rable has argued, “clinging to the bedrock of evangelical religion provided at least some comfort in a world of storm and stress.”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Rable, *Civil Wars*, 205-220, quotation from page 225; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 194-95.

## Chapter 3 “The Aggressions of the North Can be Borne No Longer:” Alabama Women and Secession

In the debate over the origins of the secession crisis it is increasingly apparent that women must be examined in this process. For example, the rise of the abolitionists (most of whom were Northern women) in the 1830s sparked a host of social responses among Southerners, and prompted heightened concerns about political events that might threaten the expansion and security of the institution of slavery. A pro-slavery crusade arose in response to the abolitionist movement. This crusade invoked not only scientific but also religious justifications for the institution of slavery.<sup>1</sup> Historian Mitchell Snay argued that

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<sup>1</sup> Kate Cumming, March 22, 1864, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*. The secession crisis remains a greatly debated topic. Historians traditionally traced the political events from the Missouri Compromise to Lincoln’s election as laying the foundations for the eventual secession crisis. The political events examined as precursors to the outbreak of the Civil War include the Nullification Crisis, the Mexican-American War to the Mexican Cession, the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas Nebraska Bill, the breakdown of the Whig party, the rise of the Republican party, John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry, and the election of Lincoln. For works examining the events leading to the outbreak of the Civil War see, Tyler Gregory Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: the Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850’s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); William Barney, *The Road to Secession: A New Perspective on the Old South* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery* (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1969); Anthony Gene Carey, *Parties, Slavery, and the Union in Antebellum Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997); Steven A. Channing, *Crisis of Fear: Secession in South Carolina* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970); William J. Cooper, Jr., *The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828-1856* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); Daniel W. Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004); Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate*

religion became so intertwined with politics and Southern honor that it shaped the political debates. “By employing the rhetoric of honor,” he writes, “religion fortified a

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*Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); Drew Gilpin Faust, *A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840-1860* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); Lacy K. Ford, *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Dred Scott Case: Its Significance in American Law and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Paul Finkelman, ed., *His Soul Goes Marching on: Responses to John Brown and the Harpers Ferry Raid* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995); Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: the Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Michael R. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: Wiley, 1978); James L. Huston, *Calculating the Value of the Union: Slavery, Property Rights, and the Economic Origins of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); James L. Huston, *The Panic of 1857 and the Coming of the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987); Michael Johnson, *Toward a Patriarchal Republic: the Secession of Georgia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977); William A. Link, *Roots of Secession: Slavery and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); John McCardell, *The Idea of a Southern Nation: Southern Nationalist and Southern Nationalism, 1830-1860* (New York: Norton, 1979); Stephen B Oats, *To Purge this Land with Blood: A Biography of John Brown* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984); Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); George Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 41-43; Anne Sarah Rubin, *A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861-1868* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Mark J. Stegmaier, *Texas, New Mexico, and the Compromise of 1850: Boundary Dispute and Sectional Crisis* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1996); James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: the Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976); James Brewer Stewart, *Wendell Phillips: Liberty's Hero* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986); J. Mills Thornton, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981); Elizabeth Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Eric H. Walther, *The Fire-Eaters* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992); Helen Swift to Anna Mercur, Eufaula Alabama, March 16, 1861, Anna Mercur Papers #751-z, SHC-UNC. For an older discussion of the secession movement in Alabama see Clarence Phillips Denman, *The Secession Movement in Alabama* (Montgomery: Alabama Department of Archives and History, 1933).

distinctive element in Southern society and politics.”<sup>2</sup> White men were still the only ones allowed to vote and hold political office, but this did not mean that women were idle bystanders in the political events leading to secession. As Elizabeth Varon has argued for Virginia, during the antebellum era and particularly the 1850s, women became more involved in the political realm even though they were still barred from voting or holding any form of political office.<sup>3</sup>

Women increasingly wrote about political events as the secession crisis became consuming for white Southerners. By the time of Lincoln’s election by the Republican Party in 1860, many considered him to be the great enemy of the world they knew and

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<sup>2</sup> For an in-depth discussion of how religious leaders in both the North and South used religion to justify secession see, Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 211-18, quotation from page 214. Snay concludes his work with the statement “Religion played an important role in the shaping of antebellum Southern separatism. It reinforced important elements in Southern political culture, invested sectional politics with a charged religious significance, and contributed to a moral consensus that made secession possible. It helped convince Southerners that slavery and Southern civilization were best protected in a separate Southern nation. In tandem with a variety of other social, political, economic, and ideological factors, religion helped lead the South toward secession and Civil War” (218). For the South see also Drew Gilpin Faust, ed., *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981); Kenneth Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982). For a discussion of Northern feminists and their crusade to define women as citizens with equal rights see, Nancy Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Julie Roy Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted*.



they viewed the current political events with great trepidation as a result.<sup>4</sup> Antebellum Alabamians “peered out at their frightening world,” in J. Mills Thornton’s words, and wondered what would happen.

Fear was not the only element present in the secession crisis for many women. In February of 1861, M.E. Thompson noted that the “political life” in Alabama was “now more calm” than it had been in the previous months, but this calm, she feared was only the calm “which proceeds a storm.”<sup>5</sup> Women, however, also especially worried about the ramifications if secession produced war.<sup>6</sup> White Southern women had long been satisfied

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<sup>4</sup> J. Mills Thornton argues that the secession crisis thrust politics in the faces of all Alabamians as politicians with a long heritage of manipulating the fears of the common person created an atmosphere which essentially “demanded the decision” to secede. Thornton, *Politics and Power*, xvii, 5, 62-75, 95, 116, 143-151, quotation from page xvii. The Alabama government combined with the economic upheaval, political sectionalism, admittance of railroad development, and rapidly expanding urban population created the perfect combination of fear and uncertainty that allowed succession to take place. Yet the Civil War was more than simply the result of “sectional encounters,” but rather that it was the “sum of the age” and in a large part the “catastrophe of Jacksonian America” (xx-xxi). The structure of politics in Alabama was viewed as a tool by which politicians could gain power, distribute patronage, and manipulate “the popular dread of manipulation” and while Alabamians were led by the politicians they elected they essentially governed themselves (161-62).

<sup>5</sup> M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, February 9, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

<sup>6</sup> Faust shows that not only did “leaders of Confederate opinion and government talk about the proper place of white women in both the new nation and the war to secure its independence; they executed plans and passed legislation that had direct effects on women’s lives.” Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, xiii. See, Paul D. Escott, *After Secession: Jefferson Davis and the Failure of Confederate Nationalism* (Louisiana State University Press, 1978; Louisiana Paperback Edition, 1992), 68, 74, 180, 191; Emory M. Thomas, *The Confederate Nation: 1861-1865* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1979), 196, 223; Stephen V. Ash, *When the Yankees Came: Conflict and Chaos in the Occupied South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 53; William Blair, *Virginia’s Private War: Feeding Body and Soul in the Confederacy, 1861-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Rubin, *A Shattered Nation*; David Williams, *Rich Man’s*

with their social positions and, as George Rable argues, valued the security the paternalistic hierarchy of the antebellum world provided. They ardently supported the Confederacy in its infancy because they believed that the Lincoln administration threatened the security of their slave-based social positions. Thus, they encouraged men to fight. While Drew Gilpin Faust pointed out that “the conflict between women’s emergent patriotism and their devotion to the lives and welfare of their families became clear as southern men prepared for war,” she similarly added that because of the strong association between the military and manhood, women tried to overcome their fears for their loved ones.<sup>7</sup>

Southern women held their own opinions about the political scene.<sup>8</sup> To be sure, the political opinions formed were not radically different from those of their male

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*War: Class, Cast, and Confederate Defeat in the Lower Chattahoochee Valley* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 13, 243. Later, upon becoming disheartened with the war, they ultimately begged men to desert from the army which led to the downfall of the Confederacy. Faust agrees with Rable, while placing more emphasis on the hardships of the war that overwhelmed women. Rable, *Civil Wars*, 2. Rable acknowledges the limitations of his study and clarifies that his study and conclusions were limited to upper class Southern women.

<sup>8</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 10; M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, January 2, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Kate Cumming, May 9, 1862, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*. Drew Gilpin Faust argued that “the way in which many powerful and articulate southerners endeavored to reconcile their revolution with tradition, to have change without change, becomes the story of Confederate nationalism, and perhaps of the Confederacy itself.” Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, 21, 84. William W. Sweet, noted that “nowhere else in the world has Negro slavery exercised such a large influence upon the Christian Church as in the United States.” See his *The Story of Religion in America* (Harper and Row, 1930: reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 285, 293-95. The question was not whether Alabama would remain in the Union, but rather a question of if Alabama would secede from the Union alone or wait for the cooperative efforts of other southern states. This, however, did not prove to be an issue after other states seceded from the Union. Thornton shows how the

counterparts. As Gerda Lerner noted, “women have often collaborated with men in maintaining their own subordinate position, and nowhere in the nineteenth-century United States was this truer than in the eleven states that would make up the Confederate States of America.”<sup>9</sup> As Rable points out, many southern women were well aware of political events and often formed their own opinions, but conclusions that were nonetheless very similar to those held by men. Elizabeth Varon illustrates the ways in which throughout the late antebellum era women became more involved in politics, especially with the Whig Party, even though they were barred from voting. She argues that during the 1850s writers rallied in defence of the South as they opposed the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and in so doing promoted an image of white Southern women as sectional mediators. By the end of the 1850s with John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry, in 1859, however, women began to take on a new political role and a “new ideal female civic duty gradually emerged as a reflection of the rise of Southern nationalism.”<sup>10</sup>

News of John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry shocked and enraged white Southerners. Sarah Espy related her fears as she read about “the abolition riot at Harper’s

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close association and daily reminder of slavery provided a catalyst for attempts by politicians to play upon a fear of enslavement in order to gain power and control. This volatile situation, which included a heightened awareness of perceived northern aggression, provided an avenue and the ideal circumstances for secession after Lincoln’s election when other states seceded from the union. Thus, according to Thornton, the politics and power manipulation in Alabama drove the state to secession and the Civil War. Thornton, *Politics and Power*, 176. For an examination of the influences of the market revolution on the coming of the Civil War see, Charles Grier Sellers, *The Market Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> Rable, *Civil Wars*, 2.

<sup>10</sup> Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted*, 4.

Ferry” in newspapers. She added that “a great excitement prevails, in some of the Southern states in consequence. May the Northern assassins be put down with their free-negroes allies.” Espy hoped that peace would follow after Brown’s hanging and that the “women and children of the South would be saved from their Northern murderers.”<sup>11</sup> The manner in which she wrote about Northern abolitionists as a threat to white Southern women and children invoked the familiar image of the weak in need of help and protection from Southern men, who were honor bound to protect the weak and helpless. Hence she promoted simultaneously an acceptable image of the Southern woman in need of protection, while at the same time relating her honest fears to her diary.<sup>12</sup>

While Brown’s raid terrified others in the South, the election of 1860 catapulted women’s thoughts onto national politics on an unprecedented magnitude, as is evident from the increased attention they devoted to it in their diaries. Elizabeth Rhodes grasped the historical significance of her times, as she recorded that the events taking place

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<sup>11</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, November 26, 1859, December 2, 1859, SPR2 ADAH. She wrote, “I see the four other abolitionists rioters were hanged on the 16<sup>th</sup> Dec. according to appointment; all went peaceably. The leader Brown, being hanged on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thurs. 5 Men have paid for their fanaticism with their lives. May others take heed” (January 10, 1860). She also heard from a friend in Texas who noted that the abolitionists were giving them great trouble (August 31, 1860).

<sup>12</sup> Lee Ann Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta Georgia, 1860-1890* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 3. Whites points out that that gender in the Civil War has been neglected, but is an area that should be studied in greater depth. She argues not only that gender norms were upset during the war, but also that gender roles and gender relations actually played an important role in the outbreak of the Civil War. Men enlisted to protect their position as “freemen,” while women sought to “protect their position as dependents, as mothers, wives, and daughters” (3-10, 53). Yet the war itself greatly altered gender relations as women took on new roles in supporting the war effort turned domestic production from the home outward. As men were no longer able to provide directly for their families, women’s traditional roles changed as they began relying on their female kinship networks and became more self reliant and autonomous (90).

around her would “be handed down to posterity as important items of a nations history.”<sup>13</sup> Espy concluded that the safety of the country depended on whom was elected in 1860, and she wrote about Breckenridge’s campaign for presidency. Commenting on the “deplorable state” of the country because of the “depredations committed by the Abolitionists,” she ardently desired the “union loving Breckenridge” to be elected, which illustrated her simultaneous desire for the preservation of the Union and hatred of abolitionists; the latter, if pushed on the matter, was stronger than the first. On the election day she added, “today the fate of this nation is to be decided by the election of a President. May he who will rule for the general good, be the one chosen, and may peace again bear rule in this glorious land.”<sup>14</sup>

When Espy heard of the “black republican” Lincoln’s election, in 1860, she assumed that the Southern states would now withdraw from the Union. While she supported secession, she added that “if so, it is the beginning of woe.” There were “fearful times in store for us, I greatly fear, for war will be the final result of such

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<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, December 1, 1860, transcripts in author’s possessions. She penned an entry that announced: “Today begins another month and the last of the remarkably eventful year of 1860. Many events have occurred which will be handed down to posterity as important items of a nations history.” Many southern women realized that they were writing about important events and it was during this time period that historians such as Fox-Genovese point out that “one after another, they began implicitly to write for posterity - to write in support of their cause and to justify their ways to God, to each other, to their enemies, to the world.” See Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 346; Kimberly Harrison, ed., *A Maryland Bride in the Deep South: the Civil War Diary of Priscilla Bond* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 42.

<sup>14</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, August 11, 1860, November 6, 1860, November 7, 1860, SPR2 ADAH.

withdrawal.”<sup>15</sup> Others were less hesitant. Upon hearing the same tidings, Margaret Gillis wrote that, “All the Southern states are called on to act together and we are listening for the call, ‘to arms’ every day.”<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes adamantly proclaimed that “every true Southerner is for resistance. We feel that we can never never submit to the reign of so great an enemy to our institutions. S.C. will secede. Tis hoped that the whole South will be united in this vital matter.”<sup>17</sup>

Rhodes’ reference to “our institutions” validated slavery, as well as the way that Southerners perceived Lincoln’s election as a threat to their role in national politics and Southern honor. For many of the women studied here, slavery was at the heart of

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<sup>15</sup> As Drew Gilpin Faust has argued, by the election of 1860 Southern elite white women were well aware of the belief that their vision of white womanhood “had presumed the existence of slaves to perform menial labor and white males to provide protection and support” for them and their families. Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 7, 32; Sarah Rogers Rousseau Espy Diary, November 14, November 25 1860, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>16</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, November 15, 1860, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, November 6, 1860, Transcripts in author’s possessions; Eugene D. Genovese, *Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South*, Mercer University Lamar Memorial Lectures, No. 41 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 3, 45. For an excellent discussion of the way the North helped create a collective southern identity as the opposite of what the North stood for see, William Blair, *Virginia’s Private War: Feeding Body and Soul in the Confederacy, 1861-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 11-12. Blair has also noted “issues regarding slavery’s expansion into the territories brought on the war, yet most white people quickly expressed their reasons for fighting in terms of guarding their liberties rather than protecting slave property” (11-12). The heightened political atmosphere surrounding Lincoln’s election caused Elizabeth to specifically mention politics for the first time in her diary. See Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, November 6, 1860, Transcripts in author’s possessions. As 1860 progressed, Elizabeth’s diary became more oriented toward national political events. Lincoln’s election became a decisive factor in causing the people of Alabama to favor secession. See Denman, *The Secession Movement in Alabama*, 87.

secession.<sup>18</sup> Yet support for the institution of slavery did not directly correlate to the number of slaves owned. Rhodes, for example owned one slave. M. E. Thompson, who owned two slaves, maintained that “it is perfectly evident that the North has for a long time designed to get the Washington government under their control” and after losing control of the South after secession “they have become furious, now we must defend ourselves or become a thousand times worse slaves than our negroes, as the “spirit of determination does not flag, but increase under every obstacle.”<sup>19</sup>

Kate Cumming likewise believed that the South had done its Christian duty to the slaves. Born in Scotland, she attacked the antislavery British for not coming to the aid of the Confederacy during the war writing, “if Great Britain is base enough to keep back from giving us aid, from the motive imputed to her, her day of reckoning will surely come. I have thought that she did not give us aid because she could not consistently be an abettor of slavery. But I have given up that notion, for I know that the Britons are endowed with judgement enough to see through the mast worn by the abolitionists, and to know that we, not they, are the true friend of the negro.” Cumming attacked Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and she claimed that if people could see the truth they would see that Southern slaves were the happiest in the world.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, November 6, 1860, Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, Transcripts in author’s possessions; Kate Cumming, November 8, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*; Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, April 25, 1861, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>19</sup> M. E. Thompson to Elias Thompson, Marion, July 22, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

<sup>20</sup> Kate Cumming, October 6, 1863, November 29, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

Zillah Brandon too minced no words in her assessment of the causes for secession and the impending war. “The controversy between North and South has been going on for forty years” she wrote, and “they never did, they never can agree.” She believed that “their soil is different their interests are conflicting their temperaments and characters are different.” It was over the issue of the South holding the “negroes in bondage,” which she noted was done “in mercy to them, for could they be freed, they are so improvedent that nine tenths would perish, unless they were placed under officers, which would [make] their condition far worse than it now is.” The natural and logical progression of events led to “a cry for peaceable secession from over twelve million of people according to the last census taken in the South that is including the slaves, that is what we upon our borders at our own home desire.”<sup>21</sup>

The North, however, and according to Zillah Brandon, particularly “Lincoln, the black republican president” refused to allow a peaceful secession. She elaborated, stating that although Southerners were well educated in both theory and practice, yet “in God alone we put our trust and humbly pray that He will speak to the north and it will hear.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, April 25, 1861, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>22</sup> Lincoln “refuses to receive the commissioners, John Forsyth, and Martin J Crawford the former from Ala and the latter from Ga. Though the President would not receive them yet like true statesmen, they informed the secretary of state that they had been duly accredited by the government of the Confederate States of America as commissioners to the government of the United States, and they set forth the object of their attendance at Washington they further stated that seven of the states of America in an exercise of a right inherent in every free people, have withdrawn through convention of their people from the United States resumed the attributes of sovereign power and that those Confederate States now constitute an independed nation, do facto, and de jure And it is now a government perfect in all its parts and fully endowed with all the mens of self support. But alas; for us the Secretary denies the right of the states to withdraw, and the final result is Lincoln’s appeal to the sword; which commenced first at Fort Sumpter, and a second out rage in the city of Baltimore, and a third at Harper’s Ferry, and a fourth at



Then she added that “except the Lord of Hosts had left unto us a very small remnant we should have been as Sodom and we should have been like unto Gomorah.” She believed that the South was being pruned by God to create a holier nation. “This war will regenerate the south,” she wrote, “and will inspire it from recollections of the past with energy and cautious shall to guide their steps aright and it will have through coming time a prevailing influence upon nations yet unborn.” Thus only Jesus Christ could help their cause. If the Confederacy sought the divine blessing of God, they would surely succeed.<sup>23</sup>

While she did not desire war, Rhodes also justified the South’s dissolution from the Union. She believed that the North threatened to enslave the South, and thus the Southern states were perfectly warranted in their actions.<sup>24</sup> While Rhodes, like other

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St. Louis, and we are not hourly expecting a severe battle at Fort Pickens, we are waiting the result in fearful suspense and many a warm Southern heart has grown cold; and while memory of friends, that revers them pays just tribute to their true character they sleep in death, a sacrifice to downtrodden fanaticism.” Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, April 25, 1861, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>23</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, April 25, 1861, SPR262, ADAH. “And were I to write an appendix to Armageddon I should quote from the thirty eighth chapter of Ezekiel, and illustrate by the fulfillment of the prophecy of the second chapter of Joel and make an application by using the seventh verse of the fifty sevenths chapter of Isaiah, “for the iniquity of his covetousness was I worth and smote him I hid me, and was wrath and he went on forwardly in the way of his heart.” She continued, “But if the Lord Jesus Christ and the purchase of his death was not about the prerogative of the devil, our trust in Him would not only prove a failure but we should be lost to every virtue.”

<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, April 28, 1860, Transcripts in author’s possessions; Owens, “A History of Eufaula,” 36. The Rhodes family both owned slaves and hired help. The local newspaper called for regulations on the hiring of slaves. *Spirit of the South*, December 22, 1857. Population Schedules of the Eight Census of the United States 1860. Alabama: (slave) Autauga, Baldwin, Barbour, Bib, Blount, Butler, Calhoun. Microcopy No. M653 Roll No. 27. Microfilm at Auburn University Library. Mr. Rhodes probably owned at least one slave and hired others to help Elizabeth. She had a cook, a nurse, and someone who helped her with the garden. In 1858, Elizabeth mentions that

women, was aware of the importance of slavery, and noted that it was part of the reason the South had to leave the Union, she did not often record her personal views on slavery, or even mention owning a slave until 1860, when her husband purchased a woman. In contrast to Catherine Clinton's argument that elite white southern women opposed slavery because they were essentially the slaves of slaves, the attitudes of Rhodes and others reinforce Faust, Fox-Genovese, and Rable in that they did not question the validity of the institution of slavery and cited it as one of the central causes of secession.<sup>25</sup>

Other women wrote about slavery in a matter of fact manner, noting how enslaved children were growing and describing their work in the fields. Interestingly enough, while a few of the women openly discussed slavery, it seems as though it were commonplace enough to not merit much attention. Although one would expect to find a great deal on a justification of slavery, it was noticeably absent from the issues discussed by these women. Indeed, every mention of slavery has been noted in this work. Antebellum women often cared for the physical needs of their slaves and some seemed genuinely

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“Mr. Rhodes went to the negro meeting,” but never mentions owning any slaves. Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, February 22, 1858, Transcripts in author's possessions. Some religious leaders feared that God would punish them for the abuses of slavery. Slave holders did not feel guilt over slavery itself but rather over its abuses. For an excellent discussion of slavery and the ways in which Christians reconciled their religious beliefs with slavery, see Genovese, *Consuming Fire*, 32.

<sup>25</sup> Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 6, 109, 198; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 30, 43; Faust, *A Sacred Circle*, xi; Rable, *Civil Wars*, 35. Many southern women did not question the institution of slavery as was the case for Priscilla Bond. Harrison, ed., *A Maryland Bride in the Deep South*, 29.

While some point to the burdens of slave management as proof that women opposed the institution as Rable has noted, “By writing articles and even by commenting on slavery in their diaries and letters, women had entered politics. But they did so as defenders of the status quo in a world seemingly beset by frightening and uncontrollable change.” Rable, *Civil Wars*, 39. Rable, “Missing in Action,” 182-183.

concerned for them.<sup>26</sup> Sarah Espy reflected as she watched “droves of negroes” that while they sang as they passed, she did not “like to see them driven about like stock, but think it wrong.”<sup>27</sup> Rhodes expressed an interest in the spiritual well-being of slaves, praying that they “may be numbered among the children of God and be God loving and fearing people.”<sup>28</sup> Her account of the death of one of her father's slaves illustrates the point made by Fox-Genovese that “death confronted mistresses with the humanity of their slaves and with the ties - often reaching back to previous generations - that bound them to those they kept in bondage.”<sup>29</sup> Rhodes did not, however, imply that there was any common bond of

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<sup>26</sup> Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, September 19, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, December 16, 1859, January 19, 1860, March 25, 1861, SPR2 ADAH; M. E. Thompson to her sons, Marion, September 23, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Martha M. Jones to Samuel H. Jones, Tuscaloosa County Alabama, May 20th 1860, in Martha M. Jones Papers, Duke; Kate Cumming, October 27, 1862, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, February 12, 1864, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>27</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, August 31, 1860, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, May 5, 1860, October 1, 1860, transcripts in author's possessions.

<sup>29</sup> Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 130. On January 19, 1861 Rhodes' sisters Emma and Sue came to visit her and told her of “the sad news of Spencer's extreme illness. He is a negro man who has been in our family since before I was born, and has been very faithful.” On January 20, 1861 Rhodes states, “Spencer, Pa's negro man died. We all feel sad for him, but tis the will of God and we should not mourn for [blank space] He only knows what's best for us. He has been in the family for about 30 years. Of course, we all feel very much attached to him.” Rhodes's husband was also actively involved in the religious activities of the black community, attending their church services on a regular basis. Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, February 10, 1861. Elizabeth wrote, on February 3, 1861 that, “Mr. Rhodes goes to Negro meeting.”

earthly sisterhood between white and black women. When mentioning slaves women sometimes referred to them as “our people” and other times by name.<sup>30</sup>

Some women further described the burdens of managing slaves, and they vented some of their frustrations in letters and diaries. Sarah Espy noted how wasteful some of her slaves had been in cutting their wheat and lamented that they were not more faithful. She wrote, “they finished our wheat, and cut some of the oats; - Mr Rudd says they have made the greatest waste of the grain he ever saw, - this grieves me very much, for we needed it all; besides, I expected them to be faithful I always try to be so myself.” She later wrote about how disrespectful one of her slaves had been because he took a horse and “rode it to a negro-wedding above here,” noting that it was a “strange thing for him to do, for he has hitherto been a very correct boy.” She lamented that it seemed as though she was going to have “trouble in every possible way.”<sup>31</sup> At the same time, however, despite the challenges some faced, the ideology of slavery had become such an ingrained part of the social fabric of the Old South that women continued to take it for granted even

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<sup>30</sup> M. E. Thompson to her sons, Marion, January 1, 1862, in Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, July 11, 1860, July 14, 1860, December 8, 1860, May 22, 1861, June 17, 1861, May 9, 1861, SPR2 ADAH; Eliza Corry letter, December 4, 1863, February 26, 1865, Robert E. Corry Confederate Collection, 1857-1913, RG84, AU; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, February 12, 1864, SPR5, ADAH; Kate Cumming Diary, September 28, 1862, October 6, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*

<sup>31</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, June 12, 1861, March 12, 1862, SPR2 ADAH; M. E. Thompson to her sons, Marion, January 1, 1862, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

as the institution itself changed and began to deteriorate around them during the course of the war.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover nascent fears of slave uprisings lent more urgency to Confederate independence, and ironically provided another reason to support it.<sup>33</sup> Thompson wrote to her son Joe that there was agitation among some of the slaves that caused her no little consternation.<sup>34</sup> After hearing of the burning of a crib and stables on a nearby plantation, Espy noted the “great deal of mischief” taking place in the South, which was “attributed to the Abolition....What are we coming to?” Two months later, she wrote that she had “heard today that a negro-insurrection is on foot in the country,” with “pretty strong evidence” being brought against an “old negro man.” By the next month, June of 1861, she as well as the local population were convinced that a “negro-insurrection is on foot in this vicinity” and that the local Confederate guards were going to look into the matter.” In July she described “a most atrocious murder near the camp: - that of an old lady murdered by her negro woman – the negro to be hung tomorrow.” She soon heard of another “insurrectionary movement among the negroes of Wills valley, which was

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<sup>32</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, ed., *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 1, 4, 10-16; Anne Firor Scott, “Women’s Perspective on the Patriarchy in the 1850s,” in *Half Sisters of History: Southern Women and the American Past*, edited by Catherine Clinton (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994): 76-92, 78.

<sup>33</sup> Kate Cumming, January 5, 1865, March 9, 1865, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>34</sup> M. E. Thompson to her Joe Thompson, Marion, August 30, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

suppressed however.”<sup>35</sup> The fears Espy expressed of revolt, rather than demonstrating closet feminism or closet abolitionism, were genuine concerns.

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Newspapers closely followed the events of the times and some women regularly recorded what they read. Espy noted that the papers were “filled with the secession of the South,” because “the aggressions of the North can be borne no longer.” A few days later she added that “unless the North speedily repeals her obnoxious laws, and gives the South equal rights, the Union will be divided, and the Lord only knows what will come next. May He interpose and save the country from ruin.”<sup>36</sup> Yet while she became swept up in the excitement of the time, she also fervently hoped that secession would not produce war.

Sarah Espy described a mass meeting in Dublin in December 1860, held to decide on a course of action after the election of Lincoln. She did not doubt that Alabama would withdraw from the Union.<sup>37</sup> Rhodes ardently supported the idea of secession as did her husband and family, who were actively involved in the secession movement. Her husband and brother both attended similar political meetings to discuss the idea of secession, and she noted that “the people were all united in approving immediate secess.”

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<sup>35</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, March 18, 1860, May 22, 1861, June 3, 1861, July 11, 1861, July 13, 1861, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., December 1, 1860, December 15, 1860.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., November 27, 1860.

She recorded that “all are more or less excited on the subject of disunion.” Yet at the same time her concern for her family and friends encouraged her to hope for a peaceful disillusion of the nation. She stated, “I do trust that a merciful over-ruling Providence may so order every movement that all things be settled without blood-shed.”<sup>38</sup> Since there was nothing that she could do to prevent a war from erupting, she turned to her faith to assuage her fears about the impending war.

At the end of 1860, other women reflected upon the hard times and what Hunter called “the dark cloud that is hovering over us.”<sup>39</sup> Rhodes reflected upon the changes of the past year and expressed her concern regarding political events. She saw

dark clouds overspreading our National Horizon and we cannot yet know whether the fringes of prosperity will dispel them and the bright rays of peace and

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<sup>38</sup> On November 19, 1860, Chauncey Rhodes left for Clayton to attend a “political mass meeting in which the people were all united in approving immediate secession.” Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, November 19, 1860, transcripts in author’s possessions. As the South Carolina convention met “for the object of seceding from the Union,” Elizabeth wrote, “we are anxiously awaiting to hear the news by telegraph ... Great excitement prevails on the dissolution question.” Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, December 18, 1860, Transcripts in author’s possessions. Her brother, John, also attended the meeting in Clayton and was elected to the secession convention that would meet in January of 1861. He “was elected as a delegate to the convention which will meet in Jan. to come to some decision about the movement of the state of Ala with regard to the election of Lincoln.” Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, November 23, 1860, transcripts in author’s possessions. In the official records of the delegates from Barbour County to the secession Convention that met in January of 1861, J. S. M. Daniel was listed as a delegate. See William R. Smith, *The History of the Convention of the People of Alabama, Begun and held in the City of Montgomery, on the Seventh Day of January, 1861; In which is preserved the speeches of the secret sessions, and many valuable state papers* (Montgomery: White PFISTER & Co, 1861), 21. On December 20, 1860, Eufaula received word around noon that South Carolina had seceded from the Union, which provoked an outburst of enthusiasm from the people of the town. Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, December 20, 1860, November 11, 1860, transcripts in author’s possessions; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 13-17; Rable, *Civil Wars*, 54.

<sup>39</sup> Carrie Hunter, Tuskegee January 3, 1861 to James H. Hunter New Orleans, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

happiness once more beams upon us, as whether they will grow darker and denser until proved out in wars and bloodshed on our once prosperous and happy nation. Time alone can unfold these things. We can only wait and pray God to overrule all things for His glory and the good of mankind.<sup>40</sup>

In their commentary on what was taking place around them, many women also revealed the ways in which they had shifted their loyalty rapidly and almost seamlessly from the Union to the Confederacy. That transfer could be seen early on, as one woman revealed to another that, “the only thing that gives me real pride is that my child may be born in a Southern Republic, and not in the detestable Union.”<sup>41</sup> Yet at the same time, a few, who later became ardent supporters of the Confederacy were initially sad that the Union had dissolved, even as their loyalty began shifting to the Confederacy. In early 1861, Helen Swift of Eufaula wrote, “I regret very much that the Union is dissolved yet I had much rather for it to be so than be under the jurisdiction of such a bitter enemy to the South as that staunch abolitionist as Lincoln is.”<sup>42</sup>

While many women wrote about the Confederacy and their belief in it, Zillah Brandon did so with notable feeling. Her belief in the ideas behind the Confederacy can be seen even before the outbreak of the war itself. Before Lincoln’s election, Brandon had lamented that the “bewildered statesmen and philosophers” of the North in their “misdirected efforts” had labored and because they could not “trust the people of the Southern states to hold their slaves or not as they might choose” had “at last accomplish

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<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, December 31, 1860, transcripts in author’s possessions.

<sup>41</sup> Lizzie to Anna Mercur, Eufaula Alabama, December 17, 1860, Anna Mercur Papers #751-z, SHC-UNC.

<sup>42</sup> Helen Swift to Anna Mercur, Eufaula Alabama, March 16, 1861, Anna Mercur Papers #751-z, SHC-UNC.



their own and their countrys ruin.” She fully understood the cause over which the Union would dissolve and she somewhat sarcastically noted that the North could “not have selected a better topic to have effected the ruin of the country.” In January of 1861, she lamented the old Union as

Our noble country.... the boast of all lands, the beauty of the whole world” and the “star that illumined every hemisphere... thought to be firmer by its laws and institutions [than] the rock of Gibraltar, bringing peace and righteousness to all people, frowning down all oppressions, teeming with literary endowments and acquisitions, illumined by sunny skies and bordered by streams laden with shipments, and burdened by the swell of the muse of the steam car, josteling in the streets.<sup>43</sup>

This Union, only a few years prior “found peace without alloy” and its magnificence and glory were “restricted by no bounds” and seemingly was “destined to stand though the battle of Gog and Magog should be fought upon its borders, as long as the sun and moon endured.” But now “the United States are sundered, - the Southern states have seceded! The glory of America Babylon has fallen, The issues is of the gravest character.” She viewed any attempts at “Cooperation” as “paralyzed,” while the events taking place around her seemed to “foreshadow anarchy and ruin.” She added that many people had “foreseen the probable occurrence of a crisis like the present,” because of “pride and Sabbath breaking, and drunkenness and other sins have reached unto heaven and evil men and evil angels have cooperated to bring about our countrys ruin.” She still did not desire to see her country fall apart, and knew that a victory for the South would have to be “sealed by the hearts best blood, and the sacrifice of the most valuable lives in the defense and organizing of the Confederacy, will be recorded and immortalized by history before this war is ended.” Yet, when the war came, Brandon became one of the most

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<sup>43</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 8, 1861, SPR262, ADAH.

verbose supporters of the Confederate cause among the women studied here. Indeed, she would continue to compare the Confederacy to the Israelites as she placed her full trust in God, petitioning, “Speak thou the word O Christ our king; and our Confederacy will be unchained, the blockades shattered, and the enemy’s army dispersed.”<sup>44</sup>

As the new year began, Rhodes convinced herself that even the gloomy weather reflected the political atmosphere and she expected “troublesome times on account of dissolution.”<sup>45</sup> Carrie Hunter likewise lamented that “there is sadness and sorrow brooding over the land the prospect of war is close upon us” because of “the fanatical horde that would crush us.”<sup>46</sup> Espy bemoaned that the North was threatening coercion and added that, “Great preparations are now making for war, by both South, and North, and both parties seem eager for the contest; May Right prevail over Might.”<sup>47</sup> Yet many felt as though there was nothing they could do except for wait and turn to their religious beliefs for reassurance and to calm their fears. The conviction that a greater power controlled the events taking place on earth provided a sense of reassurance for some women.

While fear pervaded even the atmosphere, regardless of age, other women were not above becoming swept up in the excitement. Hunter, although concerned for the potential devastation and destruction if war broke out, was also excited about the idea of

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., September 30, 1860, January 8, 1861, January 11, 1862, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, January 6, 1861, transcripts in author’s possession.

<sup>46</sup> Carrie Hunter, Tuskegee January 3, 1861, May 1, 1861 to James H. Hunter New Orleans, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>47</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, February 14, 1861, May 3, 1861, SPR2 ADAH.

secession. She recounted attending what she called a “Southern Rights leap Year party,” adding that she “enjoyed the novelty of the occasion excessively. Most of the young ladies were dressed in home spun” in “celebration of the Confederacy – or rather Southern Rights.”<sup>48</sup>

Political issues finally became all consuming in January 1861 after Florida and Mississippi announced their decision to secede from the Union. Once Alabama followed suit a few days later, Rhodes, drawing on ideals from the American Revolution wrote that she “rejoiced to know that we are no longer part of the Union which would make us slaves.” She firmly believed that “the people have done what they sincerely believe to be for their good” and even though “some of the best blood of Southern sons will be spilt in defending what they believe to be their right,” because the “sign of the times indicate much trouble” she believed that “however dearly bought,” southern independence would be worth the cost because the “South can never be conquered.”<sup>49</sup> In preparation, Gillis noted, many local militias were “given orders to hold themselves in readiness.”<sup>50</sup>

Several women described the subsequent creation of the Confederacy in Montgomery. Espy wrote about the new Confederate government and the election of

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<sup>48</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, January 1, 1861, in the Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC; Carrie Hunter, Tuskegee January 3, 1861 to James H. Hunter New Orleans, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>49</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, January 7, 1861, January 9, 1861, transcripts in author’s possessions. She records that, “A telegram informed us that the ordinance of secession passed this evening at 2 o’clock – that the whole city of Montgomery was in the highest state of excitement” (January 11, 1861).

<sup>50</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, January 13, 1861, SPR5, ADAH.

President Jefferson Davis and Vice President Alexander Stephens.<sup>51</sup> After Davis's inauguration, Gillis wrote that the event would be "quite an era in the history of the Southern Republic," adding, "A grand time that was for Montgomery twas thought there was over ten thousand people there." She then expressed her desire to see more states join the Confederacy.<sup>52</sup> Dawson noted that in the past few months many things had transpired as their new government had been formed. "Our fair and loved country plunged by a revolution into a bleeding weeping land with monuments of fallen Hero's, which will serve as landmarks to strangers who may perhaps visit our Southern Confederacy made more dear to us by the shedding of their blood, but alas!" she wrote, lamenting "that the year ever arrived to cause this terrible change."<sup>53</sup> She noted that the people of the South were more anxious to know what the Confederate congress would do than they were to know how the Federal body would act. She sincerely hoped that it would be "impossible for the North to raise the means to prosecute this unnatural War" or, more to the point, that God would "in some yet unforeseen manner avert it."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, February 14, 1861, SPR2, ADAH. Sarah Davis's brother was involved in the secession movement in Alabama as she recorded him going to "Montgomery for the convention to which he belongs" (March 1, 1861).

<sup>52</sup> She wrote that "In another week Lincoln will take his seat in Washington, but from that high seat he will have seven (and I hop the number will be swelled at least two or three more by that time) states [talking about the states in the Confederacy]." Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, February 24, 1861, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>53</sup> She noted that it would "require years to recover from" these events. Elodie to Dawson, Selma, November 17, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SCH-UNC.

<sup>54</sup> She wrote, "We are all anxiety to know what the Confederate congress will do more so than when the Federal met." Elodie to Dawson, Selma July 14, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

In March, women such as Rhodes again reacted to an inauguration. She blamed Lincoln for the impending conflict, as he had “been ever hostile to our dearest institution” and placed upon his head the decision to either “command peace or bring war and pestilence upon our once happy people.” The war seemed “awful calamity,” but she rested in her belief that God would “so order events to work all things together for the good of this once happy people.”<sup>55</sup> Yet, when the war broke out she did not question her religious beliefs. Finally convinced that God had willed the war to come, she concluded that she must resign herself to His will. She relied also upon her firm belief that God not only controlled the future of her country, but would also work things out for good. She sought reassurance in Romans 8:28, which states, “and we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” Thus, while she had opposed the war, she became convinced that God had ordained it, and hence defined herself as a part of that struggle.

Elodie Dawson brought a unique twist to secession, for the man she blamed for the war was her brother-in-law. She personally attacked his manliness as she wrote, “I do not think of peace and know well Mr Lincoln is not man enough to dare to make it.” She also judged him to be nothing “but a tool in the hands of his Party” who “would not brave their wrath by such a proposition.” He could “redeem himself if he had the courage,” but he was “no more fitted for the office than many others who have recently occupied it.” She believed that the South could date its present trouble from the date when the country allowed the Republican Party to elect a president without regard for his “ability or

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<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, March 4, 1861, April 12, 1861, Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, transcripts in author’s possessions.

capacity for it,” and solemnly hoped that the Confederacy would guard against such a poor decision.<sup>56</sup>

Women anxiously waited for news from their government after Lincoln took office. Espy wrote about receiving “bad news concerning our new republic” and became upset because of the Northern determination to “coerse the Leeding states.” She added that, “Lincoln has ordered 12 war-vessels to Mobile” and that the local volunteer company had been ordered to Mobile to assist in repelling them. She felt “badly, for when the war commences when is it to end and what dire consequences will not fall on us! I fear our happy days are all gone.”<sup>57</sup>

As women learned of the political events in both the North and South, they inevitably blamed the North, approved of secession, and began to describe themselves as Confederates in citizens of what Zillah Brandon called, “our noble country.”<sup>58</sup> Thompson wished that all of the Southern states had the spirit of South Carolina, writing, “I trust an overarching Providence is guiding us.”<sup>59</sup> Hunter referenced the sacred cause of Southern

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<sup>56</sup> She wrote, “I would not be offended at your remarks concerning Mr. L. knowing they are not intended more for him than his party or than for any other Rep President and you do not say as much as I do, tho’ that is a privilege I allow myself exclusively, to abuse my relations as much a I desire, but no one else can do the same before me or even say a word against Kentucky.” Elodie to Dawson, Selma August 4, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

<sup>57</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, March 19, 1861, SPR2, ADAH.

<sup>58</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 8, 1861, April 25, 1861, SPR262, ADAH. Brandon also stated, “The South hold the negroes in bondage, which we believe is in mercy to them, for could they be freed, they are so improvedent that nine tenths would perish, unless they were placed under officers, which would their condition far worse than it now is.”

<sup>59</sup> M. E. Thompson to her sons, Marion, September 23, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

liberty and the “Many brave sons of the South,” praying “May the Lord protect them.” On the Fourth of July, she noted how different it was than in previous years as “Every Southern heart is bound up” in the contest for “our own independence.”<sup>60</sup> To them, the Confederacy, as described by Faust, “represented an apotheosis of the Old South at the same time it introduced glimmerings of the New; it caught the South within the paradoxes of that very change the Confederate nation had been founded to avert.”<sup>61</sup>

Yet while the women examined opposed Lincoln and ardently supported the concept of secession and the Confederacy, few wanted war because they feared for their loved ones’ safety.<sup>62</sup> Upon hearing of the preparations for war and the enlistment of Southern men, Sarah Davis exclaimed “but I hope that will not be the case.”<sup>63</sup> After noting that “I suppose the war is now opened,” Sarah Espy prayed, “may the Lord be with us in our weakness, and grant that we may conquer the strong.”<sup>64</sup> As Alabama prepared for war, the militia was ordered out. Margaret Gillis wrote about it being sent to Fort Sumter in South Carolina and lamented that, “War seems inevitable.”<sup>65</sup> Right after the firing on Fort Sumter, Zillah Brandon wrote that she believed that “the country was

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<sup>60</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, May 28, 1862, before June 22, 1862, July 4, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>61</sup> Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, 85.

<sup>62</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 15.

<sup>63</sup> Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, March 4, 1861, SPR113, ADAH.

<sup>64</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, April 16, 1861, SPR2, ADAH.

<sup>65</sup> Margaret Gillis wrote, “our state is making preparations for war The militia ordered out, independent companies forming” and were being sent to “South Carolina to help take fort Sumpter.” Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, January 6, 1861, SPR5, ADAH.

headed for ruin unless the great God of Israel, the Lord of Lords and King of Kings interposes in our behalf our Southern confederacy is lost.” She then prayed, “God Almighty cheer us with the news of peace and in these things may thy Hand be seen and acknowledged by all.” She believed that although Southerners were “learned in theory and practice yet in God alone we put our trust and humbly pray that He will speak to the north and it will hear ere the song of Solomon will fall upon them with stunning weight.”<sup>66</sup> News of the surrender of Fort Sumter brought rejoicing to many, yet also created unprecedented fear and turmoil. Elizabeth Rhodes, for one, did not greet the news with joy. “Each day brings with it awful disclosures,” she wrote. “Preparations are going on on both sides for war, war, civil war. What an awful thought.”<sup>67</sup>

As Varon argued for Virginia women, it was Lincoln’s April 1861 call for troops that became the turning point for those Alabama women who were still on the edge of not supporting the Confederacy.<sup>68</sup> After the surrender of Fort Sumter and Lincoln’s call for 75,000 volunteers four more states joined the first seven.<sup>69</sup> This continued to be the topic of discussion; Sarah Davis noted that “I have heard nothing but war talk for the last

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<sup>66</sup> It would be “lost to all the hopes that promised glory, lost to all the privileges of a free people lead captive by ambitious fantasies that would keep us dwelling under clouds of oppression as long as the sun and moon endures.” Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, April 25, 1861, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>67</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, April, 13, 1861, transcripts in author’s possessions.

<sup>68</sup> Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted*, 162-63.

<sup>69</sup> The fall of Fort Sumter led to new volunteer companies being raised. Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, April 16, 1861, SPR2, ADAH.



week.”<sup>70</sup> While the other states were important to the Confederacy, Alabama women were thrilled by the news of Virginia’s subsequent secession because they felt as though Virginia held not only physical strength, but also symbolic strength because of its historical significance. It also would encourage the rest of the upper South to follow. When Rhodes heard of Virginia’s decision to secede, she continued to express her reservations about war while again affirming her belief in the righteousness of the southern cause. “Of course every Southern State will come out with their sister states in the struggle for independence,” she wrote. “God grant they be victorious.”<sup>71</sup>

A few women still continued to long for peace into the summer. As late as July, Elodie Dawson still hoped that she would receive news that peace was “spreading over the land.”<sup>72</sup> In September she wrote to Nathaniel, “Would to heaven we had never had occasion for this Unnatural War,” adding that she wished that she had never “been unfortunate enough to have such a great interest in it.” She regretted that she revealed her worries to him because she was “selfish in wanting to place my share of sorrow on the already burdened hearts of others.” Then she resolved to not indulge herself in such behavior and put aside the letter until she was in a better mood.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, April 15, 1861, May 9, 1861, May 16, 1861, SPR113, ADAH; Carrie Hunter Diary, April 19, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>71</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, April 18, 1861, Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, transcripts in author’s possessions.

<sup>72</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Selma July 14, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 13.

<sup>73</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Selma July 14, 1861, September 22, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

As both the Union and Confederate nations tensely awaited news of current events, Kentucky and its fate in the coming conflict became a notable matter of discussion for some women. The state's leaders had agonized over the decision of what to do in the secession crisis and ultimately proclaimed it neutral. That lasted only until September of 1861, when Confederate troops entered the state, violated its neutrality, and pushed Kentucky to remain in the Union.<sup>74</sup> M. E. Thompson wrote about Kentucky and the state's inability to remain neutral, noting that she wished that all of the Southern states would take up the cause of the Confederacy.<sup>75</sup> Sarah Espy lamented that Kentucky had decided to stay in the Union and Elodie Dawson noted that people around her believed that Maryland would "soon throw off its chains."<sup>76</sup> But while other women mentioned Kentucky, Elodie Todd Dawson firmly identified herself as a Kentuckian, and she wrote avidly about the commonwealth's fate. Secession led her to exclaim, "Kentucky with all thy faults I love thee still."<sup>77</sup> Although she heard no "good news from Kentucky," her faith was "not shaken" and she still hoped for Kentucky to join the Confederacy. She was proud that many were "leaving the state to join Companies of

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<sup>74</sup> Thomas, *The Confederate Nation*, 88-89, 95.

<sup>75</sup> M. E. Thompson to her sons, Marion, September 23, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

<sup>76</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, November 1, 1862, SPR2 ADAH; Elodie to Dawson, Selma, September 1, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

<sup>77</sup> Elodie wrote, "It is just a year today since I came to Selma, little dreaming then that today I would be here, or that so many and varying changes would occur in that space of time." Elodie to Dawson, Selma, November 17, 1861, July 22, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

others and endeavoring to do what they can, perhaps those remaining will surprise us by doing the same.”<sup>78</sup>

Through the summer, Dawson firmly believed that Kentucky would secede eventually and join the Confederacy, and she became enraged when anyone in Selma spoke ill of her home state. After a conversation with two men in August, she recorded her indignation that “people who just by a small majority threw off northern tyranny themselves, and before Ky” would speak ill of her home state, admitting, “For I still have faith in her and will ever take her part knowing better than some.”<sup>79</sup>

By September, however, Dawson had grown upset that Kentucky was still in the Union. She wanted the state to “act nobly,” and she was worried about her family who lived in Kentucky and noted that she could not “hear one word to relieve my anxiety,” and her fear only increased as “every day I grow more restless and impatient at the silence they are now forced from painful necessity to keep, and I cannot imagine now when I shall ever hear or see any of them again, if ever.” When news finally reached her that Kentucky would remain in the Union, she expressed anguish. In a letter to her future husband, she wrote, “You cannot imagine how distressed I was to hear such terrible and disgraceful news from my birthplace. I had expected better and I almost made myself sick crying and bemoaning the fallen condition of my state. I am sorry to have lived to see the day when proud noble old Ky should act in this manner.” She was proud that her

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<sup>78</sup> She added “I know you will smile and say yes it will surprise us but I don’t care what Kentucky does I will acknowledge to the last I am a good old fashioned Kentuckian, and be proud to say it.” Elodie to Dawson, Selma July 28, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

<sup>79</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Selma August 4, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 SHC #210, SHC-UNC.

family members who were “free to act” were doing their “duty” to the Confederacy. Her youngest brother, Ellick, who was also her favorite brother was preparing to defend his rights “or sell his life in the attempt.”<sup>80</sup>

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The outbreak of the American Civil War provided a way for women such as Dawson to demonstrate their willingness to bear their Christian burdens without complaint while at the same time exhibiting their patriotism and loyalty to the new Confederacy. They offered not only their services to help provide for the soldiers, but also gave their most precious possessions as a sacrifice for their country, their male relatives. And indeed, the Civil War called upon women to employ all in their power to live up to their ideal image of the Republican mother who was willing to sacrifice all for her country just like the mothers of old. By the end of the war more Southerners perished in the conflict than did their Northern counterparts.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., September 15, 1861, September 22, 1861, November 2, 1861, November 23, 1861.

<sup>81</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), xi-xii. Faust stated that, “Confederate men died at a rate three times that of their Yankee counterparts; one in five white southern men of military age did not survive the Civil War” (xi). See also Annie Strudwick Diary, June 14, 1862, Annie Strudwick Diary and Letter # 1838, SHC-UNC. Soldiers were not the only ones to die during the war. Although there are no definite numbers, James McPherson has estimated that around fifty thousand civilians died during the course of the war. Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, xii. In May of 1862 Carrie Hunter lamented that not only had death touched the lives of those with relatives who were soldiers in the field, “but it is here in our midst. Here where it takes a little one and another the wife of one who has gone to defend her from the vandal foe” (May 28, 1862). A few months later Hunter mourned that, “one after another the good the noble and the true pass away and

The rhetoric of the Early Republic portrayed the ideal woman as one who was willing to sacrifice everything for the good of her country. Indeed, as various historians have argued, Enlightenment ideas of active participation in government that were espoused throughout the Revolutionary Era took on a particular shape as a political role was created for women in the new republic that simultaneously elevated their position and barred them from actual active political participation.<sup>82</sup> That role, according to Linda Kerber, “made use of the classic formulation of the Spartan Mother,” whose primary responsibility was to raise sons who would be prepared to sacrifice themselves for the good of the *polis*.<sup>83</sup> Hence as time progressed from the American Revolution through the days of the early republic, women were supposed to play the important political role of raising sons who would be willing to serve their country. This ideal image was promoted in 1861 through a variety of forms that ranged from the pulpit to published material.<sup>84</sup> Elizabeth Varon argues that Confederate propagandists, both male and female, stressed the idea that women were somehow “purer patriots than men,” as it was not only their

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are gone forever. The seat beside the hearthstone is vacant and places that knew them So well in times past will know them no more forever” (October 5, 1862).

<sup>82</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, March 18, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC; Linda Kerber, “The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment-An American Perspective,” *American Quarterly* 28, no 2 (Special Issue: An American Enlightenment, 1976): 187-205; 188; Linda Kerber, “The Limits of Politicization: American Women and the American Revolution,” in *The American and European Revolutions, 1776-1848: Sociopolitical and Ideological Aspects*, edited by Jaroslaw Pelenski (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1980); 54-74; Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 39-40; Nancy M. Theriot, *Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-Century America: The Biosocial Construction of Femininity* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 2.

<sup>83</sup> Kerber, “The Republican Mother,” 188.

<sup>84</sup> Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 162.

duty, but also their “desire to assume the role of ‘Spartan mothers,’ accepting the loss of their men in defense of states’ rights.”<sup>85</sup>

As men began to depart, other women wrote in torrents about the men leaving. Many women realized, as Sarah Espy wrote, that when their loved ones left they could not “expect to see them all again.”<sup>86</sup> They nonetheless encouraged their male relatives to join the Confederacy. Carrie Hunter wrote to her brother that, “Your home and country may need you aid and protection ere long” even though it was “very sad to think of.”<sup>87</sup>

Some indeed were not above pressuring their male relatives and other men into the service of the Confederacy. One mother wrote to her son that if he desired to win the heart of an attractive girl he must be a good faithful soldier because no honorable woman would consider a man who had not proved his devotion to his country and she goes on to note that the young men who remained at home were ashamed to even go out in public because they were not doing their duty to the country. Another woman wrote to her

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<sup>85</sup> Varon, *We Mean to be Counted*, 4. The irony of the entire process was, as Rable argues that the war “destroyed the security of the antebellum world” for which women had encouraged men to fight. Rable, *Civil Wars*, 43, 50. The Alabama women examined in this study clearly became somewhat disheartened as the war progressed as discussed in a later chapter, but they also supported the war fully as women formed a new sense of identity which placed themselves and their families as a part of the Confederacy. M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, January 2, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

<sup>86</sup> Quotation from Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, August 14, 1861, SPR2 ADAH. Women were well aware of the fact that they might never again see their relatives when they left. See Carrie Hunter Diary, December 3, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC; Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, March 22, 1861, April 15, 1861, SPR113, ADAH; M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, January 14, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, July 28, 1861, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>87</sup> Carrie Hunter, Tuskegee January 3, 1861 to James H. Hunter New Orleans, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

fiancée that she never would have considered loving him if he had shirked his duty to his country.<sup>88</sup> Thus in some ways the image of womanhood was able to be used to promote Confederate enlistment.

Other women actively sought out their own trials in order to demonstrate strength and willingness to sacrifice. While they encouraged their loved ones to join the Confederate Army and fight for the liberty of the Southern states, some wistfully desired to do more for the cause, to bear their share of the burdens and nobly face “sorrow and trouble” for the Confederacy.<sup>89</sup> As Rebecca Vasser stated, “How apt I am to wish for great trials that I may prove my strength thereby.”<sup>90</sup> M. E. Thompson, writing to her son in camp, likewise related her wish to be with him, claiming that she would be willing to endure any hardship and to face the dangers and fatigues of camp life if she could only be with her sons and help fight for Southern independence. She also lamented that she was not a man, because “if I were a father I would be with you all the time.”<sup>91</sup>

Social norms dictated that respectable women could not fulfill their desires to partake of the hardships of field and camp life with their loved ones. Hence women

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<sup>88</sup> M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, September 2, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Elodie to Dawson, Selma, December 22, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

<sup>89</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Selma, April 15, 1862, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 # 210, SHC-UNC. She stated that, “Sometimes I feel perfectly despairing, but there is much hopefulness in my disposition, and it after a while will rise far above in the ascendancy of my other feelings.” Elodie to Dawson, Selma, September 22, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

<sup>90</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, January 3, 1857, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*; Rable, *Civil Wars*, 50.

<sup>91</sup> M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, July 7, 1861, M. E. Thompson to Joe Thompson, Marion, July 22, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

sought out other ways to demonstrate their patriotism. Having men camped close to where they lived provided a great deal of excitement as well as potential for service for women who went out to watch the men drill.<sup>92</sup> Carrie Hunter went out to “see the battalion drill and shoot. They shot riding at full gallop but I believe not a shot hit the target.”<sup>93</sup> Upon seeing the Confederate flag waiving and hearing the drums playing from a nearby camp, Margaret Gillis announced that “I felt very like taking up arms myself[,] o me[,] it was soul inspiring.”<sup>94</sup> Thompson related how the streets were “packed with people anxious to hear the latest news” and while the “political strife,” in which they were involved was “no act of your or mine, but we are equally involved and will be carried by the current, willing or unwilling and our wisest course is to get all the strength we can to bear it, the hardships.”<sup>95</sup>

Send-off parties and the presentation of banners became an important symbolic part of sending men off to fight the Northerners. Indeed, historians William Garrett Piston and Richard W. Hatcher III point out that one cannot exaggerate the importance of these ceremonies, as they cemented community and company ties. In essence, those presenting the flag promised to care for the families of those leaving, while and those

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<sup>92</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, May 5, 1861, August 12, 1861, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>93</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, March 21, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>94</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, May 5, 1861, SPR5, ADAH; Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, May 2, 1861, SPR113, ADAH.

<sup>95</sup> M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, January 14, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.



departing pledged to uphold the honor of the presenters and the community.<sup>96</sup> Piston and Hatcher add that “if the men left their communities to protect their homes, as many of them insisted they did, they brought something of their homes with them into battle. The flag was the physical tie between the homelife they had left and fought for and the war into which they were plunged.”<sup>97</sup>

The importance of sending men off was important for the Alabama women examined in this study. Presenting men with tokens that they could carry into battle helped create a sense of identity with the Confederacy. The soldiers’ departure often involved a mixture of grief and excitement, however. Hunter lamented that it had “left many a sad heart in Tuskegee tonight,” adding “May the Almighty Father watch over and protect them from dangers and death. Two of her brothers had “gone off to fight the fanatical horde that would crush us.” Commenting on their decision, she lamented that the day on which they departed was “a strange sad day, as the men departed with their flag and “all the fine speeches made on the occasion of its presentation” yet she firmly believed that “They have enlisted in a noble cause” and prayed, “God grant that they may be successful.”<sup>98</sup> Sarah Espy also wrote about the departure of volunteers, noting that “a

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<sup>96</sup> William Garrett Piston and Richard W. Hatcher III, *Wilson’s Creek: The Second Battle of the Civil War and the Men Who Fought It* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 66; Carrie Hunter, Tuskegee January 3, 1861 to James H. Hunter New Orleans, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC. For a discussion of the mobilization of Alabama troops during the war see Thomas Alton Smith “Mobilization of the Army in Alabama 1859-1865” (MA Thesis, Auburn University, 1953).

<sup>97</sup> Piston and Hatcher, *Wilson’s Creek*, 67.

<sup>98</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, January 7, 1861, May 1, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

large assemblage of people were there to take leave of them; the scene was most impressive for we cannot expect to see them all again.”<sup>99</sup>

As the soldiers prepared to depart there were huge parties and elaborate banner presentation ceremonies to send them off. Sarah Davis wrote about two different banner presentation ceremonies. The first took place at the end of March. “I think that the banners presented were beautiful and very appropriate,” she wrote. Yet, at the same time she was concerned that the preoccupation with the “celebrations” and banner presentations would prevent the girls at her school from studying. Her school presented the other banner to the Home Guards. The headmaster suggested that the girls make the presentation and the girls elected one of their classmates to present the banner, which was done with elegance.<sup>100</sup>

Hunter recorded in great detail the preparations for the presentation of a banner as well as her fears that something would go amiss during its presentation since she was the one presenting the banner. She viewed this as the “all important occasion” in which she would make her “debut in public” adding that her only desire was that she would “meet the expectations of my friends” noting that she was “almost indifferent to the presentation party and every thing else.” The day after the presentation she related to her diary her relief that “nothing at all terrible happened to me yesterday as I fully expected it would and I hear nothing but the congratulations of my friends upon having acquitted myself credible on the all important occasion of the presentation. I was not so much

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<sup>99</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, August 14, 1861, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>100</sup> Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, March 25, 1861, April 15, 1861, April 17, 1861, April 18, 1861, April 23, 1861, April 25, 1861, SPR113, ADAH.

discomposed as I expected to be. My horse behaved him self admirably and everything went off well.” She added, “I feel very greatly relieved that it is all over. I have gotten through with it, and have received the commendation of my friends which is all I ever cared for. I care little for the praises and congratulations of the crowd.”<sup>101</sup>

Some mothers nonetheless were not excited about their sons in particular leaving to join the Confederate army. While Espy helped her son prepare to leave she noted that she would “have to submit.”<sup>102</sup> Writing of the departure of her sons James and Hines “who belonged to a voluntary company,” Brandon noted her concern for them partially because of what they would be exposed to in camp life, yet noted that “I have become better reconciled.”<sup>103</sup> At the end of 1861 Espy lamented that there had been a call for Alabama to raise sixty more companies and that she heard rumors that those who would be subjected to the draft would include all men age sixteen to sixty. Were this to become the case, her youngest son, Marcellus, would be subjected to military service as well. She admitted that not only did not want him exposed to the hardships and “evils of camp life,” but also that she would miss him more than she missed any of her other children.<sup>104</sup>

The Espy boys ended up in Mobile because the “Abolitionists are invading our sea-ports in large numbers, and I much fear will get the advantage of us, for they have so

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<sup>101</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, March 11, 1861, March 18, 1861, March 21, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>102</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, April 19, 1861, SPR2, ADAH; Carrie Hunter Diary, January 7, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>103</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, August 21, 1861, SPR262, ADAH. Her sons left to fight in the Confederacy with the nineteenth Regiment Alabama Volunteers and gave their lives as a result of this (May 29, 1864).

<sup>104</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, December 6, 1861, SPR2 ADAH.

many ships and we, but few.”<sup>105</sup> Sarah Davis also noted that men were being called upon to protect the state against an “attack made by the Republicans.”<sup>106</sup> After writing about how a Dr. Ross addressed the Rifle Company, she admitted that, “it was very touching to see so many young and gallant men preparing to go to war where it is probable they will never return. But I hope that will not be the case.”<sup>107</sup> Well into the war women remained interested in watching regiments and soldiers pass, They also visited friends in camps.<sup>108</sup> Sarah Davis wrote about spending a nice day going out with other women to watch some regiments drill. Recording her reactions, she wrote that she was not sure if her feelings were “of a pleasurable or painful kind when I beheld such a sight. It made me realize more plainly our critical condition at present and the urgent necessity of preparing for any emergency.”<sup>109</sup>

While women firmly believed that it was their duty to be resigned to their fate and willingly sacrifice their loved ones, the simple fact that many struggled with letting them go led them to believe that they were failing in their duty. Separation was hard for women who were used to having men around all the time. Many lamented the “cruel

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., November 13, 1861, November 16, 1861.

<sup>106</sup> Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, April 23, 1861, April 25, 1861, July 28, 1861, SPR113, ADAH.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., March 22, 1861; Elodie to Dawson, Selma July 14, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

<sup>108</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, December 26, 1862, February 4, 1864, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>109</sup> Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, March 11, 1862, SPR113, ADAH.

separations” and longed for them to come to an end.<sup>110</sup> Yet they believed that separation was necessary and thus they should not complain and even reproved themselves for complaining and for admitting to struggling. When Elodie Todd wrote to her lover about how much she missed him, she added that she sincerely hoped that she would be able to bear her “part of sorrow and trouble, caused by so glorious a struggle for liberty, with as much firmness as any of my countrywomen,” and she convinced herself that if she gave way to letting herself miss him she was not doing her duty.<sup>111</sup> Thus, while women were willing to sacrifice their loved ones, they struggled to resign themselves to the sacrifice upon which they felt they were called to make.<sup>112</sup>

The election of 1860, in sum, politicized Alabama women in a way that previous political events did not. Secession further embroiled women in politics. As their loved ones left for service in the Confederacy women became caught up in the excitement of the times. Yet their excitement did not keep them from worrying about them, nor from hoping and praying that secession would not produce war. The firing on Fort Sumter followed by Lincoln’s call for volunteers sealed, in many women’s opinions, their country’s fate and forced them into a war with the North. While some still longed for peace, nearly all came to define themselves more and more in relation to the Confederacy

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<sup>110</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, February 12, 1864, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>111</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Selma, September 22, 1861, April 15, 1862, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

<sup>112</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, December 31, 1863, SPR2, ADAH.

and its cause. In doing so they drew upon a belief that they were God's chosen people and were actually the true heirs of the ideals of the American Revolution.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Kate Cumming, May 9, 1862, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

## **Chapter 4 “One Does Not Suffer More than Another for We All Have to Make Sacrifices... We Must Conquer No Matter What it Costs:” Women and Confederate Identity**

Both fear and excitement pervaded the atmosphere in Alabama with the outbreak of the Civil War. The women in this study embraced a new sense of Confederate identity, albeit one that was deeply rooted in the ideas of the Old South. The white women in this study sought to define that new identity by justifying the Confederacy. Having a male relative fighting in the Confederate army strengthened and cemented women’s links to the new nation, especially during the first years of the war. As women faced increasing hardships, they also developed a deepening hatred of “Yankees.” Thus, like the Carolina women examined by Jacqueline Glass Campbell, the hardships of the war actually strengthened devotion to the Confederacy. Women sought to demonstrate their loyalty to the cause through their war work, which in turn reinforced their new Confederate identity as they actively took part in this new nation’s struggle for independence.<sup>1</sup>

The concept of Southern identity and even nationalism was a real phenomenon with roots reaching far back into the antebellum years. To be sure, some historians, such as Paul Escott, have argued that Confederate nationalism and identity never existed beyond a few elites, because of the actions of the Confederate government and especially

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<sup>1</sup> Jacqueline Glass Campbell, *When Sherman Marched North from the Sea: Resistance on the Confederate Home Front* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

Jefferson Davis himself.<sup>2</sup> Broader Confederate nationalism existed, however, as historians such as Emory M. Thomas, John McCardell, and Anne Sarah Rubin have demonstrated.<sup>3</sup> By the outbreak of the Civil War the South was, according to Thomas, “un-American.”<sup>4</sup> McCardell meanwhile maintained that the “peculiar institution came to represent for Southerners a whole ideological configuration – a plantation economy, a style of life, and a pattern of race relations – which made Southerners believe that they constituted a separate nation.”<sup>5</sup> Southern nationalism began to emerge out of the realization that Southern economic interests were diverging from the rest of the country, particularly during the tariff crisis of the 1820s. At that point, Southerners began to perceive their interests as separate and incompatible with those of the rest of the nation.

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<sup>2</sup> Paul D. Escott, *After Secession: Jefferson Davis and the Failure of Confederate Nationalism* (Louisiana State University Press, 1978; Louisiana Paperback Edition, 1992); David Williams, *Rich Man’s War: Class, Cast, and Confederate Defeat in the Lower Chattahoochee Valley* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998). Lawrence N. Powerll and Michael S. Wayne argue that self interest actually contributed to the decline of Confederate nationalism. Lawrence N. Powell and Michael S. Waye, “Self-Interest ad the Decline of Confederate Nationalism,” in Harry P. Owens and James J. Cook, eds., *The Old South in the Crucible of War* (Jackson, Mississippi: University of Mississippi, 1983): 29-45, 32-33.

<sup>3</sup> George Rable, *The Confederate Republic: A Revolution Against Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); George Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism*.

<sup>4</sup> Emory M. Thomas, “Reckoning With Rebels,” in Harry P. Owens and James J. Cook, eds., *The Old South in the Crucible of War* (Jackson, Mississippi: University of Mississippi, 1983), 7; Anne Sarah Rubin, *A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861-1868* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> McCardell, *The Idea of a Southern Nation*, 3-4. Also see Steven A. Channing, “Slavery and Confederate Nationalism,” in Walter J. Fraser, Jr., and Winfred B. Moore, Jr., eds., *From the Old South to the New: Essays on the Transitional South* (London: Greenwood Press, 1981): 219-226.



Southern nationalism, however, did not equate to support for secession. Many Southerners even in 1861 viewed it as a last resort.<sup>6</sup>

Southern nationalism only coalesced during the course of the war as Confederates strove to define themselves while facing the external threat of the Union. Thomas, for example, maintained that the Confederate experience was actually an “extended moment during which Southerners attempted simultaneously to define themselves as a people and to act out a national identity.”<sup>7</sup> Over the course of the war, the region became “more Confederate and less Southern.”<sup>8</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust has also argued that Confederate nationalism was real. It functioned as the South’s commentary on itself, forming as the tensions and necessities of wartime created an atmosphere in which it became essential

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<sup>6</sup> McCardell, *The Idea of a Southern Nation*, 4-6, 9; Richard E. Beringer, Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones, William N. Still, Jr., *The Elements of Confederate Defeat: Nationalism, War Aims, and Religion* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), Richard E. Beringer, et al., *The Elements of Confederate Defeat: Nationalism, War Aims, and Religion* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988); Richard E. Beringer, et al., *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (New York: Verso, 2006); Channing, “Slavery and Confederate Nationalism,” 219.

<sup>7</sup> Emory M. Thomas, *The Confederate Nation*, xiii-xv, 1-4, 305-306, quotation from p. xv; Paul D. Escott, “The Failure of Confederate Nationalism: The Old South’s Class System in the Crucible of War,” in in Harry P. Owens and James J. Cook, eds., *The Old South in the Crucible of War* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1983), 15-28; Rubin, *A Shattered Nation*; John McCardell, *The Idea of a Southern Nation: Southern Nationalist and Southern Nationalism, 1830-1860* (New York: Norton, 1979); Harry P. Owens and James J. Cook, eds., *The Old South in the Crucible of War* (Jackson, Mississippi: University of Mississippi, 1983), viii.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas, *The Confederate Nation*, 166. The heart of his argument lies in his statement that “the end product of these Confederate alterations of ante-bellum norms was a distinctive national life behind the battle lines. Conditioned by war and revolution, that national life differed dramatically from what came before and after” (221).

that white Southerners quickly identify with a shared ideology.<sup>9</sup> Mitchell Snay agreed that secession and the birth of the Confederacy marked the “final transformation from Southern sectionalism to Southern nationalism.”<sup>10</sup>

Once secession had been decided upon, the women examined in this study rapidly shifted their loyalty to the newly formed Confederacy, as noted in the previous chapter. This new sense of being a part of a larger whole did not lead women to disregard their loyalties to their families, hometowns, or states. Local identity still held a firm grasp. Yet the passionate torrent of writing during the secession crisis, discussed previously, provides a perfect illustration of the way that many women (and men as well) desired the South to act as a nation rather than on a state-by-state basis. As the war progressed and reached its conclusion, women continued to form and promote a conception of a strong Confederate identity through Lost Cause Mythology. The Lost Cause Mythology was a way for many Southerners to claim that the Confederate cause was just and should have resulted in a separate Confederate nation rather than defeat. It was in many ways a way for Southerners to come to grips with what had taken place during the Civil War. The

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<sup>9</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988). Faust also pointed out that, “the ideological foundations of nationalism required popular consent; nationalism, not to mention total war, necessarily involved and thus empowered the people at large” (83). Women sought to demonstrate their commitment to the Confederacy through aid societies and supporting their troops. George Rable, “‘Missing in Action:’ Women of the Confederacy,” in Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber eds., *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992): 134-146, 176. See also Carrie Hunter Diary, February 8, 1862, February 15, 1862, March 23, 1862, June 30, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>10</sup> Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religious Separatism in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 181.

Lost Cause, was in many ways a continuation and expansion of the Confederate identity that women actively shaped and promoted during the war itself.<sup>11</sup>

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From the outset of the war, the white women Alabama examined in this study sought to justify the ideas for which the Confederacy stood. Slavery was one, and white supremacy was another.<sup>12</sup> Zillah Brandon believed that the North and South “never did”

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<sup>11</sup> For an excellent discussion of the Lost Cause see, Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980); Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003); Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001); Gary W. Gallagher, *Lee and His Generals in War and Memory* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998); Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan, eds., *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Rubin, *A Shattered Nation*.

<sup>12</sup> Slavery could not be the only admitted reason for the war, Faust adds, because many southerners did not own slaves. While some of the Alabama women examined here did discuss slavery, most of them did so in a matter-of-fact way that took for granted their existence in daily life. Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, September 19, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC; M. E. Thompson to Joe Thompson, Marion, August 30, 1861, M. E. Thompson to her sons, Marion, January 1, 1862, September 23, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, December 16, 1859, January 19, 1860, March 18, 1860, August 31, 1860, March 25, 1861, April 26, 1861, May 22, 1861, June 3, 1861, June 12, 1861, July 11, 1861, July 13, 1861, March 12, 1862, SPR2 ADAH; Martha M. Jones to Samuel H. Jones, Tuscaloosa County Alabama, May 20th 1860, Martha M. Jones Papers, Duke; Lizzie to Anna Mercur, Eufaula Alabama, December 17, 1860, Anna Mercur Papers #751-z, SHC-UNC; Helen Swift to Anna Mercur, Eufaula Alabama, March 16, 1861, Anna Mercur Papers #751-z, SHC-UNC; Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, September 30, 1860, January 8, 1861, SPR262, April 25, 1861, August 21, 1861, ADAH; Elodie to Dawson, Selma, September 22, 1861, December 8, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC; Rubin, *A Shattered Nation*, 1-3; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*:

and “never can agree” over the issue of slavery and hence war had been inevitable. Everything about the North and South was different in her opinion; “their soil is different their interests are conflicting their temperaments and characters are different.” When the South could no longer take the infringement of the North onto the issue of slavery, the natural and logical progression of events led to “a cry for peaceable secession from over twelve million of people according to the last census taken in the South that is including the slaves, that is what we upon our borders at our own home desire.” The North, however, and particularly “Lincoln, the black republican president” refused to allow it to happen. As far as she was concerned, if the Confederacy failed, “the last hope for freedom fails.”<sup>13</sup> M. E. Thompson likewise believed that “it is perfectly evident that the North has for a long time designed to get the Washington government under their

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*Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (New York: Verso, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, April 25, 1861, August 21, 1861, SPR262, ADAH. She wrote that Lincoln “refuses to receive the commissioners, John Forsyth, and Martin J Crawford the former from Ala and the latter from Ga. Though the President would not receive them yet like true statesmen, they informed the secretary of state that they had been duly accredited by the government of the Confederate States of America as commissioners to the government of the United States, and they set forth the object of their attendance at Washington they further stated that seven of the states of America in an exercise of a right inherent in every free people, have withdrawn through convention of their people from the United States resumed the attributes of sovereign power and that those Confederate States now constitute an independent nation, do facto, and de jure And it is now a government perfect in all its parts and fully endowed with all the means of self support. But alas; for us the Secretary denies the right of the states to withdraw, and the final result is Lincoln’s appeal to the sword; which commenced first at Fort Sumpter, and a second out rage in the city of Baltimore, and a third at Harper’s Ferry, and a fourth at St. Louis, and we are not hourly expecting a severe battle at Fort Pickens, we are waiting the result in fearful suspense and many a warm Southern heart has grown cold; and while memory of friends, that reverses them pays just tribute to their true character they sleep in death, a sacrifice to downtrodden fanaticism.”

control.” Now Southerners must embrace secession and defend themselves or “become a thousand times worse slaves than our negroes.”<sup>14</sup>

Commentary on the Confederacy and the efforts to justify its existence continued throughout the war. Women drew in part upon the intertwined belief that the Confederacy was the true heir of the American Revolution and that it held the blessing of God. It could not be defeated.<sup>15</sup> In 1862, for example, Kate Cumming wrote that “I am no politician,” and she admitted that she “must own to ignorance in regard to federal or state rights,” but nonetheless she mentioned, “I think I have a faint idea of the meaning of the word ‘union’ . . . according to Webster and other authorities, it is the concord, agreement, and conjunction of mind.” Comparing the union to a marriage she noted that, “we all know how little . . . happiness exists in a forced union of man and wife, where there is neither love nor congeniality of feeling.” She wondered if the North was “so blind as to think, even if they succeed, that it can ever bring happiness to them or us? Is it not exactly the

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<sup>14</sup> She added that, “since you left our government has called for five thousand more troops which I have no doubt is answered before this time. . . . The spirit of determination does not flag, but increase under every obstacle.” M. E. Thompson to Elias Thompson, Marion, July 22, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

<sup>15</sup> The comparison between the United States and biblical Israel “was another popular vehicle for expressing the fervent religious nationalism of the antebellum era.” See Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 188. While the ruling class attempted to create an identity, they realized that this identity had to be one with which the common people could identify. Thus, the common people influenced ideology as the elites attempted to shape it. Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, 21. Southern clergymen also claimed that by seceding, the South was actually the true heirs of the political ideals of the American Revolution. Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 184-85, 191-96. Southerners went to war firmly believing that God was on their side. See Eugene D. Genovese, *Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998). Thomas agrees that churches mustered support for the Southern Cause and invoked the blessings of God; see Thomas, *The Confederate Nation: 1861-1865*, 196, 223, 245-246. See also Phillips, *Diehard Rebels*; Rubin, *A Shattered Nation*; Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism*.

same as the case of the marriage state?" If a forced reunion of the North and South occurred she believed that "they must strike out the word union, and have in its stead monarchy or anarchy; one of these, perhaps, would be better." Cumming further reflected, "grant that we had no lawful right to secede; that I know nothing about, and never was more grieved than when I knew that we had done so; not from any wrong or unlawfulness," but rather because she felt that "united, we were stronger than we would be when separated; and I also feared the bloodshed which might ensue." Yet, "if we were sinners" in seceding from the Union, she continued, "what were our forefathers when they claimed the right to secede from the British crown?"<sup>16</sup> She thus compared secession to the thirteen colonies declaring their independence from England in 1776, hence claiming authority for the actions taken by the Confederacy based on historical record.

Zillah Brandon in contrast stressed the religious side of the equation. She believed that if the South were to come out of the conflict victorious it needed to be "consistent in religion" and constantly "pay our vows to the most High by giving all diligence to make our calling and election sure," by "preserving labour, cultivating those holy principles universally taught by the gospel, by so conforming to the influence of permanent, abiding reality, ever steadfast." She referred to the Confederacy as a new Israel, and believed that its people, "with their chaste glory," would reflect a "brilliance upon them that will ennoble their national name." Placing her full trust in God, she turned to Him for comfort and reassurance. She directly petitioned God, "Speak thou the word O Christ our king;

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<sup>16</sup> Kate Cumming, May 9, 1862, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

and our Confederacy will be unchained, the blockades shattered, and the enemy's army dispersed."<sup>17</sup>

Backed by faith as well as examples from the American Revolution, many women firmly believed in the invincibility of the Confederacy well into the war. Jason Phillips has argued that the combination of these two principles led many soldiers to become what he calls "diehard rebels."<sup>18</sup> Women could become diehards as well. The early victories reinforced their belief in the invincibility of the Confederacy. While women wrote about many different battles that the Confederacy won, the First Battle of Manassas provides an excellent early example of how they linked God to Confederate victory.<sup>19</sup> Dawson wrote of her soon to be fiancée's involvement in the fight and wished that she could have gotten to the site of the battle so that she could have been there with him. She then called into question those young men who called themselves patriots yet refused to lift a hand in the cause of the Confederacy. "I am so proud of you," she wrote, "and think you are such a

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<sup>17</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, August 21, 1861, January 11, 1862, SPR262, ADAH; Phillips, *Diehard Rebels*, 15, 18-19.

<sup>18</sup> Phillips, *Diehard Rebels*.

<sup>19</sup> Brandon wrote fluently about the victories won by the Confederacy and noted that the "gifted sons of our Country" were braving "the storms to shield us from wrong, braving the strife even unto death." Her dear sons left their "dwelling with careworn sighs, as the weeping voices of rushing friends, and waving hats, and kerchiefs, mingled with the unearthly noises of steam boat and cars bore them off to the scene of death." She noted how when they left the expressions on their faces "plainly said anything except submission to Northern fanatics." She then questioned, "But could we with hold our lamentations as we beheld for the last times those youthful martyrs to a tyrants rage? Falling victims to the ambition of those under whose control they determined no longer to serve? Nay! But our mourning for our departed heroes will denounce the fate of those, with which a scene of dreadful death will surely ensue. But let us leave them to an avenging God, which while we once more trace the lineaments and her heritage of your young soldiers whose birth rite, a sculptured stone or battered piece of board only now reveals." Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 11, 1862, SPR262, ADAH.

great man that I fear I shall never be able to realize the fact that anybody else fought for their country.” Then revealing her fear and her resignation to the only source of comfort to whom she could turn, she petitioned God to “be merciful” to all those who not only served but also fell in “our glorious cause of liberty, and rest their souls in peace.”<sup>20</sup>

Carrie Hunter likewise wrote about First Manassas, noting that her entire family was in a “terrible state of suspense for two days” until they received word that her brothers were safe. She announced that this was a “glorious victory for the South and one perhaps that may decide the fate of the war. Our troops acted nobly but many a noble heart echoed the cry of victory for the last time.”<sup>21</sup> Sarah Espy wrote about the “splendid victory at Manasses” and added that, “such a battle has never been fought in America.”<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes meanwhile rejoiced that her government credited God with their victory at “Bull’s Run.” After recording how the outnumbered Confederates routed the Federals, Rhodes included in her diary a handwritten transcription of the resolutions of the Confederate Congress that offered condolences to the families of those who lost family members and assured them that “the sacrifices made will be consecrated in the hearts of our people and will there enshrine the name of the gallant dead and the championing of freed and constitutional liberty.” She further rejoiced that her government acknowledged the “hand of the Great High God, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords in the glorious victory with which he has crowned our armies at Manassus and

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<sup>20</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Selma July 28, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

<sup>21</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, July 26, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>22</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, August 8, 1861, SPR2 ADAH.



that the people of the Confederate states unite by appropriating services on the ensuing Sabbath to offer up their united Thanksgiving and praise for this mighty deliverance.”<sup>23</sup>

The First Battle of Manassas provided sure evidence for these women that God supported the South, hence the Confederacy could not lose the war. Given how much they credited God with, and their belief that He controlled everything, it made perfect sense for them to look at the events that had taken place and draw a simple equation in their head that equated a military victory with God’s pleasure. God had not simply allowed the Confederates to win the battle, but had, in fact, caused them to be victorious.

During the first two years of the war, women continued to cite Confederate victories, even though they often did not always mention specific battles, as proof of God’s continuing favor upon their holy cause. Yet at the same time, ironically, when the Confederacy experienced defeats, they did not conclude that God had changed His mind about the Confederacy, even at the end of the war. Instead, the chosen nation had done something to displease God and incur his wrath. Defeats were nothing more than the trials intended by God to purify the Confederacy and cause it to come out of the conflict a more holy and perfect nation than ever before conceivable.

Yet women both anticipated and dreaded news of battles and remained on edge as they expected the worst.<sup>24</sup> Elodie Dawson admitted, “I am prepared to hear any day of

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<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, July 20, 1861, July 22, 1861, Elizabeth Rhodes Diary.

<sup>24</sup> Catherine Kerrison, *Claiming the Pen: Women and Intellectual Life in the Early American South* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 29-33; Carrie Hunter Diary, December 3, 1861, February 3, 1862, February 5, 1862, May 7, 1862, May 28, 1862, September 28, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC. Hunter was also concerned because she heard that all of the infantry was killed or wounded at the battle of Sharpsburg, but she hoped that the rumor was false. Her fears were heightened because she had not heard anything from her relatives although she soon heard that her brothers

another engagement but the feeling produces any other than the one of happiness.”<sup>25</sup>

Worry was by no means a new phenomenon for Alabama women, nor for women across the antebellum South, for that matter. Women had dealt with it on a daily basis before the war, some to be sure more than others. After her husband’s death in early 1860, for example, Sarah Espy faced the future with trepidation as she worried about her family’s welfare. She was concerned about her children’s future, and admitted that, “in spite of all efforts to the contrary I cannot help feeling dissatisfied for the present, and apprehensive for the future.” She took on the full responsibility for managing her household without a husband, and while she did not shirk her responsibilities, she constantly wished that her brothers were still alive so that they could have offered their assistance to her. She meanwhile depicted herself and her children as helpless because they lacked a traditional male authority figure to run the household. Espy often noted that she was “much depressed in spirit and perplexed, for I know not how to order things for the best” because a “heavy responsibility rests upon me.” Later, writing of her widowhood, she prayed, “may the great and compassionate Being be with us in our desolation and keep us

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were safe. See Carrie Hunter Diary, October 3, 1862, October 5, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC. See also Elodie to Dawson, Selma July 14, 1861, June 16, 1861, July 23, 1861, August 4, 1861, September 15, 1861, April 15, 1862, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC; M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, July 7, 1861, M. E. Thompson to Joe Thompson, Marion, December 22, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Rebecca Vasser Diary, June 9, 1862, June 11, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke; Annie Strudwick Diary, June 10, 1862, Annie Strudwick Diary and Letter # 1838, SHC-UNC; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, March 19, 1861, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>25</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Marengo August 24, 1861, Selma, September 1, 1861, November 9, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

from all evil. If only one of my brothers was alive, how much strength would it be to me.”<sup>26</sup>

With the outbreak of the war the number of women placed in similar situations dramatically increased. Some Alabama women clearly believed that God personally was testing them as much as the new nation, and they longed to be able to bear their burdens with humility. Kate Cumming, for example, noted toward the end of the war how a sermon on the text “Thy will be done” fell “upon our saddened ears with a mournful cadence.” She believed that “no matter what befell” them, it was their duty to “bow in meekness to ‘Him who doeth all things well.’” She added her conviction that the war had played out the way it had because of God’s greater plan, ““For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth: that the trial of our faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried by fire, might be found unto praise, and honor, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.... This is a severe ordeal” she concluded, but believed that God in His mercy would give them “comfort through it.”<sup>27</sup>

Mothers worried about the physical safety of their sons.<sup>28</sup> They especially dreaded receiving news of battles because of the possibility that one of their loved ones had

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<sup>26</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, December 31, 1860, January 1, 1861, February 16, 1861, February 18, 1861, February 19, 1861, March 23, 1861, May 8, 1862, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>27</sup> Kate Cumming, April 30, 1865, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*; Genovese, *Consuming Fire*, 32; Rebecca Vasser Diary, June 8, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

<sup>28</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, March 19, 1861, SPR2 ADAH. Espy wrote, “Ah me! How dreadful are the times when one so innocent as he must go into camps and suffer for the guilty. May the Lord go with him, and shield him from all evil

perished in the conflict. Espy even recorded a nightmare she had about one of her sons being brought home in a coffin. When her youngest son was preparing to leave for the army, she recorded her dismay.<sup>29</sup> Octavia Otey meanwhile worried about the trouble rain would cause for the “poor recruits who are going to fight the Yankees.”<sup>30</sup> Hunter felt deep concern for her brother who had endured so many hardships, and was surprised that he treated them “lightly as if he been in a theatre.”<sup>31</sup> After writing about how many “of our noble boys” had fallen in the conflicts, Gillis exclaimed, “Will the silver lining of this

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and danger.” Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, January 31, 1863, SPR2 ADAH. See also M. E. Thompson to Joe Thompson, Marion, December 22, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke. She worried that her sons might fall into temptation and wrote, “Oh my children do not suffer the evil one to tempt you to sin! I have been separated from all I hold dear on earth, save your sisters, if I were a father I would be with you all the time.” See M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, July 7, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke. She warned her son not only to watch his language, but also stated, “My son it is the highest part you can act in this life to be a good Christian, one who loves and obeys all his commands.” See M. E. Thompson to Joe Thompson, Marion, August 30, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; M. E. Thompson to Elias Thompson, Marion, November 21, 1861, December 22, 1861, M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, December 11, 1861; M. E. Thompson to her sons, Marion, January 1, 1862, M. E. Thompson to her brother, Marion, May 22, 1864, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

<sup>29</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, June 9, 1863, December 31, 1863, July 30, 1864, August 1, 1864, September 7, 1864, September 12, 1864, October 22, 1864, December 7, 1864, December 14, 1864, SPR2 ADAH; Elodie to Dawson, Marengo August 24, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC. When Kate Cumming heard that her brother’s unit was all destroyed she wrote that she had never been more wretched in her whole life. See Kate Cumming, April 8, 1862, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>30</sup> Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, October 3, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC.

<sup>31</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, November 23, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

dark dark cloud ever appear nothing but gloom and sorrow hangs around now Oh! will it ever brighten?"<sup>32</sup>

As news of more battles came in, women also worried about the fate of their country.<sup>33</sup> As the war progressed, women increasingly reflected on their previous prosperity and lamented the "blackening clouds that hung over our country."<sup>34</sup> Yet their resolution to persevere did not waiver. Writing of her son's absence, M. E. Thompson determined to "not murmur," stating that "the spirit of determination does not flag, but increase under every obstacle."<sup>35</sup> Thus while women desired their loved ones to return to them they also believed, as Elodie Dawson wrote, that "one does not suffer more than another for we all have to make sacrifices" and "we must conquer no matter what it costs."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, July 8, 1862, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>33</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, June 11, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke; Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, October 3, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, January 1, 1861, June 3, 1861, May 20, 1862, December 7, 1863, SPR2 ADAH; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, July 19, 1863, January 22, 1865, SPR5, ADAH; M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, July 7, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Elodie to Dawson, Selma May 27, 1861, July 28, 1861, July 14, 1861, September 29, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC; M. Jelks to her sister, Uchee Russell County, Alabama, November 9, 1862, Louisa M. Jelks Sills Papers, Duke; Mattie C. Treadwell to E. W. Treadwell, September 29, 1861, E. W. Treadwell Papers, Duke.

<sup>34</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 9, 1863, SPR262, ADAH; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, July 4, 1861, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>35</sup> M. E. Thompson to Elias Thompson, Marion, July 22, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

<sup>36</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Selma July 31, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

Yet some struggled for as she admitted, she was selfish enough to “prefer others” to make the sacrifice rather than herself, while at the same time she attempted to “bear up cheerfully” and sacrifice for the Confederacy. Almost ready to break into tears because of the long absence of her lover, she fell back on her affected Spartan-like resignation, claiming that she refrained from crying because she knew it was her duty to be brave and it would not be like her to give way to tears. “My patriotism is only resting!” she then exclaimed, in order to prove that she truly was committed to the Confederate cause and was willing to endure any sacrifice necessary.<sup>37</sup>

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The course of the war produced problems on the Southern home front because often there was no distinction between it and battlefields. Although most Alabama women did not experience the enemy firsthand until later in the war, the Union blockade, problems with transportation, and other issues contributed to the lack of food, medicine, clothes, shoes, and other necessities.<sup>38</sup> Inflation increasingly became one topic of discussion. As Espy noted, “Goods of all kinds are now going up; and coffee is worth 25

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., March 16, 1862.

<sup>38</sup> David Williams has argued that, “poverty, mistreatment, and a feeling of utter helplessness in the face of speculation, impressments, and conscription,” turned Southerners against the war effort so much so that by the end of 1864, despondency was so widespread throughout the South that over two thirds of the soldiers had deserted from the army. See Williams, *Rich Man’s War*, 80, 129, 169. Yet it is important to note that the women Williams examined were not the elite white women of this study. See also John C. Inscoe and Gordon B. McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia: Western North Carolina in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 170; Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, 57, 150.

cts per lb.”<sup>39</sup> The price of salt particularly became an issue for women throughout the war.<sup>40</sup> Margaret Gillis likewise lamented that goods of all kinds were scarce and “what there is in the country to be bought sell at three (or more) times its value. Calico that used to sell at 12 and a half cts per yard is now from 75cts to a dollar, which in our villages we cannot get it for love of money – it aint to be had.”<sup>41</sup> As prices rose and goods became harder to find, women such as Kate Cumming wrote about using substitutes for commonly used goods. In early 1862, for example, she wrote about passing through a wealthy part of Mississippi. The matron of the family with whom she was staying “used sweet potatoes as a substitute for coffee,” and, she added, “it was very nice.” At the same time she also believed that the “scarcity of coffee seems to affect the spirits of the people more than any thing else.”<sup>42</sup> M. E. Thompson wrote about having trouble getting provisions, but believed that God would help, and hoped that an intervening England would supply the Confederacy.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, June 6, 1861, SPR2 ADAH; Corry wrote about trying to sell cotton for ten cents a pound in gold. See Eliza Corry letter, December 18, 1863, Robert E. Corry Confederate Collection, 1857-1913, RG84, AU.

<sup>40</sup> Salt was a major concern for many women. Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, September 28, 1861, September 12, 1864, SPR2 ADAH; M. E. Thompson to Joe Thompson, Marion, August 30, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

<sup>41</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, January 1, 1862, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>42</sup> Kate Cumming, April 10, 1862, May 12, 1862, January 5, 1865, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>43</sup> M. E. Thompson to her sons, Marion, January 1, 1862, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Kate Cumming, January 11, 1864, March 3, 1864, 5, 1865, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

Women spent even more time writing about food and the lack thereof as the war progressed, although some made it a point to let their loved ones know that there was nothing they could do about it even if they were present.<sup>44</sup> As early as March 1861, for example, after some robbers broke into her smoke house and stole some meat, Sarah Espy wrote that, “this is hard on us, but I am thankful it was not worse; we still have enough left I think.”<sup>45</sup> As the war progressed, some women were still able to provide reasonable meals for their families. In mid-1863, Rhodes’s family was still in an economically stable enough position to have the entire family get together for a meal. Others, such as Octavia Otey, made special note of making delicacies such as sweet cakes. Although Corry lamented her hardships, in 1863 she wrote to her husband that her mother got pork so they were “not starving.”<sup>46</sup> At other times, however, some women noted that they did not always have enough to eat.<sup>47</sup> None of the women wrote of

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<sup>44</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, December 7, 1859, July 9, 1863, SPR2 ADAH; Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, October 10, 1864, October 11, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC; Eliza Bedford Weakley Diary, January 4, 1865, Eliza Bedford Weakley Papers #1605, SHC-UNC; Eliza Corry letter, February 26, 1865, Robert E. Corry Confederate Collection, 1857-1913, RG84, AU; Kate Cumming, January 29, 1864, September 6, 1862, November 11, 1862, March 3, 1864, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>45</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, March 26, 1861, June 6, 1861, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>46</sup> She got the molasses that he sent them and “it is excellent and we relish it very much,” adding that she hoped he would come home at Christmas and help them pull the candy. Eliza Corry letter, December 18, 1863, Robert E. Corry Confederate Collection, 1857-1913, RG84, AU.

<sup>47</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, April 1, 1863, transcriptions in possession of author; Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, September 24, 1864, October 5, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC; M. E. Thompson to Elias Thompson, Marion, November 21, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, December 7, 1864, SPR2 ADAH.



starvation, but they still worried about having enough food especially as the war progressed, and concern for crops became a major theme for many. Sarah Espy, for example, worried about her crops and wrote, “it seems that the thing that I greatly feared has come upon me” because the “crop will soon be ruined if it does not rain.”<sup>48</sup>

While the war thus caused physical hardships for the elite Alabama women examined, some such as Kate Cumming hoped that the war would strengthen the Confederacy because it would have to become more independent. She admired the “manufactories” that had “arisen” throughout the South “where before the war they were not known.” She praised the fact that “women who thought such things impossible, are making shoes and knitting socks. In every farm-house the spinning-wheel and loom is heard. Fields are teeming with grain, where once grew cotton and tobacco.” She firmly believed that the South had “enough vessels running the blockade to keep us in tea and coffee, and cattle from Texas to keep us in beef.” “In fact,” she emphatically stated, “if the war lasts much longer, we will be the most independent people in the world.”<sup>49</sup>

Not everyone embraced home manufactories, however, particularly as the war wore on. In 1861 Carrie Hunter wrote about making a party dress after attending a funeral, but quickly added that it was the first one she had for several years and that she “almost absolutely needed it.” She then reproved herself for dwelling on such frivolous

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<sup>48</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, July 11, 1860, July 14, 1860, December 8, 1860, May 22, 1861, June 17, 1861, May 9, 1861, SPR2 ADAH; Eliza Corry letter, December 4, 1863, February 26, 1865, Robert E. Corry Confederate Collection, 1857-1913, RG84, AU.

<sup>49</sup> By 1865, however, she lamented the fact that “nothing is cheap.” Then sarcastically added, “I sometimes think we will be charged for the light of heaven and the air we breathe.” Kate Cumming, November 30, 1862, January 5, 1865, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

distractions and admitted that all she could think about was how all of this world was nothing more than vanity. She also wrote of sewing a dress, making a hat, and spending a pleasant day with her aunt and cousins knitting.<sup>50</sup>

In 1862 Sarah Espy recorded her pride at the jeans and cloth she made and also wrote about weaving straw bonnets, noting that “they are so fashionable and pretty. The blockade of our ports have thrown us on our own resources and nobly are we coming up to the conflict.” By 1863, however, her tone had changed as she wrote of remodeling a dress, which was a common practice throughout the antebellum era but one that became a necessity as the war wore on. By the end of the year she actively complained about weaving and dress making, no longer hobbies but rather onerous necessities.<sup>51</sup> Octavia Otey likewise noted in 1864 how her daughter no longer liked to knit but was forced to do so out of necessity.<sup>52</sup>

Yet at the same time that sewing, which women had long taken pride in, increasingly became a burden, it remained a symbol of devotion to the Confederacy to wear clothes that had been home made. Sarah Espy wrote about making dresses out of “domestic gingham,” noting that “it is getting quite fashionable, since we receive no

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<sup>50</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, March 18, 1861, September 30, 1861, December 8, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC. Thompson lamented how hard it was to get clothing because of the factories and lack of money and added that, “things have much changed since you left. No one is now ashamed to say that he has no money.” M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, October 13, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke. See Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, February 18, 1862, SPR113, ADAH.

<sup>51</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, October 18, 1860, June 17, 1861, May 8, 1862, July 9, 1862, January 31, 1863, January 6, 1863, November 9, 1863, November 24, 1863, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>52</sup> Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, September 28, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC.

goods from the north, people are put on their own resources.”<sup>53</sup> As Faust has argued, “clothing became fraught with meaning for Confederate women.”<sup>54</sup>

Other women wrote about their domestic work on a daily basis, and their desire to complete it so that they could move on to more enjoyable tasks, such as reading or spending time with various people. Twenty-year old Annie Strudwick wrote not just of sewing, but of making gloves, repairing shoes, making bonnets, and desiring to finish her work so that she could read.<sup>55</sup> Rebecca Vasser described trying to finish all of her fall sewing so that when her lover “F” arrived she would be free from her work. She added that she worked so hard that she practically made herself sick. Noting that she had made a silk dress, fall mantle, and bonnet, she admitted that she did not like to sew because it irritated her mentally and wearied her physically, noting, “it takes all my will and much prayer to keep at all amiable during my working days.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, October 14, 1861, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>54</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 220; Cumming noted in 1864 that, “many of the ladies were dressed in homespun, which makes very pretty street dresses when trimmed, but they are not economical, as they do not wash as well as calico.” Kate Cumming, March 3, 1864, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*. She wrote about many different kinds of homespun dresses and added that while some of the men talked of extravagance in clothing, she did not feel like the women are being so. Kate Cumming, January 11, 1864, January 5, 1865, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>55</sup> Annie Strudwick Diary, January 17, 1862, April 30, 1862, May 1, 1862, May 12, 1862, June 11, 1862, June 12, 1862, June 19, 1862, December 20, 1862, Annie Strudwick Diary and Letter # 1838, SHC-UNC.

<sup>56</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, September 14, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

Women believed that they were not supposed to complain, and in the midst of their uncertainty they again turned to their religious beliefs. They committed their loved ones to the keeping of the “God who seeth in the future,” as did M. E. Thompson. While “the future [was] so uncertain” and the prospects for both “family and the nation and [were] anything but bright” her belief that there was a “Power who has promised to be our friend and in whom we must trust” provided comfort and assurance.<sup>57</sup> Women were not, however, always able to assuage their concerns by turning to their religion. Sarah Espy finally admitted to her diary “in spite of all efforts to the contrary I cannot help feeling dissatisfied for the present, and apprehensive for the future.”<sup>58</sup>

Yet while defeats caused dissatisfaction they did not force women to lose their faith in the ultimate outcome of the war. The women examined in this study still believed in the invincibility of the Confederacy. Not only were they able to fall back upon their religious beliefs, but many women also turned to their Confederate identity to help themselves cope with the war. Hence, women remained firmly rooted in the conviction that they would come out of the war victorious because God supported them. In the face of hardships and trials the elite white Alabama women examined in this study directed their anger at forces other than their beloved Confederacy and channelled that discouragement toward not only the Confederate leadership, but also toward the

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<sup>57</sup> M. E. Thompson to her Elias Thompson, Marion, December 22, 1861, January 1, 1862, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

<sup>58</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, February 18, 1861, SPR2 ADAH. At the end of the year 1860 Sarah Espy wondered, “where shall we all be this time next year.” Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, December 31, 1860, SPR2 ADAH. The next day she confessed to her diary, “I am much depressed in spirit and perplexed, for I know not how to order things for the best.” Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, January 1, 1861, SPR2 ADAH.

eventually victorious Union, as they clung tenaciously to the Confederate cause.<sup>59</sup>

Women's growing hatred of "Yankees" further confirmed their Confederate identity and helped create an "us versus them" mentality. Jacquelyn Glass Campbell has argued for South Carolina women, military actions such as Sherman's destruction of Atlanta and the March to the Sea, while intended to discourage civilians, in many ways strengthened the resolve and desire of women to support the Confederacy. The Alabama women examined in this study exhibited many of the same feelings and characteristics.<sup>60</sup>

North and South entered the Civil War with a specific set of preconceived notions about each other, as William Taylor has noted.<sup>61</sup> Many Southerners believed that the North was full of radicals like John Brown, whose aim was the destruction of not only the Southern way of life, but society and culture in general. By the same token, many Northerners viewed the South as a feudal society run by aristocrats. Both believed that

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<sup>59</sup> Beringer, et al., *The Elements of Confederate Defeat*, 190.

<sup>60</sup> Jacqueline Glass Campbell, *When Sherman Marched North from the Sea: Resistance on the Confederate Home Front* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Thomas, *The Confederate Nation*; Escott, *After Secession*; Williams, *Rich Man's War*; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*; Rable, *Civil Wars*. This is in opposition to what Rable argues that, "Sherman's men unintentionally exacerbated Confederate internal conflicts, especially class divisions, which had already been widened by wartime economic dislocation." Rable, *Civil Wars*, 174.

<sup>61</sup> It is also important to remember, as John McCardell has noted, that the North and South held much in common and shared a heritage, with the major divergence being the institution of slavery. McCardell, *The Idea of a Southern Nation*, 3-5. See also Beringer, et al., *The Elements of Confederate Defeat*, 190; William R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: the Old South and American National Character* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

the two regions were “heirs of two distinct cultural traditions, embodied by the gracious Cavalier and the practical Yankee.”<sup>62</sup>

These stereotypes became more intense with the outbreak of the war. As Snay has argued, the North became an essential component in the creation of a Southern national identity because “it functioned as a negative reference point by which Southern clergymen could demonstrate their region’s allegiance to American values and institutions by examining how the North had departed from and subverted this common tradition.”<sup>63</sup> Whereas Southern men and women upheld honor, virtue, and Christian values, the women in this study envisioned Yankee invaders as the antithesis of everything they valued as good in the world. The new identity thus became complex as women attempted to reconcile their fears for the welfare of their loved ones with devotion to their newborn nation and their hatred of the Yankees. This hatred of “Yankees” especially became the case after 1862, after Union war policy toward the Southern states evolved from a conciliatory stance to “hard war.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ash, *When the Yankees Came*, 8-21, quotation from page 8. See also Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee*; Mark Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy Toward Southern Civilians, 1861-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>63</sup> Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 181-82; Amy R. Minton, “Defining Confederate Respectability: Morality, Patriotism, and Confederate Identity in Richmond’s Civil War Public Press,” in Edward L. Ayers, Gary W. Gallagher, and Andrew J. Torget, eds., *Crucible of The Civil War: Virginia from Secession to Commemoration* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 80-105.

<sup>64</sup> For an excellent discussion of Southerners’ perceptions of the Union army as the war progressed see, Ash, *When the Yankees Came*. Ash argues that during the beginning of the war the North pursued a conciliatory policy toward the South. Under these circumstances many Southerners, especially women and children openly shared their Southern sympathies with their Northern invaders. This, combined with the events of the war led the North to believe that the South as it existed before the war was “incompatible with American nationhood.” The year 1862 marked a turning point in the

In many ways, women used their hatred of “Yankees” both to cement their sense of Confederate identity and to justify having loved ones in danger. As Faust has argued, “anger ... became an emotional staple among females of the wartime South. Most often women identified it as a by-product of legitimate patriotism and self-consciously directed their fury against Yankee invaders and oppressors.”<sup>65</sup> Women conceptualized clear images of Northerners, especially those in the Union army, even if they never had personal contact with them. Many discussed the Union soldiers to some degree, most often in a negative light and as people they feared. Indeed, as George Rable noted, “women’s hatred of the enemy exacerbated frustrations about the limits of the female sphere.”<sup>66</sup> Faust further added that “whatever transgressive potential rested within ladies’ unaccustomed and unseemly rage, there could be no more socially acceptable target or release than the Yankee, who served as a safety valve for emotions frustrated women might otherwise have directed within their own families, households, or social order.”<sup>67</sup>

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policy pursued by the North toward the civilian population in the areas it occupied. The Occupiers now felt that they needed not pursue a policy of conciliation, but of conquest, whereby the South could be remade into and “new South, and a new nation” (53). See also Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War*, 1-46.

<sup>65</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 21.

<sup>66</sup> Rable, “Missing in Action,” 143. Faust noted that “many Confederate females never came face to face with Union soldiers.” Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 197. Women’s anger was both directed at “Confederate and Yankee men – Confederates for their incompetence and Yankees for the tangible military threat they posed,” see Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 204. See also Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, January 1, 1861, June 3, 1861, May 20, 1862, December 7, 1863, SPR2 ADAH; Eliza Bedford Weakley Diary, December 29, 1864, Eliza Bedford Weakley Papers #1605, SHC-UNC; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, February 9, 1864, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>67</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 204.

Although most women in Alabama did not experience first hand the trauma of invasion, at least in the magnitude to which some in states such as Virginia did, some did have to deal with the Union army, especially toward the end of the war. Vasser, Otey, Warring, and Espy all experienced invading Federal columns on a personal level, which allowed them to formulate views of the Northern troops based upon personal experiences. But even those who did not physically face the Union army formed clearly defined ideas about Northerners and about the Union army.<sup>68</sup>

During the first year of the war, the Northern plan to blockade Southern ports, control the Mississippi River, capture Richmond, and invade the lower South meant that little fighting took place in Alabama. By February of 1862, the fall of Fort Henry on the Tennessee River followed by the Union victory at Shiloh left Northern Alabama unprotected from Union troops. By April 11, 1862, Huntsville was under the control of Union General O.M. Mitchell. The next month Union Colonel, John Basil Turchin, who was a Russian immigrant veteran of the Crimean War led the Eighth Brigade into Athens where he turned his men loose on a rampage. Other Northern officers such as Mitchell and Don Carlos Buell condemned him for allowing pillaging, rape, robbery, and arson.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Geography exerted a powerful influence on how women experienced the war. Rable, *Civil Wars*, 154. Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War*, 4; Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, September 24, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC; Eliza Bedford Weakley Diary, April 28, 1864, Eliza Bedford Weakley Papers #1605, SHC-UNC; Rebecca Vasser Diary, September 5, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

<sup>69</sup> William Warren Rodgers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt, *Alabama: The History of a Deep South State* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994). “The Northern plan of battle – to capture Richmond, blockade the Southern ports, control the Mississippi River, and invade the lower South – kept the fighting away from Alabama during the first year of the war. But the fall of Fort Henry on the Tennessee River in February 1862 allowed federal gunboats to sail up the river to Florence. With the Confederate defeat at Shiloh, the Tennessee Valley was open to Union



Throughout the winter of 1862 and into the early spring of 1863, most of Northern Alabama was quiet until US Colonel Abel D. Streight attempted to break Braxton Bragg's supply line from Atlanta and cut across Alabama from "Eastport, Mississippi, to Rome, Georgia."<sup>70</sup> Two thousand men were supposed to get across the state before Nathan Bedford Forrest, who was in Tennessee, found out. The Confederates routed Able Streight but this invasion was followed in October 1863 by another short raid by the First Alabama Union Cavalry under George E. Spencer who moved from Corinth Mississippi across Alabama and were turned back north of Jasper. By the spring of 1864 William Tecumseh Sherman began his march South from Chattanooga and "he ordered Lovell H. Rousseau to take 2,500 cavalry from Decatur, Alabama, and cut the rail line supplying Atlanta."<sup>71</sup> He raided near Opelika after July 10, 1864 then went to Columbus, GA. Meanwhile, the Union attempt to gain control of Mobile began. By August 5, 1864, Mobile had been captured by Admiral David G. Farragut. On March 22, 1865, Federal General James H. Wilson let 13,480 cavalrymen on a raid through Alabama in which

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troops. General O.M. Mitchell captured Huntsville on April 11, 1862" (205). "On May 2 Colonel John Basil Turchin led his blue-coated Eighth Brigade into Athens, a quiet little town west of Huntsville. Turchin was a Russian immigrant and veteran of the Crimean War with different ideas about spoils of war and plunder. Turchin turned his troops loose to pillage and loot" (205). He was condemned by other Northern officers such as Mitchell and Don Carlos Buell for allowing pillaging, rape, robbery, and arson (205).

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>71</sup> Rodgers, Ward, Atkins, Flynt, *Alabama: The History of a Deep South State*, 211-16. These 1863 raids were what Espy wrote of on May 2-3, 1863 (212).

Selma was burned on April 2 and Tuscaloosa destroyed.<sup>72</sup> (For a map illustrating the Union presence in Alabama see appendix A, second illustration).

“Yankees” became the epitome of everything evil – the antithesis of the noble, honorable, godly Southerner. In denouncing the “ruthless foe,” women were able to mask their own hatred by “condemning the Yankees as the most hateful of God’s creatures.”<sup>73</sup> Octavia Otey wrote with some amusement about how when a passing Confederate soldier from Texas asked her two year old daughter, Lucy, if she were a little Yankee. She emphatically denied it. Otey then reflected on how the youth of the South were growing up to hate the “Yankees” because of what they had done and were doing to Southerners.<sup>74</sup>

As news of the Union army’s approach reached women, they often expressed their sheer horror to their diaries and prayed for God’s mercy and protection from their enemies. Upon hearing of Federal troops approaching Madison County, Otey noted that in preparation for their arrival she hid many of her belongings. When the Union army stole some food from her, Otey recorded her fear that she would not have enough food to feed her family. She was completely disgusted as well that the “Yankees” laughed at her, told her that they did not care if she starved, and cursed all in front of her children. She had refrained from saying anything back, she claimed, for fear of displeasing her maker. After the Federals passed through she thanked God from protecting her, but proceeded to

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 217-21. For a more in depth analysis of Wilson’s raid see James Pickett Jones, *Yankee Blitzkrieg: Wilson’s Raid Through Alabama and Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1976).

<sup>73</sup> Rable, *Civil Wars*, 155.

<sup>74</sup> Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, October 5, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC; June 12, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

predict that the children of the war would cause the Union soldiers more problems than their parents ever did.<sup>75</sup>

In 1863, Cherokee County resident, Sarah Espy meanwhile begged God to “help us all” and to “send our cruel enemies back to their own country.” She revealed not only the devastation caused by the enemy in Cherokee County but also thanked a “Merciful God” that the Northern soldiers did not attack her home. Espy also noted that people in the area concealed their belongings. Many men hid because of rumors that the Union soldiers “were hanging all men between the ages of 15 and 45. but the night passed peacefully.”<sup>76</sup> Espy added that the local boys had devised a plan to stop them, but she did not rely on human strength alone for protection. She called upon God to protect her and her family. She fearfully wrote that it seemed as though the enemy were “straining every nerve to crush us, and the death struggle is now to be made.” To allay her fears she prayed, “Would an all-powerful God stand up for our help, they would yet be put to confusion but it seems he has given us over into the hand of our cruel foe.” A few days later when she expected the “enemy at any day,” Espy added that the wealthy were preparing to leave, “taking their slaves with them,” but she noted also that “it would be a great distress to me to have to leave my home and be a wanderer. I have no idea of trying it, but will stay here trusting in God to preserve me and my helpless family from the hands of violence.” She reassured herself again and again that while some of the

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<sup>75</sup> Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, September 13, 1864, September 18, 1864, September 16, 1864, September 26, 1864, September 27, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC.

<sup>76</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, May 2, 1863, May 3, 1863, May 5, 1863, June 3, 1863, June 7, 1863, SPR2, ADAH.

neighbors had left and some of the local slaves had run away, she would stay and take whatever Providence sent her way.<sup>77</sup>

Espy delineated the “evil” nature of the Union soldiers, who went about Cherokee County not only burning fences, but also killing all of the livestock in the neighborhood. They looted houses and even blew up bee hives, stealing most of the honey as well as meat, all the while swearing profanely. And while Espy was thankful to God that it was not worse, she also prayed that He would never let them again pass through another such trial. Writing about both William Tecumseh Sherman and the fall of Atlanta, Espy noted that she became “much depressed” because she felt as though “we are delivered into their hand and that they will lay us waste.” She then prayed “may the Great God of Battles be with us and deliver us out of their hand, or give them hearts of compassion for us.”<sup>78</sup>

Zillah Brandon similarly portrayed the Union soldiers as the antithesis of everything good. She wrote about the Federal troops setting out through Alabama destroying “life and property.” Using a Biblical metaphor she added, “from Dan to Bersheba they were distinguished before Heaven and Earth for their skill and desolation and crime.” Some neighbors, she added, were completely unable to bear the thought of facing invading Northerners. She disdained a wicked man who was found on the floor of his house with his throat cut: he committed suicide rather than face the prospect of being overrun by the Federal troops. She then noted that “we embrace prospectively the stake

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<sup>77</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, May 20, 1862, July 2, 1863, July 17, July 19, 1863, August 7, 1863, September 4, 1863, September 12, 1863, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, June 3, 1864, July 15, 1864, July 22, 1864, September 7, 1864, October 22, 1864.

and the cross and all the agonies of martyrdom.”<sup>79</sup> Removing one’s self from the world was not an option that she supported, even though some turned to it as they were unable to bear the events taking place around them.

Sarah Davis became convinced that if the Federal Army were as close as claimed the school would be suspended. After hearing an account of atrocities, Annie Strudwick decided that she would sleep with her other family members in order to protect them.<sup>80</sup> Eliza Weakley wrote about the Union soldiers occupying Florence. Not only did they demand food from the local residents, but they also invaded her home while she was attending church and tried to obtain food. She further emphasized the cowardice of the “Yankees” as they “ran in every direction” upon the arrival of the Confederate soldiers.<sup>81</sup> While her fears of the Union army were great, they were exceeded by Espy’s fear of hearing “of another army coming with a Regiment of negroes.” “May the Lord forbid” she adamantly wrote, “for negroes have no mercy.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, May 13, 1863, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>80</sup> Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, March 18, 1862, March 19, 1862, March 20, 1862, SPR113, ADAH; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, March 13, 1862, SPR5, ADAH; Annie Strudwick Diary, May 5, 1862, Annie Strudwick Diary and Letter # 1838, SHC-UNC.

<sup>81</sup> Eliza Bedford Weakley Papers, May 7, 1864, May 1, 1864, May 8, 1864, May 23, 1864, December 29, 1864, January 4, 1865, January 17, 1865, March 6, 1865, Eliza Bedford Weakley Papers #1605, SHC-UNC. She wrote, “The Yankees came back into town and foraged of the people ... they ordered dinner for 10 men I told him they could not get it ... after a while I consented after Mr. Weakley said he would give them some.” See Eliza Bedford Weakley Papers, May 16, 1864, Eliza Bedford Weakley Papers #1605, SHC-UNC.

<sup>82</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, June 7, 1864, SPR2 ADAH.

At the end of the war, Mary Waring watched the fall of Mobile and lamented that the “city is filled with the hated Yankees.” She believed that she “was never so gloomy,” yet trying to look on the brighter side of things she hoped that “there will be a bright day for us yet.” She then commented on the Union soldiers noting that they differed in “the greatest degree from our poor dear soldiers – the commonest, dirtiest-looking set I ever saw.” She admitted that she felt “quite strange in my own city, seeing so many new and strange countenances.” She did note, however that she felt obligated to “do to them justice,” and “admit, though reluctant to do so,” that the Union soldiers were “very quiet and orderly, and they entered the city with extraordinary order and quiet, so different from what we had anticipated, from the numerous accounts of their behavior in captured cities. We are thankful for it and hope such conduct will be preserved throughout their stay here.”<sup>83</sup>

Confederate soldiers in contrast were far superior to Union troops as far as the women examined here were concerned. For example, late in the war when Davis went out and watched some Texas Rangers pass through her town, she commented that even though they were “very nasty looking men,” they still looked “like good soldiers.” She never made such a comment about men in blue. Upon examining the soldiers who she noted were everywhere around her, she added that some of them appeared to be “strange looking beings” while others seemed to be gentlemen, and she admitted that “while I cannot but help see this distinctions yet in my heart there is none made.” She continued that she felt the highest respect “for every brave heart” who sacrificed the comforts of

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<sup>83</sup> Mary Waring Diary, April 12, 1865, ADAH.

home to “gain former liberty.”<sup>84</sup> Women wrote not only about the gallant nature of the soldiers but also about their suffering.<sup>85</sup> Upon being introduced to the horrors of war for the first time, Kate Cumming wrote, “certainly none of the glories of war were presented here. But I must not say that; for if uncomplaining endurance is glory, we had plenty of it. If it is that which makes the hero, here they were by the scores.” Shortly thereafter, however, she did note how impressed she was at the nature of the troops as column after column passed by.<sup>86</sup>

Fear of the Union soldiers led some women to feel the need to be able to protect themselves, hence some began learning how to handle firearms. As George Rable has aptly pointed out, in learning to shoot women were stepping over a clear gender divide. Throughout the Old South “shooting was one of the most masculine of activities. Skill with a shotgun or pistol was part of a young boy’s coming of age.”<sup>87</sup> In deciding to teach themselves to use a firearm or in having other people show them how to fire a gun, women were expressing, whether consciously or unconsciously, their fear that men were no longer able to perform their gender specific duties of protecting them, hence the need to take on that duty for themselves. Some, such as Sarah Davis, openly admitted that she wished that she were a man so that she could have fought for her “freedom” or been able

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<sup>84</sup> Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, March 4, 1862, March 17, 1862, SPR113, ADAH.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., February, 1862; M. E. Thompson to Elias Thompson, Marion, November 3, 1861, in Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

<sup>86</sup> Kate Cumming Diary, April 11, 1862, May 4, 1862, May 7, 1862, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>87</sup> Rable, “Missing in Action,” 134-146, 136; Rable, *Civil Wars*, 151.

to “die as a defender of my rights.”<sup>88</sup> Others did not quite so openly express their desire to transgress gender norms, but did so inadvertently in taking up learning to fire weapons.<sup>89</sup> Upon hearing of Lincoln’s election Margaret Gillis wrote, “I’ve been learning to shoot and went squirrel hunting day before yesterday.” Then, writing about the “coming storm” she noted that while many men were anticipating what would happen and getting ready to leave she had “been practicing shooting, very assiduously.”<sup>90</sup> Hunter actively criticized the inability of some men to accurately discharge a weapon. After going out shooting with another women and some men, she distainfully noted a Capt Jones who was “not a good shot at all” and completely missed the target.<sup>91</sup> Elodie Todd Dawson meanwhile wrote to her future husband that after her first shooting lesson she was complimented “so very much on our first efforts that I am determined to try again and see if Kentucky’s daughter cannot have hidden somewhere, some of the celebrated aim of her sons.” She then added, “I can fire without flinching. (Now do say how brave!).”<sup>92</sup> She thus sought his approval for her actions even though in many ways she was overstepping the socially prescribed bounds of acceptable behavior for young

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<sup>88</sup> Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, March 3, 1862, SPR113, ADAH.

<sup>89</sup> Rable notes, “At the beginning of the war, however, several Virginia women asked Governor John Letcher to send them pistols or other arms for self-defense.” Rable, “Missing in Action,” 134-146, 136.

<sup>90</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, November 15, 1860, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>91</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, April 19, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>92</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Selma July 22, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.



women.<sup>93</sup> While the Alabama women who discussed learning to defend themselves did not emasculate all of their male friends and relatives, they did overstep their socially prescribed gender roles. Though one sought the approval of her lover, another openly criticized one man's inability to shoot, thus questioning an aspect of his manhood.

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Many believed that it was a part of their Christian duty to perform charitable work. Before the war, women had visited the poor, helped care for the sick, and tended to those less fortunate than themselves. The outbreak of the Civil War provided them new outlets to perform their charitable work as they took up their new mission with gusto.<sup>94</sup> They could not go out and fight along side their male relatives because that would have defied social mores. Hence they spent hours attending to the physical needs of soldiers. Many women found additional solace by actively forming and participating in aid societies and relief efforts for both soldiers in the field and those left at home. For most of them, the very act of joining together for the relief of soldiers also “marked a new departure,” though not as abrupt as firing a gun. It broadened their horizons by bringing some of them together into social groups on a broader scale than just their church groups

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<sup>93</sup> In some ways, as George Rable argued, women soon realized that their men were not able to protect them: “Women soon came to realize their defenselessness against an invading army, and although few said so explicitly, the truth was that Southern men could not longer protect their homes and families. In other words, they were no longer men.” Rable then cites the women of New Orleans who defied Benjamin “Beast” Butler. See Rable, “Missing in Action,” 134-146, 136.

<sup>94</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, May 1, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

for the first time.<sup>95</sup> War work thus became more than a simple patriotic duty. Indeed, as Rable has added, it became an obsession for many as sewing and working for the support of their soldiers “provided a new measure of female devotion to the cause.” While Rable ultimately believed that soldier’s aid, in the end, was nothing more than “another of the Confederacy’s glorious failures,” it was not a complete failure, and in many ways greatly strengthened the sense of identity that the women examined in this study felt.<sup>96</sup>

In the face of the northern blockade, Confederate women organized elaborate Soldiers Aid Societies and not only made cloth, but also sewed and knitted for the soldiers. By the end of 1861 there were over one thousand aid societies in the South. The state of Alabama had ninety-one registered with the Governor’s Office.<sup>97</sup> Aid societies

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<sup>95</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust has noted that for most Southern ladies, “the very act of binding together as women marked a new departure. Women’s associations and organizations had not blossomed in the antebellum South as they had in the northern states.” Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 23. Rable agrees that sewing groups “broadened women’s social horizons by bringing them together in groups.” Rable, *Civil Wars*, 139.

<sup>96</sup> Rable, *Civil Wars*, 138, 142.

<sup>97</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 24, 40-52. Indeed, “the Civil War period saw the rise of charities on a larger scale than had ever before existed in the United States.” William W. Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America* (Harper and Row, 1930: reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 325. For a discussion of relief efforts in Alabama during the war see Phyllis LaRue LeGrand, “Destitution and Relief of the Indigent Soldiers’ Families of Alabama During the Civil War” (master’s thesis, Auburn University, 1964). See Elodie to Dawson, Selma, April 15, 1862, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 # 210, SHC-UNC; M. E. Thompson to Joe Thompson, Marion, July 22, 1861, M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, July 7, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke. M. E. Thompson wrote that, “the ladies cannot go but they will provide well for the soldiers, I suppose there was never so much knitting done.” M. E. Thompson to Joe Thompson, Marion, August 30, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 1, 1863, SPR262, ADAH; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, July 9, 1862, SPR2 ADAH; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, August 11, 1861, SPR5, ADAH; Elodie to Dawson, Selma, September 22, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

often attracted large groups of women. Sometimes as many as fifty would gather at the local courthouse or church to sew for soldiers. Traditionally women were responsible for sewing or at least overseeing the sewing for their families. In sewing for “their” troops, women’s conception of family expanded from their immediate biological family members to include the broader Confederate nation. Many women believed that it was part of their duty, and in many ways an extension of their religious beliefs as well as an expression of their patriotism, to assist in the war effort in that manner. M. E. Thompson, for example, wrote to her two sons in the Confederate army that although the “ladies cannot go [fight] they will provide well for the soldiers.”<sup>98</sup> Soldiers Aid Societies became a way for women to organize their efforts and many women became actively involved in them, not only in the day to day aspects of sewing and knitting, but also in the

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<sup>98</sup> M. E. Thompson to Joe Thompson, Marion, August 30, 1861, M. E. Thompson to her sons, Marion, September 23, 1861, M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, September 26, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 116-117; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, May 5, 1861, August 11, 1861, SPR5, ADAH; Carrie Hunter Diary, May 1, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC; Mary Warring Diary, April 6, 1865, ADAH. Word of the war work of Confederate women reached the North. As illustrated by some of the publications of women’s Loyal Leagues, formed throughout the North to rally support from the Northern women for the war effort, some Northern women felt the need to justify their method of support for the Union troops, while at the same time strongly encouraging women to help with the war effort. These “Ladies National Leagues played a critical role in bridging the gap between Union military policy necessary to Union victory and flagging popular support for the war.” LeeAnn Whites, *Gender Matters: Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Making of the New South* (New York: Palgrave MacMillen, 2005), 26-27. Publications appealed to the Northern women to rise up to the example set for them by the Confederate women in their support of the Confederacy. Northern women viewed “rebel women as the root of the war itself,” and tried to convince Northern women to be more noble and upright than their Southern counterparts. Whites, *Gender Matters*, 35; “A Few Words in Behalf of the Loyal Women of the United States by one of themselves,” Loyal Publication Society, No., 10 (New York: Wm. C. Bryant and Co., Printers, 1863), Manuscript at the British Library, London England.

organization and leadership of them. Gillis wrote that after the local ladies organized a Soldiers Aid Society, they scheduled another meeting and selected officers, making her and two others vice presidents. M. E. Thompson became one of the superintendents of the local aid society, and she and fifty other ladies met in the courthouse to sew and do other work for the relief of the soldiers. Yet, as was the case with the far more nationally organized Northern soldiers aid societies discussed by historians such as Jeannie Attie and Elizabeth Leonard, the more localized Southern aid societies were not without divisions; Dawson noted in passing in her diary that divisive if unspecified issues had arisen within her local aid society.<sup>99</sup>

Women also actively participated in fundraisers to raise money to support the soldiers. These efforts ranged from concerts to fairs as women were “anxious to raise funds” however they could for the benefit of their soldiers.<sup>100</sup> Elodie Dawson wrote that she performed a duet at a concert even though she was disinclined to do so because she could not “find it in my heart to refuse when I can do anything of the benefit of the Soldiers.” She did, however, hope that she would not have to participate in another one

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<sup>99</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, August 11, 1861, SPR5, ADAH; M. E. Thompson to her sons, Marion, September 23, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Elodie to Dawson, Selma, January 12, 1862, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 # 210, SHC-UNC; Jeanie Attie, *Patriotic Toil: Northern Women and the Civil War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Elizabeth D. Leonard, *Yankee Women: Gender Battles in the Civil War* (New York: Norton, 1994).

<sup>100</sup> Dawson wrote that, “the ladies of the Military Aid society are anxious to raise funds for the winter clothing of the Companies and expect to give Tableaux and a Concert combined, next week, for the accomplishment of their design.” Elodie to Dawson, Selma, September 1, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC. See also Elodie to Dawson, Selma July 14, 1861, December 1, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC; Carrie Hunter Diary, August 22, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*; Rable, *Civil Wars*.

any time soon because not only did it consume a “great deal of my precious time, to practice” but it was also “very tiresome to meet often twice a day for a week or two.”<sup>101</sup> Most women sent material items to the soldiers.<sup>102</sup> Espy recorded that she was busy knitting “woolen socks for the volunteers” after the governor requested “every lady in the state...to knit one pair of socks.”<sup>103</sup> At one point M.E. Thompson wrote to her son that, “I suppose there was never so much knitting done.”<sup>104</sup> Women also took responsibility for sewing uniforms. By the middle of 1862 Espy was weaving jeans for the boys because there were “no goods brought to the country now and people are thrown on their own resources.” It soon turned into a competition as she continued that the ladies were all “trying now,” and attempting so see “who can make the best cloth.”<sup>105</sup> “The press” of

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<sup>101</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Selma, September 22, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

<sup>102</sup> On the rare occasions that women sent money to their male relatives in the field they sent them strict warnings to guard it closely because it was “almost impossible to get any” money, see M. E. Thompson to her sons, Marion, August 5, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Eliza Corry letter, December 4, 1863, Robert E. Corry Confederate Collection, 1857-1913, RG84, AU. Providing for the “comfort of the soldiers” was an important responsibility. M. E. Thompson to her sons, Marion, August 5, 1861, September 26, 1861, M. E. Thompson to Joe Thompson, Marion, July 22, 1861, August 30, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Carrie Hunter Diary, October 31, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>103</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, August 27, 1861, SPR2 ADAH; M. E. Thompson to her son Joe Thompson, Marion, August 30, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Elodie to Dawson, Marengo August 19, 1861, August 24, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

<sup>104</sup> M. E. Thompson to her son Joe Thompson, Marion, August 30, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

<sup>105</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, April 9, 1862, June 24, 1861, August 1, 1861, August 10, 1861, SPR2 ADAH; M. E. Thompson to her sons, Marion, August 5, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Elodie to Dawson, Selma, December 1, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

“making cloth sewing and knitting comforts and stocking for the soldiers” sometimes kept women from writing in their diaries.<sup>106</sup> Necessities were not the only things women made for soldiers. Mary Waring wrote about making a tobacco-bag for a soldier and adding it to the box of provisions that her local aid society was sending to the soldiers.<sup>107</sup> Throughout the war, Kate Cumming noted receiving goods that ranged from oranges to clothing and money from various military aid societies, especially the Mobile Military Aid Society.<sup>108</sup>

Providing for their soldiers became a matter of pride for many women and something that they strongly desired to do. After writing about how she had been sewing winter clothes for the soldiers, guards, and cadets, Elodie Dawson proudly announced that they would all soon receive their boxes in which to send the goods to the soldiers. She hoped that another unnamed woman in Selma, who had apparently been making negative comments about the appearance of the local soldiers, would no longer “be ashamed of her ragged friends, and the people of Selma.” She added, however, that rather than being so critical that woman should use her “fingers more in trying to mend for them and [her] tough less, were I her.”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 1, 1863, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>107</sup> Mary Warring Diary, April 6, 1865, ADAH.

<sup>108</sup> Kate Cumming, May 5, 1862, November 9, 1862, November 23, 1862, January 14, 1863, March 10, 1863, October 6, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>109</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Selma, September 15, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC; M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, September 26, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

Some women hoped to receive thank you notes from the soldiers to whom they sent things. After sending a cap to a particular soldier, Hunter noted that although she knew she should not expect it, she had hoped for some thanks, which she received. Hunter not only received thanks for the cap but the man to whom she sent it also began a correspondence with her. She readily agreed because she felt it was “our duty to do everything in our power to make the soldiers life a pleasant one.”<sup>110</sup>

Women felt as though it was their duty to aid others, especially those whom they considered helpless. Hence, they also continued to visit the poor, and they helped provide for the soldiers’ families. Upon visiting one poor woman, Rebecca Vasser admitted her shock to her diary at how well kept and neat the house was even though the woman who lived there was poor and destitute.<sup>111</sup> Sarah Espy noted how a member of the home-guard came and not only set the women to work making shirts for the soldiers, but also encouraged them to continue to aid the soldiers’ families. She added that the women would have a “hard time of it, what with supporting the families, and clothing the soldiers too.”<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Hunter excitedly reported to her diary, “a few days ago there came in the nicest kind of a note returning thanks for socks and caps and a request for a correspondence,” which she “did not hesitate to answer in the affirmative.” See Carrie Hunter Diary, October 22, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC. After writing about agreeing to correspond with a soldier who she sent a cap to, Hunter notes that after her cousin send a quilt to a different soldier she too agreed to correspond with him. She added, however, “but I did so with a little feeling of uneasiness One weakness with me is an excessive admiration of a beautiful handwriting, and a well dictated note or letter, both of these he has to perfection and I am only afraid I will like the correspondence too well.” Carrie Hunter Diary, October 31, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>111</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, October 5, 1856, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

<sup>112</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, June 24, 1861, SPR2 ADAH.

Women also cared for war orphans. As James Marten pointed out, the Civil War left thousands of orphans to make sense out of the war and to be provided for by others. Unlike the former slave orphans discussed by Michelle A. Krowl, who were often simply cared for by other families, many white orphans went to orphanages constructed specifically for the purpose of caring for them. Discussing an appeal made by a clergyman for donations to raise funds for the orphanage asylum being built in Tuscaloosa, Elodie Dawson wrote to Nathaniel that, “no one should refuse to aid in so noble a cause and could not if disposed after such a touching appeal of today.” She informed him that not only had she give forty-five dollars, knowing he would want her to contribute, but that she had also given twenty-five dollars “for the establishment of “an Episcopal orphan asylum in Mobile,” adding that he would “doubtless be called upon for your donation and can do better.”<sup>113</sup>

While many women remained home and provided for soldiers, many also longed to lend their aid in more direct ways. Elodie wrote that she loved “all the Soldiers, and if they were wounded and sick near me I would think I could not do enough for them.”<sup>114</sup> Most women had never experienced a hospital. Gillis provides a good example. When she went to visit her husband in Greenville she encountered a hospital for the first time and spent four hours visiting soldiers. Some local people opposed having hospitals

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<sup>113</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Selma, September 4, 1864, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC; See James Marten, *The Children's Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Michelle A. Krowl, “For Better or for Worse: Black Families and ‘the State’ in Civil War Virginia” in *Southern Families at War: Loyalty and Conflict in the Civil War South*, edited by Catherine Clinton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 35-57: 47.

<sup>114</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Selma August 4, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.



established in their towns, but others turned over all of the church buildings for use as hospitals. Elodie Todd wrote about how the local ladies held a meeting in which they decided to turn a local building into a hospital for the benefit of a regiment camped by Selma. Some of the women from military aid societies served as nurses in hospitals.<sup>115</sup> Women were supposed to nurse their families. When they moved outside of the realm of their family sphere, even though they were performing some of the same duties, they were performing them outside of their homes. This meant that they were stepping outside of the prescribed norm. Indeed, some women began to view the Confederate nation as their “family” in a broader sense of the word. This strengthened support for the cause.

Kate Cumming actually did go out and care for the wounded. In 1862, the famous Civil War nurse left Mobile to serve in the hospitals of the Army of Tennessee.<sup>116</sup> As she did so, she worried not only about her loved ones who were fighting, but also about being in a hospital for the first time in her life. She soon encountered the horrors of war. She wrote about washing a man’s face and being halfway finished before she realized he was dead. Witnessing an amputation for the first time left her shocked that the practice was “so common that it is scarcely noticed.” “How my heart sickens in contemplating the

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<sup>115</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, August 9, 1863, SPR5, ADAH. Kate Cumming wrote about how the people in Newnan were not happy about the idea of hospitals coming to their town. See Kate Cumming, September 9, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*. She also wrote about local churches taken and made into hospitals. See Kate Cumming, July 11, 1862, June 24, 1864, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*. See also Elodie to Dawson, Selma, April 1, 1862, April 15, 1862, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC. See also Edwin C. Bridges, “Juliet Opie Hopkins and Alabama’s Civil War Hospitals in Richmond, Virginia,” *Alabama Review* 53 (April, 2000): 83-111.

<sup>116</sup> Faust noted that much of what was described as nursing could be better characterized as hospital work and administration. Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 102.

horrors with which I am surrounded!” she continued, then reflected, “Our sins must have been great to deserve such punishment.”<sup>117</sup>

She and the other female nurses faced prejudice from male doctors and nurses who felt threatened as women stepped outside of the socially prescribed gender norms. Some opposed women entering nursing on principle, while others claimed that women would be exposed to unnecessary hardships. She was convinced that “as soon as surgeons discover that ladies are really of service, that prejudice will cease to exist.” And to the potential hardships she responded that, “we were all good *soldiers*, and had been accustomed to hardships.” Not all of the doctors, however, were prejudiced against female nurses and some complimented women for the work they were doing in the hospitals. Initially she and the other nurses did not receive any pay and when they were offered it they objected to it, but finally they agreed because they were in such dire need of basic supplies. Yet, the issue of paying women to perform duties as a nurse also created tensions with the men in authority over them.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Kate Cumming wrote avidly about her experiences and first published them as, *A Journal of Hospital Life in the Confederate Army of Tennessee from the Battle of Shiloh to the End of the War with Sketches of Life and Character, and Brief Notices of Current Events During that Period* in 1866. She left Mobile for Corinth and noted that, “we are going for the purpose of taking care of the sick and wounded of the army.” Kate Cumming, April 7, 1862, April 12, 1862, April 17, 1862, April 26, 1862, January 11, 1863, January 5, 1865, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>118</sup> Kate Cumming, February 23, 1863, May 23, 1862, June 10, 1862, July 23, 1863, August 7, 1863, August 10, 1863, *A Journal of Hospital Life*. Cumming was very upset about the treatment of women who went and worked as nurses in the Confederate army. She wrote, “it seems that the surgeons entertain great prejudice against admitting ladies into the hospital in the capacity of nurses... I only wish that the doctors would let us try and see what we can do! Have we not noble examples of what our women have done? For instance, Mrs. Hopkins, in Virginia, and, I have no doubt, many others.” She then went on to write about how the women should be allowed to serve as nurses in Confederate hospitals. Kate Cumming, April 9, 1862, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of*

Cumming noted that, “war has cast aside all conventionalities, as it should.” Yet at the same time she also avidly supported and justified nursing as women’s work. She became indignant that more women of the South had not taken up their duty to nurse soldiers and serve in the hospitals “even though they should be.” She believed that women should serve in the hospitals and that it was the “woman’s true sphere: in war, the men to fight, and the women to nurse the wounded and sick,” then added “I have no patience with women whom I hear telling what wonders they would do if they were only men, when I see so much of their own legitimate work left undone. Ladies can be of service in the hospitals, and of great service.” She believed that even if some women were unable to nurse, they could help out with the housekeeping in the hospitals.<sup>119</sup>

Cumming sometimes became discouraged and disheartened with the daily grind of hospital life. At one point she made up her mind to leave it, but by the time she arrived back at the hospital she had changed her mind. The state of the medical profession was by no means prepared to deal with the magnitude of wounded as a result of the war. Cumming noted that in some hospitals there was no order and “all do as they please.” At one point she became upset at the state of the medical profession and the inability of the

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*Hospital Life*. Yet Cumming’s experience was not abnormal, as Faust has previously noted. Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 92-93. Although Cumming was able to overcome many challenges, the concept of nursing in many ways challenged the generally accepted concept of female identity. Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 110. At the same time, Faust also noted that, “Kate Cumming maintained that ‘respectability’ transcended circumstance and that it could not be diminished by association with the socially undesirable or by the sordid and menial aspects of nursing. Indeed, she argued, ladyhood had a spiritual, an intrinsic character that could be only enhanced by Christian service to others.” Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 113.

<sup>119</sup> Kate Cumming, August 14, 1862, September 3, 1863, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

government to provide for the medical needs of the wounded, stating, “If our government can not do better by the men who are suffering so much I think we had better give up at once.”<sup>120</sup> Yet she stuck it out until the end of the war and continued to offer her services as a nurse.

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As women attempted to sort through the worry and uncertainty surrounding the departure of their loved ones, they positioned the invading “Yankees” in diabolical opposition to Southern manhood and actively demonstrated their support for the Confederacy. Their actions demonstrated evidence of their new Confederate identity. By placing their men and their cause in mortal opposition to their enemies, some women were able to strengthen their sense of loyalty to their cause even as they worried about the welfare of their loved ones. If these women were giving them up for a just cause, then their sacrifice could be justified and the pain of their loss lessened. Their men were fighting to uphold their honor against a marauding foe. This foe was not only despicable, but also the religious antithesis of what women believed to be the right, hence, the metaphorical comparisons between the South and Israel of the Old Testament.

Many women actively sought to express their support for their men as well as for the Confederacy by providing for their physical needs as much as they could. By doing

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<sup>120</sup> She had been on a visit home and when she returned to the hospital she noted that she had been gone long enough to become demoralized. Kate Cumming, February 10, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*. She made up her mind to leave the hospital but once she got there that feeling vanished. Kate Cumming, October 28, 1863, April 12, 1862, June 12, 1862, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

so, women were able to demonstrate their support for the Confederacy and strengthen their sense of identity with the Confederate cause. Indeed, actively participating in aid societies became a part of some women's personal identity and an outgrowth and expression of their religious beliefs. At the same time, women were not always readily accepted into fields such as nursing, as the atypical example of Kate Cumming illustrates. Women faced male prejudice on top of the daily hardships of the war. In many ways that sense of belonging to a cause in the face of opposition helped strengthen some women's sense of loyalty to the Confederacy. As the war progressed, however, other women eventually became discouraged with the hardships they faced. The sense of a collective identity that many women formed, which was strengthened by having a loved one fighting, their hatred of Yankees, and their ability to perform duties to help support the effort, would eventually come under increased strain, especially as the war progressed and women faced the daily hardships of the war and the death of their loved ones.

## Chapter 5 “In the Midst of Life We Are in Death:” Coping with Death During the Civil War

In the antebellum South, as elsewhere, death saturated life and culture.<sup>1</sup> That death was such an integral part of life meant that it needed to be confronted, accounted for, and explained. Jack Goody has appropriately argued that, “the fact of death... is the most critical, the most final, of crisis situations, which capitalizes culture and social organization for actor and observer alike.”<sup>2</sup> This centrality of death was certainly true for Alabama women during the Civil War. As one pointedly stated, “in the midst of life we are in death.”<sup>3</sup>

Drew Gilpin Faust has argued that the Civil War created a new relationship with death for the common person. Southerners were far more likely than Northerners to lose their loved ones in the conflict. In the midst of unprecedented death, Alabama women fell back upon their religious beliefs for comfort and assurance. The faith that had allowed them to cope with death in the pre-war years grew more critical, and actually

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<sup>1</sup> Death touched all individuals and, as Drew Gilpin Faust noted, “mortality defines the human condition.” Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), xi.

<sup>2</sup> Jack Goody, “Death and the Interpretation of Culture: A Bibliographic Overview,” *American Quarterly* 26 (1974): 448-455, quotation from 455.

<sup>3</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, September 21, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC. Hunter is quoting from the burial services in the Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer*.

strengthened with the Civil War.<sup>4</sup> Jason Phillips has argued that “moments when people encounter mortality or when societies confront crises reveal the strength of religious beliefs.”<sup>5</sup> So it was in the Confederacy.

Before the war Alabama women had confronted death in a variety of forms. The most common involved the deaths of family members, especially the elderly, children, and mothers in childbirth. In a society that glorified motherhood and considered it a woman’s “sacred occupation,” childrearing anchored a woman’s personal and social identity and provided women with a position of honor and respect. Yet, motherhood held inherent risks for women, including the potential for their own death in pregnancy as well as the deaths of their children. Infant mortality was such a common occurrence that many plantation couples referred to their living children with the unspoken assumption that some children had not survived. Anne Firor Scott’s argument that women’s concerns about pregnancy and their fears of death proved that they did not accept the patriarchal system, seems to be overstated, however. Women feared pregnancy and death in

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<sup>4</sup> Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, xi-xii. As Drew Gipin Faust has argued, “The ever mounting death toll worked its terrible effects on women’s sensibilities. By the middle years of the war almost no family remained exempt.” See her *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 187. Mark S. Schantz argues that in order to understand the Civil War the historian must understand “the ideas and attitudes Americans held about death in the middle of the nineteenth century.” See his *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America’s Culture of Death* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>5</sup> Jason Phillips, *Diehard Rebels: The Confederate Culture of Invincibility* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 9.

childbirth, but they also accepted it as their duty and resigned themselves to their fate, although in reality they had few other options.<sup>6</sup>

Antebellum culture indeed was so “saturated” with death that an entire genre of “consolation” literature had developed that dictated the appropriate manner in which to deal with loss.<sup>7</sup> The close presence of death as a part of everyday life led many women to

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<sup>6</sup> Sally G. McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Infant Rearing* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 24; Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 154; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1988). Marriage, also, however “signals female dependence.” See Lori D. Ginzberg, “Pernicious Heresies: Female Citizenship and Sexual Repectibility in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Women and the Unstable State in Nineteenth-Century America*, edited by Alison M. Parker and Stephanie Cole (Arlington: Texas A&M University Press, 2000): 139-161, 141; George Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 8. Stephanie McCurry has argued a “southern white woman’s political identity and status was defined through marriage.” See her, “‘The Soldier’s Wife’: White Women, the State, and the Politics of Protection in the Confederacy,” in *Women and the Unstable State in Nineteenth-Century America*, edited by Alison M. Parker and Stephanie Cole (Arlington: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), 22; Barbara Welter, *Dimitry Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976), 8. Clinton wrote that “infant mortality was so common that many plantation couples referred to their ‘living children,’ the assumption being that some were always lost in infancy of childhood.” Infant mortality was not the only concern for mothers, indeed, “death in childbirth was no idle fear, and each individual woman faced its threat.” Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 154, 156; Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, June 7, 1862, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH; Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, February 9, 1861, Elizabeth Rhodes Diaries vol.1-5. Transcripts in the author’s possession. Vol. 1-3 at the Auburn University Library. Vol. 1-5 at the Carnegie Library in Eufaula, Alabama. Original hand written diaries in the possession of the Shorter Mansion and Museum, Eufaula Alabama. Anne Firor Scott, “Women’s Perspective on the Patriarchy in the 1850s,” in *Half Sisters of History: Southern Women and the American Past*, edited by Catherine Clinton (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994): 76-92, 78-82.

<sup>7</sup> Saum, “Death in the Popular Mind of Pre-Civil War America,” 477; Douglas, “Heaven Our Home,” 496-515; Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 158. Kate Cumming reflected the ideas surrounding a proper death as she wrote, “All our men seem to die resigned; but it is difficult to judge of their frame of mind, as they are too far gone with disease when they come here to talk to them on the subject of death, which is another



conclude, as did Zillah Brandon that, “we shall soon all leave the earth.”<sup>8</sup> In some ways, as Barbara Welter has argued, death embodied the entire essence of feminine virtue. “The dying maiden,” she believed was “so highly regarded as the quintessence of female virtue, a being literally too good for this world, that one suspects the age and the young women themselves of a certain necrophilia.”<sup>9</sup> Faust agreed that dying a “Good Death” became a central concept to “mid-nineteenth-century America, as it had long been at the core of Christian practices.”<sup>10</sup> Once the war began, women wrote about soldiers who “died the death of a Christian” as a “brave soldier; true to his God and country.”<sup>11</sup> As Kate Cumming pointedly stated in 1862, “nearly every state in the Confederacy is draped in mourning for the loss of their loved ones.” After writing of the loss of a patient Cumming noted, “his death was one of those we can think on with pleasure; it was that of a soldier of the cross.”<sup>12</sup>

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proof of the necessity of preparing, while in health, for that long journey from which no traveller returns. Nearly all of the men who have died here were in a dying state when brought from the camps.” See Kate Cumming, November 15, 1862, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life in the Confederate Army of Tennessee from the Battle of Shiloh to the End of the War with Sketches of Life and Character, and Brief Notices of Current Events During that Period* (Louisville: John P. Morton, 1866).

<sup>8</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, February 4, 1861, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>9</sup> Welter, *Dimity Convictions*, 11. Indeed, as Barbara Welter has noted, “the death of a young girl was so celebrated as a triumph of beauty and innocence that a whole ritual grew up around it” (11).

<sup>10</sup> Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 6.

<sup>11</sup> Kate Cumming, May 6, 1862, November 16, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*. Cumming wrote of the death of a Roman Catholic who trusted in God.

<sup>12</sup> Cumming wrote, “Nearly every state in the Confederacy has to mourn, as Alabama does, over the loss of their bravest and best. The banks of the Chickahominy are

The more numerous and more frequent deaths caused by the Civil War meant that women were now forced to cope not only with the loss of loved ones at home, but also with the deaths of their relatives fighting in the Confederate army. Three times more Confederate men died than their Northern counterparts. Twenty percent white Southern men who were of military age died in the war. By the middle of the war almost no families remained exempt from the face of death.<sup>13</sup>

Nor were soldiers the only ones to die during the war. Friends and neighbors did as well. Although there are no definite numbers, James McPherson has estimated that around fifty thousand civilians died during the course of the war.<sup>14</sup> In May of 1862 Carrie Hunter lamented that not only had death touched the lives of those with relatives who were soldiers in the field, “but it is here in our midst. Here where it takes a little one and another the wife of one who has gone to defend her from the vandal foe.” A few months later she mourned that “one after another the good the noble and the true pass away and are gone forever. The seat beside the hearthstone is vacant and places that knew them So

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now sacred, washed by the blood of martyrs.” Kate Cumming April 9, 1862, July 16, 1862, November 15, 1862, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*. See also Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, xii-xiii, 65; Kenneth W. Noe, “‘Coming to Us Dead’: A Civil War Casualty and His Estate,” *Journal of Illinois History*, 2 (1999): 289-304, 292; Ann Douglas, “Heaven Our Home: Consolation Literature in the Northern United States, 1830-1880,” *American Quarterly* 26 (1974): 496-515, 497; Gary Laderman, *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799-1883* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 96.

<sup>13</sup> Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, xi. See also Annie Strudwick Diary, June 14, 1862, Annie Strudwick Diary and Letter # 1838, SHC-UNC; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 187.

<sup>14</sup> Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, xii.

well in times past will know them no more forever.”<sup>15</sup> Cumming likewise lamented, “The South has suffered, O, how terribly Thousands and tens of thousands of precious lives have been sacrificed on the god of war. In every state of our beloved land there has been a temple erected to the insatiate Moloch.”<sup>16</sup>

Many women before the war already relied heavily upon their religious beliefs to counter the constant threat of death in their lives. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese noted that firm religious beliefs provided a “promising antidote” to the fears that many faced.<sup>17</sup> Faust agreed that Christian beliefs in resignation provided a way for people to deal with death, especially as the course of the war caused the mortality rate to increase dramatically in the country.<sup>18</sup> She also noted that Christian doctrines of resignation supported the “psychological process of numbing and denial, but, however sanctified, submission to God’s will remained a severe trial for those struggling to accept the pain of bereavement. Each new loss, each new horror threatened to break through the protective shell. Women invoked religious doctrines and texts almost as incantations in their efforts to transcend

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<sup>15</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, May 28, 1862, October 5, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>16</sup> Kate Cumming, November 30, 1862, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>17</sup> Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 17, 373.

<sup>18</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 188-92. As Emory M. Thomas points out, “the Southern appropriation of Puritanism seemed to offer comfort in the universality of the human condition.” See his, *The Confederate Nation: 1861-1865* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1979), 22; McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 172. The probability of facing the death of a loved one dramatically increased with the outbreak of the Civil War. When compared with Northern families, Southern families “stood a much better chance of having a relative wounded or killed” in the war. Rable, *Civil Wars*, 69; Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 154.

suffering and grief, to wean themselves from the cares of this world.”<sup>19</sup> McMillen pointed out that if one believed that a better world awaited, then “death could be consoling” and religion could actually provide strength in the face of hardships and allay women’s fears. Clinton added that for many women Christian fortitude brought comfort to many, even if it were only through the prospect of martyrdom which could come in the form of personal sacrifice or in the sacrifice of their loved ones.<sup>20</sup> Thus, in a world of uncertainty, women like Elizabeth Rhodes turned to “God in His Providence” who provided the hope of a home “in those mansions not made with hands Eternal in the heavens” to alleviate their fears.<sup>21</sup> Belief in life after death provided a way for women to deal with sickness and death. For Confederates Faust argues that “like the nation’s trial, death itself was within Christian understanding simply another hardship on the route to a greater glory – of salvation and eternal life” and losing loved ones just like military defeats were to be accepted as “part of God’s plan, even celebrated as the advent of immortality.”<sup>22</sup> If events

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<sup>19</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 191.

<sup>20</sup> McMillen pointed out that a “deep belief in God provided women with an enormous amount of strength, consistent with the importance that religion had in the lives of most southern women. . . . They turned to God for support, depending on divine mercy for a successful outcome and giving their Lord credit for a job well done. Yet God was not accountable if problems occurred. When mothers suffered or their children died, women blamed themselves or viewed their loss as part of God’s plan. They learned to believe that the peace death brought their infant was worth more than any sorrowful life on earth.” McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 78, 186. See also Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 373; Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, November 21, 1860, Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, transcripts in the author’s possession; Bertram Wyatt-Brown ed., *The American People in the Antebellum South* (West Haven, Connecticut: Pendulum Press, 1973), 15; Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 152.

<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, February 9, 1858, Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, transcripts in author’s possession.

<sup>22</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 183.

that happened on this earth were random, uncontrollable, and completely inexplicable, some women would have had a harder time dealing with death. Their conviction that there was a greater force who not only ordered every event on earth, but also held a master plan for the future that would one day allow them to see their loved ones again helped ease their pain.

Despite the central fact of death, few historians until recently discussed it in great detail. Faust provides the best recent analysis of death during the Civil War. She argued that death itself actually “created the modern American Union – not just by ensuring national survival, but by shaping enduring national structures and commitments.”<sup>23</sup> Yet even she fails to describe in much detail how Southern women dealt with death, struggled with personal loss, conceptualized the afterlife, used that conception to cope with their losses, and memorialized the departed loved ones in their writing.<sup>24</sup> Women who wrote about the death of loved ones did so in many different ways as they attempted to cope with their grief, work through it, and reconcile that loss with their religious beliefs.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, xiv.

<sup>24</sup> Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 139-163; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 179-195. Lewis O. Saum has provided an excellent introduction to the ways in which death was conceived in the antebellum popular mind, but his article also does not deal in great depth with the issues addressed in this chapter, and his article was also focused on the antebellum world as opposed to Civil War Alabama women. See his “Death in the Popular Mind of Pre-Civil War America,” *American Quarterly*, 26 (1974), 477-495.

<sup>25</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, March 30, 1861, May 28, 1862, October 3, 1862, October 5, 1862, September 21, 1864, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC; Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, March 20, 1862, SPR113, ADAH; Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 1, 1861, April 25, 1861, January 1, 1863, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, June 26, 1862, July 21, 1862, March 10, 1863, November 27, 1863, SPR5, ADAH; Lizzie to Anna Mercur, Eufaula Alabama, December 17, 1860, Anna Mercur Papers #751-z, SHC-UNC; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, December 7, 1862, SPR2 ADAH; Elodie to Dawson, Selma, September 15,

The outbreak of the war left many hearts grieving for the departed as women tried to make sense out of what was taking place around them. No one could quite completely come to grips with the magnitude of the death that swept the country and none were exempt from the fatal bullets, or lethal disease and sickness that knew no deference. Indeed, it appeared to Margaret Gillis “that the best and noblest are among the first to fall.”<sup>26</sup> Some women saw death as the end of suffering for loved ones, but even that did not mean those deaths were welcomed. Women wrote of the deep sadness they felt for the families of the dead.<sup>27</sup>

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1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC; Elodie to Dawson, Selma, September 15, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC; Mary Warring Diary, August 11, 1863, ADAH; Rebecca Vasser Diary, September 21, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke; M. E. Thompson to her Elias Thompson, Marion, December 22, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Kate Cumming, May 12, 1862, June 18, 1862, October 1, 1862, October 4, 1862, November 1, 1862, November 4, 1862, June 7, 1863, June 10, 1864, December 20, 1864, April 18, 1865, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>26</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, July 21, 1862, Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, SPR5, ADAH; Laderman, *Sacred Remains*, 97; Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 137-145; Kate Cumming, July 4, 1862, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>27</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, October 27, 1861, Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, SPR5, ADAH; Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, April 30, 1861, Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, SPR113, ADAH. One of the hardest deaths for some of the women examined here, other than their immediate loved ones was the death of Thomas Stonewall Jackson. Espy held a high opinion of Jackson as she wrote how he drove all of his opponents before him. See Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, June 8, 1862, SPR2 ADAH. Annie Strudwick also wrote of one of the local young men going to join Thomas Jackson. See Annie Strudwick Diary, June 14, 1862, Annie Strudwick Diary and Letter # 1838, SHC-UNC. Cumming praised Stonewall Jackson and believed that he would save the Confederacy. When she heard of his death she could not believe her country’s misfortune. “I note this as being one of the gloomiest days since the war. News has just been received that one of our brightest stars has left us; he has gone to shine in a more glorious sphere than this. The good and great General Stonewall Jackson has fallen; he was wounded at the battle of Chancellorsville, and lived a few days afterward. When I first heard of it I was speechless, and thought, with the apostle, ‘how unsearchable are

When women received news of fatalities, they usually became more worried about their own relatives. After hearing of the death of a young man, for example, Hunter wrote that “Our hearts are growing sick with anxiety and hope deferred as day after day passes away and we get no tidings of our dear boys.”<sup>28</sup> While her father believed that her brother had been “either killed or severely wounded in the hands of the enemy,” she refused to “believe it for a single moment.” To ease her fears she turned to God for assurance, praying, “May the Ruler of heaven look down and preserve as he has hitherto and as it would seem miraculously done our dear ones from death or mutilation at the hands of a merciless and cruel foe.” Although she received a letter saying that her brother was safe and “almost miraculously preserved,” Hunter related that, “the same mail that brought us good news of our dear friends brought the heartrending intelligence to others of the fall of ones dear to him.”<sup>29</sup>

Death was inevitable; the “fatal day” when “these invaluable possessions are wrested from us.”<sup>30</sup> Women wrote about death itself in different ways, however. They

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His judgements, and His ways are past finding out. For who hath known the mind of the Lord.’ Dark and mysterious indeed, are his ways. Who dare attempt to fathom them, when such men as Jackson are cut down in the zenith of their glory, and at the very hour of their country’s need? The honor of taking this great man’s life was not reserved for the foe, but for his own men, as if it were a sacrifice they offered to the Lord, as Jephtha gave up his daughter.” See Kate Cumming, July 4, 1862, May 11, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>28</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, October 3, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC; Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 104-106; Kate Cumming, November 30, 1862, January 11, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>29</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, October 3, 1862, October 5, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>30</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 27, 1861, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH.

sometimes depicted it as crossing over a dark river. “Oh pitying heaven! look down and have mercy,” Hunter wrote, “visit the suffering wretches, smooth the lonely dying pillows, and may they triumphantly pass the dark cold waters and land safely in that bright land where sorrow and suffering can never come.”<sup>31</sup> Brandon, in writing of the death of a cousin, likewise recorded that as he died she “saw that his feet were in the waters of the Jordan of death,” referring to that final crossing for the children of Israel into the Promised Land in the Old Testament, and hence metaphorically referred to one passing from this life into the next; from the land of pain and sorrow into one of perfection and bliss.<sup>32</sup>

Other women portrayed death in more serene terms, depicting it as a scene where angels came to escort the dying into a better place. They viewed the event which “brought sorrow and desolation” on earth as a “translation to glory” for the departed, where they would rest from the “arduous trials” and “heartrending anxieties” and be filled with the “peace of Heaven.”<sup>33</sup> On one occasion Brandon portrayed death as when “the angel of immortality will fly swiftly from the courts of heaven, will gather the ashes of the precious vase in his golden censer bear it to the throne of God where it will be remolded” so that it will be a “fit temple for the indwelling of an immortal flower.” As far as she was concerned the deaths of her children were a “day of emancipation” for

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<sup>31</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, May 28, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>32</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, April 25, 1861, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>33</sup> Juliana Dorsey to Lollie, Greensboro, June 2 1864, Ruffin and Meade Family Papers #642, SHC-UNC.



each one of them, a day that “gave them wings to mount above the skys.”<sup>34</sup> Another woman believed that the “Savior who [the deceased] loved and served on earth” would “received him to those glorious scenes.”<sup>35</sup>

Some women brought these images to the deathbed.<sup>36</sup> Brandon recounted that at her daughter Josephine’s death, she knelt by the side of her bed and told her daughter to “rely upon Jesus, to trust his mercies, to lean upon his arm” and after promising that they would all one day be reunited in heaven everyone present gathered around the dying child and “all kissed her again.” This final gathering and farewell as her daughter departed provided reassurance to her as she related to her diary that “while I besought the Lord to be with her, it seemed as if the Holy Ghost was present there and said to her go to heaven sweet sister, go to heaven, yes I responded go with the angels my darling.”<sup>37</sup> Sarah Espy also recorded her son’s death scene emphasizing how she told him he would soon be in heaven. While she was completely heartbroken she also stated that, “I feel that we should not grieve for him; for it is a happy release from these distressing times.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 27, 1861, January 3, 1863, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>35</sup> Juliana Dorsey to Lollie, Greensboro, June 2 1864, Ruffin and Meade Family Papers #642, SHC-UNC.

<sup>36</sup> Saum, “Death in the Popular Mind of Pre-Civil War America,” 481; Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, June 7, 1862, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>37</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, September 30, 1860, April 25, 1861, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>38</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, November 29, 1862, Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, SPR2, ADAH.

Funerals provided families a measure of closure and burials were an important part of the mourning process before and during the war.<sup>39</sup> As Clinton pointed out, deaths and the events that followed them were governed by traditional customs and rituals that reflected strict rules of how to act. For the most part, as Jessica Mitford points out, families and close friends were almost exclusively responsible for preparing the dead for burial, as well as for the funeral itself. If possible family members were buried together. While some families struggled to raise money to be able to put up a tombstone, other funerals became large productions. Sarah Davis recounted that for a funeral a procession of school girls marched to the grave to witness the burial.<sup>40</sup>

Some women simply recorded attending burials.<sup>41</sup> Others vividly recounted funeral scenes in their diaries and in letters. Recording the burial of her brother, Hunter

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<sup>39</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 188; Carrie Hunter Diary, June 30, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>40</sup> M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, January 25, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 10, 61-101; Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 158; Jessica Mitford, *The American Way of Death Revisited* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 147-148. Gary Laderman agreed that in the years before the 1880s a funeral industry such as is known by the modern day that provided goods and services in aiding families dealing with death did not exist. While various individuals such as undertakers, cabinet makers and liverymen provided assistance in the process, the majority of the responsibility remained with the families. See Laderman, *Sacred Remains*, 9; Saum, "Death in the Popular Mind of Pre-Civil War America," 480. See also Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, May 1, 1861, Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, SPR113, ADAH; Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 3, 1863, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH; M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, January 25, 1861, in Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

<sup>41</sup> Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, March 12, 1861, Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, SPR113, ADAH; Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, November 28, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, January 19, 1860, Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, SPR2, ADAH; Eliza Bedford Weakley Diary, March 17, 1864, March 19, 1864, Eliza Bedford Weakley Papers #1605, SHC-UNC; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, March 4, 1860, October 27, 1861, March 4, 1860, July 29,

wrote; “To day we have followed to his last resting place one who three short weeks ago was bright and beautiful full of hope.... One light of our household is [gone] forever whose place never can be filled.” She described in a striking manner how he was prepared for burial; “Fold the cold hands over the still breast and be laid away, alone in the dark, cold ground.” Death provided a constant reminder of the fragile nature of life; “What a warning is should be to us that in the midst of life we are in death, that in a moment the brittle thread of life may be snapped and our spirits pass away into the dread unknown.”<sup>42</sup> His death and funeral provided motivation for Hunter to improve her life and hold fast to their faith so that one day they could be reunited with her brother.

A few women also recorded funeral sermons in their diaries. Their main purpose was to provide comfort and help alleviate the grief of the suffering by pointing to God’s hand in the matter and the assurance of Heaven. Hunter recounted that her brother’s funeral sermon was preached from Luke 8:52, “And all wept and bewailed her but he said weep not she is not dead but sleepeth.”<sup>43</sup> When her husband passed away, a few months after the end of the war, Octavia Otey also recorded the verses that were read at his funeral, Genesis 18:25 – “Shall not the judge of all the earth do right” – as well as II Corinthians 5:2-7, which describes the earthly body as temporary and burdened with mortality. One day the soul would leave the body and be present with the Lord. She

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1864, SPR5, ADAH; Kate Cumming, July 11, 1862, October 1, 1862, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>42</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, September 21, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.; Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 162-4.

added that the hymn “How Firm a Foundation” was also sung.<sup>44</sup> These verses as well as the hymn were intended to bring comfort to those left behind, and the simple fact that they made their way into these women’s diaries points to their impact.

Death and funerals touched not only individuals but affected entire towns before the war, as sickness swept over entire areas. Women ardently prayed for the wellbeing of their loved ones, wrote about their deaths, but also praised God for their recovery from illnesses.<sup>45</sup> Hunter believed that sickness was God’s way of keeping people in check and not becoming too prideful. Having blessings “blended with troubles” reminded people of their dependence on God and their need for humility, otherwise the people of the South would “become proud.”<sup>46</sup> Many women believed that it was part of their Christian duty to

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<sup>44</sup> Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, June 2-3, 1865, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC.

<sup>45</sup> Lizzie Buford (Mrs. T. Buford), of Eufaula and Clayton, Alabama to Anna Mercur, Towanda Pennsylvania, Clayton Alabama, August 14, 1860, Anna Mercur Papers #751-z, SHC-UNC; Lizzie to Anna Mercur, Eufaula Alabama, December 17, 1860, Anna Mercur Papers #751-z, SHC-UNC; Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, February 25, 1861, SPR113, ADAH; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, March 18, 1860, April 3, 1861, April 6, 1863, June 17, 1861, July 4, 1861, October 11, 1861, SPR2 ADAH; M. E. Thompson to Joe Thompson, Marion, December 22, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Annie Strudwick Diary, January 25, 1862, February 3, 1862, February 4, 1862, February 8, 1862, March 6, 1862, March 10, 1862, March 24, 1862, March 25, 1862, May 24, 1862, June 1, 1862, June 2, 1862, September 8, 1862, September 11, 1862, October 16, 1862, Annie Strudwick Diary and Letter # 1838, SHC-UNC; Elodie to Dawson, Selma, October 20, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC; Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, October 14, 1860, June 7, 1862, SPR262, ADAH; Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, November 28, 1864, February 28, 1865, June 2, June 3, 1865, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, November 23, 1861, SPR5, ADAH; Carrie Hunter Diary, November 23, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>46</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, October 22, 1861, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

tend to the sick and dying, as Cumming openly remarked to her diary.<sup>47</sup> Women were sometimes stretched to their limit as a result. As she wrote about sickness and death surrounding her, Gillis ardently prayed, “Oh my Father if it be possible let this cup pass from me.”<sup>48</sup> In March of 1861 Davis recorded that “deaths are becoming quite common in our town.”<sup>49</sup>

The war then led entire towns to mourn the loss of soldiers. Hunter recounted that “today has been a sad one for Tuskegee” because the bodies of two of the town’s boys arrived “yesterday and today attended by a large concourse of the citizens they were laid away in their last resting place. They were buried with military honors and attention.”<sup>50</sup> Early in the war entire towns sometimes turned out for funerals partly because of the intense community pride that many felt for their soldiers. As Faust has noted, “In the early months of war, deaths were in fact marked with elaborate ceremony.”<sup>51</sup> Yet even toward the end of the war Kate Cumming wrote about attending a funeral held at a Methodist church in which the soldier was buried with the “full honors of war.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Kate Cumming, April 13, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>48</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, March 10, 1863, May 14, 1863, May 19, 1863, May 27, 1863, February 12, 1864, SPR5, ADAH; Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, September 10, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC.

<sup>49</sup> Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, March 12, 1861, Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, SPR113, ADAH; Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, September 30, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC.

<sup>50</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, July 28, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>51</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 189.

<sup>52</sup> Kate Cumming, July 17, 1864, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

For many women graveyards were not merely places frequented during burials, but rather they became an integral part of many women's lives. Women visited graveyards because they provided a connection between the living and the dead. Espy made sure that her son Columbus was buried so that the grave was in full view of her house, so that she could see it any time she looked out the window.<sup>53</sup> Women also used visits to graveyards to reflect on their loss. After a visit to her mother's grave Gillis exclaimed, "Oh! Ma Ma, I can never never be happy without you!"<sup>54</sup>

When death came to loved ones who were in distant parts of the country, their graves became a matter of significance and grief for those still living. Faust argues that "perhaps the most distressing aspect of death for many Civil War Americans was that thousands of young men were dying away from home."<sup>55</sup> That horrified people on the home front. Many families desperately attempted to locate the remains of their loved ones and bring them home for burial.<sup>56</sup> It was easier for families to retrieve the remains of loved ones early in the war. In early 1862, Kate Cumming wrote about a father who was traveling to Corinth to locate the remains of his dead son. She thought it was dreadful for the poor men to have to be buried away from their families and some even without

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<sup>53</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, December 1, 1862, Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, SPR2, ADAH.

<sup>54</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, April 19, 1860, Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>55</sup> Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 9. Gary Laderman notes that for Northern soldiers, no matter how rushed they were many on the field attempted to perform some act of closure for the departed, even if this only meant merely throwing some soil over the deceased bodies. Laderman, *The Sacred Remains*, 103-116.

<sup>56</sup> Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 62, 85, 127; Kate Cumming, July 3, 1862, March 31, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

coffins. In an attempt, however, to focus on providing for the comforts of those still alive she resolutely stated, “but there is so much suffering among the living, that I pay little heed to those things now. It matters little what becomes of the clay after the spirit has left it.”<sup>57</sup>

As the war progressed, however, it became harder for families to locate their dead, which resulted in many being buried far from home and family. Even if they were able to retrieve the remains, women had a hard time dealing with having a loved one pass away at the front. Brandon was bitter that her son James died “in a hospital, where no womans soothing voice flowed forth in song of glorious praise to God. Where no mother’s or sister’s kiss touched his marble brow and all because General Bragg would not give him a furlough.” She was furious, stating, “with all deference to such officers I would just say that your murderous neglect of your mens comfort, is bringing a destructive force to bear upon your own interests.”<sup>58</sup> In 1864, Hunter was almost unable to bear the thought that one of her brothers was not laid to rest at home but rather had been “buried away from our love far away in his lone soldiers grave by the dark waters of the Chickamauga.”<sup>59</sup> Espy recorded her gratitude that her son was permitted to come home and die among family rather than being forced to die in camp far from loved ones.

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<sup>57</sup> Kate Cumming, April 7, 1862, May 6, 1862, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>58</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, June 7, 1862, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>59</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, September 21, 1864, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

While her grief was tremendous, she stated that she was “better satisfied” than she would have been had he died alone in a camp somewhere as so many other soldiers had.<sup>60</sup>

While funerals and graveyards were important, women also spent a great deal of time conceptualizing the afterlife. They imagined it with a variety of different characteristics based upon their reading and interpretation of the Bible. Absent of all the trials and turmoil of the present life, heaven was the counterpart that balanced the pain and suffering taking place around them. They believed that the suffering and turmoil that they experienced would one day be rewarded with complete bliss and perfection. Whether in the death of a child or the death of a distant friend, the hope of one day being reunited with the departed in a better place provided a comforting assurance and was one of the main tenets of Alabama women’s religious beliefs.<sup>61</sup>

Heaven itself was a place that women went to great lengths to depict. Alabama women utilized what Ted Ownby referred to as “the sentimental or romantic concept of heaven,” which was a “happy place full of enjoyable human contacts and without human problems.”<sup>62</sup> It was a bright realm of peace and tranquility that provided a sharp contrast to the dark turmoil of the present world for women. Women also depicted heaven in concrete terms that were familiar to them. Many described it as a large “land” with a

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<sup>60</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, December 1, 1862, Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, SPR2, ADAH.

<sup>61</sup> Saum, “Death in the Popular Mind of Pre-Civil War America,” 495.

<sup>62</sup> Ted Ownby, “Patriarchy in the World Where There is No Parting?: Power Relations in the Confederate Heaven,” in *Southern Families at War: Loyalty and Conflict in the Civil War South*, edited by Catherine Clinton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 229-244, 234-35.



walled city whose “golden gates” would open and welcome the departed into its glory.<sup>63</sup>

Other women, such as Zillah Brandon, conceptualized heaven in terms of nature.

Crediting God with the responsibility for all natural beauty she metaphorically compared the beauty of nature with her conception of heaven and her daughter’s residence there. In heaven the “cold breath of death is spoiled of his power to blight or wither” her “lovely flowers” who were “transplanted on the banks of the river of life, where it will bloom in immortal freshness continually emitting its fragrance, which gathers like a cloud of sweet incense about the throne of God.”<sup>64</sup> As was the case with the soldiers Ownby examined, Alabama women never mentioned the presence of slavery in heaven.<sup>65</sup> Not only was

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<sup>63</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, May, 1864, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC; Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 8, 1861, January 27, 1861, January 9, 1863, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH; Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, February 9, 1858, Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, transcripts in author’s possession; Juliana Dorsey to Lollie, Greensboro, June 2 1864, Ruffin and Meade Family Papers #642, SHC-UNC; Mary Warring Diary, July 28, 1863, Mary Warring Diary, SPR30, ADAH; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, February 4, 1860, January 27, 1861, February 4, 1861, June 28, 1861, Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, SPR5, ADAH Carrie Hunter Diary, May 28, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>64</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 27, 1861, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>65</sup> Ownby, “Patriarchy in the World Where There is No Parting?” 237-238; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, December 16, 1859, January 19, 1860, August 31, 1860, March 18, 1860, March 25, 1861, May 22, 1861, June 3, 1861, June 12, 1861, July 11, 1861, July 13, 1861, March 12, 1862, SPR2 ADAH; Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, April 25, 1861, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH; Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, September 19, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC; Martha M. Jones to Samuel H. Jones, Tuscaloosa County Alabama, May 20th 1860, in Martha M. Jones Papers, Duke; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, February 12, 1864, SPR5, ADAH; M. E. Thompson to her sons, Marion, January 1, 1862, Thompson to Elias Thompson, Marion, July 22, 1861, M. E. Thompson to her Joe Thompson, Marion, August 30, 1861, M. E. Thompson to her sons, Marion, September 23, 1861, in Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

slavery lacking, but gender relations were also completely absent from Alabama women's conceptions of heaven as well.

Heaven was also a place where human emotions still could be felt. The departed would not forget their relatives who remained on the earth. Gillis emphatically stated, "Oh! me I cannot bear to think that in your heavenly change, you have lost all earthly feelings?... If I thought so reason would desert her throne."<sup>66</sup> Families would be reunited in heaven and greeted by the Savior and angels.<sup>67</sup> Already having one or more loved ones in heaven provided an added comfort for many women when they faced subsequent deaths, because they believed that the recently departed would be welcomed into heaven by those who had gone before. As one Alabama woman attempted to comfort a relative, she wrote, "Oh! there was joy in Heaven, not only among the angels, but the redeemed ones of earth" who were already in heaven that another soul had arrived.<sup>68</sup> She continued with the assurance that her son would be "no stranger there" but would be welcomed by heavenly hosts, "the Savior who he loved and served on earth," as well as the "dear departed of his family" including "my sainted Lester, .... For he was ever greatly beloved by her, and our aged cousin, who has not been long asleep."<sup>69</sup> The belief that family

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<sup>66</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, February 4, 1860, Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, SPR5, ADAH. Ownby points out that "heaven included the possibility of human love within heavenly society." See Ownby, "Patriarchy in the World Where There is No Parting?" 234.

<sup>67</sup> Juliana Dorsey to Lollie, Greensboro, June 2 1864, Ruffin and Meade Family Papers #642, SHC-UNC.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.; Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 27, 1861, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>69</sup> Juliana Dorsey to Lollie, Greensboro, June 2 1864, Ruffin and Meade Family Papers #642, SHC-UNC.

members would be reunited in heaven and would recognize each other, and still feel human emotions for each other, thus became a source of comfort to women.

Some women coped with the deaths of friends and distant relatives by convincing themselves that they would one day be reunited with them in a better place, yet were unable to find the same peace when a close relative died as was the case with Carrie Hunter.<sup>70</sup> Throughout her diary she recorded the deaths of others and conceptualized seeing them again one day in heaven. Yet, when news of the death of her brother arrived, her attitude toward death changed dramatically and her tone turned to one of utter and complete despair. She could not bear to think that “one so noble brave and fearless” had “passed away forever” and rather than writing about one day being reunited with him in heaven she lamented that “we will never, never see him again.” While she believed that he had “passed away from this world of suffering and sorrow” she could not deal with the fact that he was no longer in the world with her. Indeed, she could not focus on anything except his presence in his grave, his “cold hands” folded over the “still breast” and his “dear head with its curling locks mussed over the pale fore head” as he was “laid away, alone in the dark, cold ground.” Rather than writing about his entrance into the mansions of glory and eternal bliss as she had done with countless others, she emphasized her personal loss and the grief caused by his absence. She did not appear to lose her faith, but

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<sup>70</sup> Women who had faced the death of loved ones mourned their absence and commented on how lonely those on earth were without the departed. Gillis longed to see her deceased mother again and lamented that “there’s nothing but darkness and sorrow here.” See Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, February 11, 1861, SPR5, ADAH. Espy wrote in her diary about how much she longed for her husband who had died two years earlier because he would “have been a tower of strength to the country now, besides being invaluable to his family.” See Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, May 8, 1862, SPR2 ADAH.

clearly struggled. She finally viewed his death as a “warning” for everyone because at any “moment the brittle thread of life may be snapped and our spirits pass away into the dread unknown.”<sup>71</sup>

Other women longed for the day when they too could leave the troubled times of the world and live in glory with their loved ones. Faust argues that “many bereaved spent the rest of their lives waiting for the promised heavenly reunion with those who had gone before.”<sup>72</sup> By the beginning of 1863, with three of her children in heaven, Brandon openly hoped for her own death so that she could be reunited with them. She wrote in great detail about the “resurrection of the Lord when all of the trials and tribulations of the world will be dispersed in the light of life.” Reflecting on death and heaven, she wrote, “thanks be to God who has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. In view of the resurrection the grave has no victory, The sting of death is but momentary.”<sup>73</sup> Yet while the sting was momentary, it did not ease its pain for those who experienced it. After the death of her mother, Gillis despaired, “but how shall I answer the longings of my own lonely heart – why can not I join her I have nothing to live for and all to gain by death.”<sup>74</sup> She desperately longed to “leave too” and join her mother in heaven.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Her brother was actually not dead at this point as a few days later she recorded that news of his wellbeing reached her. Her brother did die during the war and she continued with this same vein of thought at his death. Carrie Hunter Diary, October 3, 1862, September 21, 1862, September 21, 1864, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC..

<sup>72</sup> Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 170.

<sup>73</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 3, 1863, January 27, 1861, April 29, 1863, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>74</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, June 28, 1861, Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, SPR5, ADAH.

While some women longed to leave this world and join their loved ones in heaven, they also coped with death through commemorating those who had departed and paying tribute to them. Of the women examined, older women wrote longer tributes to their relatives and commemorated the departed partly because they were more likely to have experienced the deaths of their children. While younger women did write about death and often reminisced about the lives of those who had died, their entries were not as lengthy as the ones recorded by women who were mothers and had experienced the loss of children or their husband. Mothers who lost a child or children during the antebellum period used writing to cope with that loss and to work through their grief.<sup>76</sup>

Elizabeth Rhodes, for example, had lost her first two children by the time she began her diary in 1858. She avidly paid tribute to them throughout the diary, beginning with her first entry Rhodes wrote of her love for her departed children and tried to deal with their deaths by writing of them and referring to them with endearing terms. Zillah Brandon likewise paid lengthy tribute to her departed daughter before the outbreak of the war.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, many of the passages in her diary, including those that talk about political events and the outbreak of the Civil War also discussed her daughter and glorified her life.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., February 4, 1860.

<sup>76</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diaries; Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, SPR5, ADAH; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, April 27, 1860, Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>77</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, January 1, 1858, Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, transcripts in author's possession; Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, September 30, 1860, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, June 26, 1862, SPR5, ADAH.

By early 1860, after Margaret Gillis lost her mother, she wrote throughout her diary about how much she missed her presence, beginning with her death all the way through the end of the Civil War. She believed that her mother was at peace, but this did not ease her suffering as she recounted that those left on earth, “her poor children” who were her “earthly idols” were “left to sort through life unguided by her watchful love, unaided by her encouraging voice and tender smile.”<sup>78</sup> Almost overcome by grief, Gillis longed to join her mother in Heaven rather than live life with her absence.

Sarah Espy was intimately familiar with death before the Civil War began. Her brothers and son had gone to Louisiana, where her brothers died of pneumonia. When her husband went out to help their son, Columbus, he died too. His death left her as the “sole survivor” responsible for taking care of the rest of her children and her plantation. After contemplating the dire nature of her situation she wrote, “after a sleepless night I began to realize our situation. Life looks exceedingly dark and cold and what is to become of my children is now my trouble. True, there is enough of this world’s substance for our support left us, if we can only manage it properly. May the Lord help us to do what is right.”<sup>79</sup>

Commemoration was common before the war. The practice, however, increased with the deaths associated with the war. Many women recounted positive attributes of the

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<sup>78</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, February 4, 1860, Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>79</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, April 27, 1860, July 5, 1860, Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, SPR2 ADAH. Mr. Espy died on June 24 and was buried on the 26<sup>th</sup>. “Mr. E. was just ready to start home when taken sick, but alas! This place will know him no more forever. We are alone now, and may the Lord help us in our weakness.” See Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, July 4, 1860, Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, SPR2, ADAH.

fallen. Espy's encounters with death were not to end in 1860 with her brothers' and husband's deaths. By November of 1862 her son Columbus, who returned from Louisiana to serve in the Confederate army, lay in her arms dying from a severe case of diarrhea. Espy demonstrated a consistency in writing about the deaths of her loved ones throughout her diary. She commemorated the deaths of her brothers as well, stating that, "in their death the world has lost two of her best men. Men of more high toned morality, I never knew."<sup>80</sup>

Writing of the death of one of her friends, Hunter recorded that he was, "a good refined intelligent boy just in the early bloom of young manhood."<sup>81</sup> After the deaths of her sons Brandon stated that "when they went to the war" they were "in the vigor of youth and manly strength" as they faced the "gathering of the blackening clouds that hung over our country." Pointing out their faith she compared them to the Biblical apostles of Jesus.<sup>82</sup> Discussing positive attributes of the deceased was a common theme during the antebellum period that continued through the Civil War as women focused on the good lives that their loved ones had led in an attempt to justify their positions in society as well as to convince themselves of their residence in heaven.

Writing down their thoughts about death and their departed loved ones also allowed women to come to terms with their personal grief and loss. Rod Andrew has

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., April 27, 1860, November 29, 1862.

<sup>81</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, October 5, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>82</sup> Zillah Brandon compared her son James to the apostle Peter, "who was bold to rebuke sin where ever he met it ... Hines was more like John." Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 9, 1863, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH.

pointed out that as hundreds of thousands of southerners grieved the loss of their loved ones “reflecting on such themes as wasted sacrifices and misguided causes could bring no comfort. To most, denying that the cause had been noble or asserting that the sacrifice of life had no moral value would be akin to spitting on their loved ones’ graves. Only praise for the virtues of the dead and their cause could bring ‘consolation.’”<sup>83</sup>

Writing public obituaries was another important part of the process of death. It often involved a collective effort of the living family and friends. Women recorded deaths in the “old family Bible,” which they viewed with much affection. They looked at its worn pages as though they were staring in “the face of an old friend” and often turned to the Bible when they sat recollecting their departed loved ones, as did Espy on the anniversary of her brother’s death.<sup>84</sup>

Physical evidence of loved ones such as a lock of hair from the departed often provided a tangible connection between the living and the deceased. Upon placing a lock of her daughter’s hair in her diary, Zillah Brandon wrote that the “little golden tress Of soft unbraided hair” was all that she had left of her daughter and provided for her a “link between My spirit and the dead.” From that single ringlet many memories sprang to her mind as she thought of her daughter, “upon whose forehead fair, For nineteen years, like sunshine, slept this golden curl of hair” and now lay “cold within the grave” her “cheek is

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<sup>83</sup> Rod Andrew Jr., *Wade Hampton: Confederate Warrior to Southern Redemption* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 249. “For Wade Hampton, the eulogization of the Confederate dead was initially, at least, a grieving father attempting to come to grips with his son’s death” (248).

<sup>84</sup> Espy referred to her Bible as her friend. See Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, July 7, 1860, March 26, 1861, April 3, 1861, Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, SPR2, ADAH.



of its bloom bereft.” “Of all thy beauties thou art left A solitary rag” she continued as she proceeded to extol her daughter’s beauty and character. She mused that one single tress of hair could “bid such memories start!” as she wondered to herself “Oh! when in Death’s cold arms I sink, Who then with gentle care Will keep for me a dark brown link A ringlet of my hair?”<sup>85</sup>

Many women dwelled upon the days on which certain events took place. Sarah Espy recounted the day when her son, Columbus left her home for Louisiana, which was a “dark time with me.” On the anniversary of her brother James’s death, which was also Columbus’s birthday, Espy reminisced, “I think now how happy I was, this day last year, in my blissful ignorance of what was then taking place, and what was to follow more dreadful if possible.” She continued throughout her diary to write about her departed loved ones not only on the dates on which they died, but also on other days. On the anniversary of Columbus’s death she missed him greatly but in light of the turmoil the country faced stated, “I do not grieve that he is gone, for I cannot wish him back here.”

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<sup>85</sup> Zillah Brandon recorded, “The memory still within my mind Retains its sweetest power; It is the perfume left behind To whisper of the flower; Each blossom that in moments gone Bound up this sunny curl, Recalls the form, the look, the tone Of our sweetest, dearest girl. Her step was like an April rain, O’ er beds of violets flung; Her voice the prelude to the strain Before the song is sung; Her life, twas like a half blown blower closed ere the shades of even, Her death the dawn, the blushing hour That opens the gates of Heaven. A single tress; how slight a thing To sway such magic art, And bid each soft remembrance spring Like blossoms to the heart; It leads me back to days of old, To her I loved so long, Whose locks outshone pellucid golds Whose lips overflowed with song A single shining tress of hair To bid such memories start! But tears are on its luster – there, I lay it on my heart. Oh! when in Death’s cold arms I sink, Who then with gentle care Will keep for me a dark brown link A ringlet of my hair?” See Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 27, 1861, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH. See also Goody, “Death and the Interpretation of Culture,”450-45; Edwin C. Bridges, “Juliet Opie Hopkins and Alabama’s Civil War Hospitals in Richmond, Virginia,” *Alabama Review* 53 (April, 2000): 83-111.

Although the departure of her son was painful for her, she “now thankfully acknowledge[d] that all which seemed so dark and distressing were ordered for the best.”<sup>86</sup> Hunter, writing of her departed brother stated, “but I miss thee yet – morning noon and night... the music of the guitar, of the quiet evening stroll – In the twilight .... And a ready sympathizing ear – O my soul longs for some one to sympathize some one to fill the mournful void, that ever echoes and reechoes to the sad sweet music of happier days.”<sup>87</sup>

Brandon not only wrote tributes to her departed children in her diary, but also transcribed “verses” written by her other daughter, Jeannie, concerning the deaths. Jeannie apparently did not keep a diary herself but avidly wrote tributes to her “loved and lost” sister. She attempted to deny her sister’s death, but realized it was real because of the “strange aching void” in her heart. Yet she knew that her sister was in a better place and this gave her some comfort; “O, sister of my soul, I know that thou art smiling with the blest, That thou art pillowed on thy Savior’s breast And that between us billows darkly roll. Thou canst not come to me. ... there are no tears in heaven... no grief... perfect bliss.” Brandon not only recorded her daughter’s tribute in her diary, but also another tribute apparently written by her son, in which after lamenting her passing, he

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<sup>86</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, January 29, 1860, March 19, 1861, November 29, 1863, April 3, 1861, May 6, 1861, April 6, 1863, July 23, 1863, April 27, 1861, Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, SPR2, ADAH.

<sup>87</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, September 21, 1864, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

resigned himself to her death stating, “sleep, dear loved one gently sleep.”<sup>88</sup> Gillis wrote her own verses about the nature of death and its place in the world:

Leaves have their time to fall  
And flowers to wither by the north wind’s breath  
And stars to set – but all  
Thou hast all seasons for thine own  
Oh! Death<sup>89</sup>

Women could not forget their loved ones. At one point Hunter imagined that her brother was back with her again and she rushed to embrace him, but the dream quickly passed away and “was dissolved and I saw him no more and so only in dreams will I ever again see dear one who was once the almost idol of my life – Rest my darling one!”<sup>90</sup> Time could not heal the pain of her mother’s death as Gillis stated, “it sometimes seems now, that my heart will certainly, break with this overflow of anguish I laugh and talk with others but as soon as I am left to my own sad thoughts, the one absorbing thought that I have no mother almost kills me.” Over a year later, and two years after her mother’s death, she continued to lament that “God alone” knew how hard those two years with her mother’s absence had been stating, “I did not think I could stand it... Oh! how many heart aches, and how many, many tears.” While it was almost more than she could bear to have her mother gone, she realized that in death her mother had “gained eternal happiness, and missed great sorrows.” “In a word,” she continued, “a wise Providence

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<sup>88</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, February 1, 1861, Transcription of a tribute written by W. C. B. in Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 8, 1861, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>89</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, June 26, 1862, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>90</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, September 21, 1864, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC. See also Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, February 15, 1861, March 22, 1861, April 25, 1861, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH.

ordered it in mercy to the faithful one.”<sup>91</sup> Espy also had a hard time dealing with death and could not simply forget it. While she was able somewhat to cope with her son’s death because she knew that he no longer was subjected to the sufferings of the world, she still felt a “deep grief that I shall never see him again; that he has passed away from all the used and purposeful life; he will never assist me again, however, great my extremity may be, but will lie in his grave unheeding all my grief.”<sup>92</sup>

Along with writing lengthy commemorative tributes to their departed loved ones, women who lost relatives in the Civil War sought to justify the cause for which their sons, husbands, brothers, and other male relatives had given their lives, which brought a new aspect to the commemoration process. Before the war, when women wrote tributes to their loved ones, they focused exclusively on their good character and their noble nature. Once the war began and sons gave their lives for the cause of the Confederacy, women began ardently extolling the merits of the Confederacy and the “Cause of Southern liberty” to justify the loss of their sons.<sup>93</sup> To ease the pain of death they justified their loss by believing that those who had died had not done so in vain, but rather had

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<sup>91</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, February 4, 1860, June 28, 1861, Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, SPR5, ADAH; Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 145.

<sup>92</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, December 1, 1862, Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, SPR2, ADAH.

<sup>93</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, quote from before June 22, 1862, May 28, 1862, October 5, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, November 29, 1862, Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, SPR2, ADAH; Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 8, 1861, June 7, 1862, January 9, 1863, April 29, 1863, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, July 8, 1862, July 21, 1862, Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, SPR5, ADAH; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 243; Rable, *Civil Wars*, 2; Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, February 9, 1861, Elizabeth Rhodes Diary.

done so for a just and holy cause. Those who had fallen in the service of the Confederate cause were referred to as the “noble dead” and portrayed as the “brave sons of the South.”<sup>94</sup> Indeed, as Faust notes, as the war progressed, the dead came to play an important role in the Confederacy. They were a “shadow nation of sacrificed lives to be honored and invoked less for themselves than for the purposes of the nation and the society struggling to survive them.” Thus while the dead could no longer perform any sort of military duty, they served “other important political and cultural purposes in providing meaning for the war and its costs.”<sup>95</sup>

Upon receiving news of the death of her son James, for example, Brandon recorded her strong belief in the complete righteousness of the Confederate cause stating that her son was “taken while contending with principalities, and powers of the world in the cause of his God.” It was “at his Country’s call” that he took on “the uniform of a patriot and soldier.” She believed that both of her sons fought for “the defense of what they believed to be their political and religious liberty” and for that cause they “nobly dared to live or die.” The Confederate Cause was “sealed by the hearts best blood, and the sacrifice of the most valuable lives” which would be “recorded and immortalized by history before this war is ended.”<sup>96</sup> Gillis also recorded her conviction that her son fell in

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<sup>94</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, May 28, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC. In 1862 Margaret Gillis lamented “So many oh! so many of our noble boys have fallen in this last conflict.” Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, July 8, 1862, Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>95</sup> Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 83.

<sup>96</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 8, 1861, June 7, 1862, April 29, 1863, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH. James died on May 26 1862.

“Battle fighting for his country’s cause.”<sup>97</sup> Hence women, who might have become disillusioned with the course of the war because of the deaths, redirected their emotions and ardently extolled the cause for which their sons had lived and died.<sup>98</sup>

Alabama women further justified the loss of their loved ones by interpreting the Confederate cause in Biblical terms. Women used familiar Biblical metaphors to explain death. As mentioned previously, the Bible was the most commonly read book and even if a person were unable to read he or she would be familiar with the Bible. For example, Hunter wrote that “the voices of mourners is heard throughout the land of Rachel mourning for her children, and refusing to be comforted.”<sup>99</sup> Anyone who might have read that statement would have known that she was referring to the Rachel of the Old Testament. By drawing comparisons between the Confederacy and God’s chosen people of the Old Testament, women reassured themselves that not only was their cause just but also that God would back and defend the Confederacy. While some women were merely parroting the messages that they heard from the pulpits as preachers across the South

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<sup>97</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, July 21, 1862, Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>98</sup> Historians Drew Gilpin Faust and George Rable discuss women’s disillusionment with the war as a result of the death toll, and while some women did eventually become disheartened with the Confederacy, for the most part they redirected these feelings into a justification of the cause for which their loved ones had sacrificed their lives. See Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 243; Rable, *Civil Wars*, 2.

<sup>99</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, May 28, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

equated the Confederacy with the chosen nation of Israel, many of them actually internalized these beliefs and found a great deal of comfort in them.<sup>100</sup>

As women faced death throughout the war and attempted to deal with it, many turned to each other for solace. Some viewed comforting others as one of their other womanly duties in life. As Clinton points out, “self-sacrifice and patient suffering had long been considered female attributes and, in the South, essential elements for maintaining both the honor of the woman and her family, especially during a crisis when the man of the house had to be away from home.”<sup>101</sup> When attempting to comfort others religion provided the mainstay and basis from which to offer consolation to the grieving. As one Alabama woman wrote to another, while there was nothing she could say to lessen her terrible distress she felt deeply for her and prayed “daily that God, the only Comforter, will enable you to bow to this heavy stroke, and give you that support and comfort, which He only can bestow.” She continued, “remember there is a tender sympathizing Savior ever near in your hour of trial, commit your cause to Him, His spirit will cheer you in darkness, His arm support you.”<sup>102</sup> Kate Cumming prayed that God would “give strength” to those who mourned the loss of their loved ones.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> See Eugene Genovese, *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998).

<sup>101</sup> Rable, *Civil Wars*, 50.

<sup>102</sup> Juliana Dorsey to Lollie, Greensboro, June 2 1864, Ruffin and Meade Family Papers #642, SHC-UNC; Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 8, 1861, September 30, 1860, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>103</sup> Kate Cumming, April 7, 1862, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

After the deaths of loved ones other Alabama women would have agreed with Espy's lonely remark, "I feel very much in need of a friend" and her lamenting petition "may the good Lord help us all."<sup>104</sup> When women felt as though no other earthly soul could comprehend their pain they turned to the assurance that there was one who not only understood their suffering but also sympathized with their plight. Writing of the death of her daughter Brandon exclaimed, "O My beloved Lord, Thou alone knoweth the sorrow of my soul." Rather than believe that deaths were random events that no one had any control over, women found assurance in the belief that their departed ones did not die without a plan. Brandon believed of her departed daughter that her death was not random but, "God has taken her." Writing about the deaths of her sons she also found comfort in her belief that as they departed "they spread their broad wings and soared above the storm" and now, "from their glorified positions they are ministering spirits sent to minister to those who are heirs of salvation."<sup>105</sup>

When writing about death some women comforted others with the belief that the departed had "joined the Lord of Hosts."<sup>106</sup> They quoted passages from the Bible such as the promises that "His grace is sufficient for you," and "He will never leave thee nor forsake thee" when trying to comfort each other after the death of a loved one.<sup>107</sup> Another

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<sup>104</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, April 27, 1860, July 7, 1860, Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, SPR2, ADAH.

<sup>105</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, December 3, 1860, January 9, 1863, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, August 5, 1864.

<sup>107</sup> Juliana Dorsey to Lollie, Greensboro, June 2 1864, Ruffin and Meade Family Papers #642, SHC-UNC.



way to comfort other women was to point to the assurance that the living would one day be reunited with the departed or to note that people respected the deceased.

Women often stressed the belief that the departed were no longer experiencing the pain and suffering that all the inhabitants of the earth faced on a daily basis. When writing of the death of her cousin, Mary Warring lamented the loss of such a promising young man; however she rested in her belief that her Cousin Edwin was “happy now” because “his sufferings are no more.” He “exchanged the bed of suffering and pain for those blissful realms above, where sin and sorrow are not known.” She felt deeply for her Aunt Mary because “she has indeed lost a treasure,” yet, she turned to God to help comfort her Aunt petitioning that “God grant that she may bear her affliction patiently and with Christian calmness and resignation to *His* divine will.”<sup>108</sup> While women believed that it was their duty to resign themselves to the will of God in death, this belief did not prohibit the grieving from mourning. Indeed, tears were viewed as a natural part of grieving, as Brandon stated, “they are nature’s offering” and needed to flow “ere this heart should break.”<sup>109</sup>

While women sought to comfort each other in the face of death they also struggled with submitting to what they perceived as the will of God. They daily prayed that they would be able to honestly and sincerely declare “Thy will Oh God, be done,” regarding not only death but every aspect of life as well.<sup>110</sup> Women believed that God

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<sup>108</sup> Mary Warring Diary, July 28, 1863, Mary Warring Diary, SPR30, ADAH.

<sup>109</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, June 7, 1862, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>110</sup> Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, February 8, 1865, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC.

controlled the events that took place on earth; it was the duty of Christians to resign themselves to His perfect plan for their lives, which included facing the reality of death. Religious beliefs did not remove pain, but instead served as a way for women to work through events that took place in life. This theme runs through the diaries of the Alabama women examined in this dissertation and was something that these women faced long before the war itself broke out and continued to deal with as the war progressed.

As already noted, Rhodes struggled to cope with the loss of her first two children. Throughout her diary she wrote about the death of her son Willie, recording that “God in His Providence saw fit” to remove her son from this world into a “brighter and happier one” and while the “stroke was a hard one” she tried to bear it with “humble submission as it was given by the hand of an All Wise God.”<sup>111</sup> She also resigned herself to God’s will in the death of her daughter, Alice who in 1853 “was called away from this world to dwell with angels in heaven” and who she hoped to one day join in “those mansions not made with hands Eternal in the heavens.”<sup>112</sup>

Rhodes’ resignation to the will of God did not stop with the death of family members. When describing the death of a friend she claimed that, “if we did not recognize the hand of an All Wise and merciful God in such afflictions the heart would indeed sink in utter despair. How thankful we should feel for the precious promises of

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<sup>111</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, February 9, 1861, Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, transcripts in author’s possession. Her son Willie was born on July 7 1855. Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, July 7, 1860, Elizabeth Rhodes Diary. Rable points out that many women as they faced the hardships in their lives and in the war could do “little but wait and pray.” See Rable, *Civil Wars*, 66.

<sup>112</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, November 21, 1860, Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, transcripts in author’s possession.

God.” She admitted that she was dependent upon the “bounty of a merciful God for life and death.” Thus, she acknowledged that she turned to her religious beliefs to keep her from “utter dispare.” Upon hearing of the death of the sister of a friend she confessed, “Tis God’s hand who bestows the blow, no doubt in mercy,” thus she should “not repine.”<sup>113</sup> By placing the authority and control over death in the hands of God, she was able to create order and cohesion out of painful events that she could not control.

After the death of her daughter Josephine, Zillah Brandon was heartbroken, but also resigned to the will of God. She grieved her loss, but found comfort in her belief that they would one day meet again in heaven and found solace in her belief that her daughter was “a believer in Christ bethrothed and espoused to Him and she is now numbered with the church of the first born.”<sup>114</sup> She claimed that she must “with a heart resigned humbly cry ‘Father, Creator, Lord, Thy will be done’ Then may we not repine while Thy word, and Thy love, and Thy promise is ours.” While she knew that she should be resigned to the will of God, she asked, “yet who could wonder that I grieve while I pour over reminiscences made sacred by communion of nineteen years, shared alike by mother and child, as a treasure too holy for earths cement.”<sup>115</sup>

Brandon was convinced that God was “infinite and man finite” and she believed in the “eternal power of God.” Yet her grief still remained. In her sorrow, however she

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<sup>113</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, July 28, 1858, November 27, 1860, February 21, 1861, Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, transcript in author’s possession.

<sup>114</sup> Josephine was born on September 30 1841 in Georgia and she died in Gainesville, Cherokee county Ala on the 30<sup>th</sup> of October 1860. Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, September 30, 1860, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>115</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, September 30, 1860, Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, SPR262, ADAH.

turned again to her religion stating, “Ah! My beloved children were it not for divine revelation and the inspiration of faith in the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ I should be enveloped in a thicker gloom than was ever revealed by heathen mythology, for in the language of Byron my soul would be dark.” While she believed that God was in control and it was her duty to resign herself to His will that did not keep her from questioning, “why did she [her daughter] have to leave the world?” She firmly believed that “God has caused our dear Josephine to pass away” and she took comfort in her belief that Josephine was “safe in heaven.” Shortly after her inquiry as to why her daughter died, she comforted herself with the assurance, “but to this conclusion I must, I will come that whatsoever God does is right.”<sup>116</sup> After discussing the death of a friend Rebecca Vasser concluded that, “I am determined henceforth to believe that all things are for the best”<sup>117</sup> Hence, women in Alabama used their religious beliefs to cope with death and to sort through the uncertainty and uncontrolled events of life on a daily basis.

Other women, however, were unable to cope with the pain caused by the death of their loved ones. Gillis, for example, recorded in her diary the “deep deep sadness” that filled her heart because of her mother’s death and prayed, “God, my God, deliver me – if only by death.” She longed to join her mother in heaven, but was concerned for her children if she were taken. She feared that she was not a “good Christian,” because of how much she missed her mother and how often she question her death. In trying to cope with her loss she noted that people “constantly question Providence,” but this did not

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., January 8, 1861, February 4, 1861, February 15, 1861.

<sup>117</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, January 7, 1857, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Rare Book, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Nicholas Perkins Library, Duke University.

keep her from doing so as she continued to express her personal struggle exclaiming “Oh! God why was my mother taken.” She reflected on how “different all things would be” and how much pleasure her family would have had if her mother had lived. Yet she also believed that, her loss was her mother’s gain and she should “not murmur.” Her mother’s trials here were great, but now she was at peace and “enjoying her reward, in the blissful pleasures of Heaven.” Hence she attempted to cope with the loss of her mother by convincing herself that her death was for her own good and had brought peace and happiness to her mother. It was not easy for her to let her mother go, and later in her life when she faced the prospect of her husband’s death she felt that it was more than she could bear. She felt as though she had been “sufficiently humbled” because God took not only her mother but now was taking her husband also. While she claimed, “Oh! I cannot, cannot stand to give him up” she also rested in the assurance that “God knows best and I trust in His wisdom.”<sup>118</sup>

While most women viewed death as merely a natural part of life they occasionally believed that death could actually be a form of chastisement. When writing about a man who died from severe burns, Vasser stated that she hoped his parents would “feel this chastening work in their hearts and kiss the hand that wields the rod.”<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, February 4, 1860, March 11, 1860, June 22, 1860, June 26, 1864, Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>119</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, January 7, 1857, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Rare Book, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Nicholas Perkins Library, Duke University.

Throughout the Civil War death became a part of everyday life for Alabama women. While they recorded deaths and burials, conceptualized heaven, extolled the cause for which their loved ones had died, attempted to comfort each other, and struggled to accept what they viewed as the will of God, their firm conviction that God was in control of the events that were taking place around them helped sustain them through their trials. He held a master plan for the world in which they lived. If they believed that every event in the world was completely random and uncontrolled, they would have had a harder time coping with the complete turmoil and chaos that they experienced. Their religious beliefs provided them with a constant in their lives. Their firm conviction in life after death meant that while they experienced untold hardships during their lifetime all of that would be worth it because of the promise of a reward and perfect bliss after death which, while their suffering on earth was temporary, would be eternal. As with other areas of their lives, religion proved to be a mainstay and the pillar of support for Alabama women in dealing with death.

## Chapter 6 “This is a Dreary World of Change and Uncertainty:” Discouragement, Defeat, and Confederate Identity

The role of women in the defeat of the Confederacy is a subject greatly debated by historians. External collapse theorists, many of whom in the beginning were Civil War veterans themselves, argued initially that the Confederacy was defeated militarily – overpowered by the superior resources and military power of the North. Heavily influenced by the Vietnam War, internal collapse theorists responded that the Civil War was not lost on the battlefield, but instead was decided at home, in part because of women. When they wrote of their trials and tribulations to their soldiers in the field, according to this interpretation, men voted with their feet and deserted from the Confederate army to return to their wives, mothers, sisters, and other loved ones.<sup>1</sup> Other historians particularly blamed Confederate President Jefferson Davis as well because of

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<sup>1</sup> Emory M. Thomas, *The Confederate Nation: 1861-1865* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979); Paul D. Escott, *After Secession: Jefferson Davis and the Failure of Confederate Nationalism* (Louisiana State University Press, 1978; Louisiana Paperback Edition, 1992); David Williams, *Rich Man's War: Class, Cast, and Confederate Defeat in the Lower Chattahoochee Valley* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998); Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); George Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989). Walter Fleming's *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama* (Cleveland: Macmillan Company, 1911), provides an outdated overview of the social and economic conditions during the war. H. E. Sterkx, *Partners in Rebellion: Alabama Women in the Civil War* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 1970) focuses specifically on the role that Alabama women played throughout the war.

his inability to respond to the problems that the common people of the Confederacy including women faced. Historian Paul Escott pointedly argued that before the North militarily defeated the South, “the Confederacy was collapsing from within” and that Davis’s greatest failure in leadership “lay in the domestic arena, in his ability to create the internal unity and spirit essential for the growth of Confederate nationalism.”<sup>2</sup> David Williams, taking the same view but from the bottom up, examined the Chattahoochee Valley and claimed that the policies of the government led many poor people to feel as though they were fighting a “rich man’s war.”<sup>3</sup>

Two of the most prominent historians of women in the Civil War, Drew Gilpin Faust and George Rable, took a similar, internalist approach to their examinations of Civil War women. They claimed that while elite white Southern women initially supported the Confederacy, they became overwhelmed by the course of the war and grew disillusioned. Through their petitions to their husbands and loved ones to return home, as well as their lamentations about the lack of relief from the government, they contributed

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<sup>2</sup> Escott, *After Secession*, ix-x, 68, 74, 99, 180, 191, 215, 272.

<sup>3</sup> As a young soldier stated in 1862 the war was a “rich man’s war and a poor man’s fight, at best.” Williams, *Rich Man’s War*, quotation from page 195, 24, 28, 53, 185-86; Escott, *After Secession*, 128; Stephen V. Ash, *When the Yankees Came: Conflict and Chaos in the Occupied South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 3; Jon L. Wakelyn, ed., *Confederate Against the Confederacy: Essays on Leadership and Loyalty* (London: Praeger, 2002); Richard E. Beringer, Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones, William N. Still, Jr., *The Elements of Confederate Defeat: Nationalism, War Aims, and Religion* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 425; Richard E. Beringer, Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones, William N. Still, Jr., *Why The South Lost the Civil War*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986).



to the downfall of the Confederacy.<sup>4</sup> More recently, however, historians such as William Blair and Gary Gallagher revived at least a neo-externalist interpretation that did not focus on women. They and others maintain that the question to really be asked, is how the Confederacy held on for as long as it did, given not only the military superiority of the war but also the ways in which the war aims changed and slavery was undermined.<sup>5</sup>

When examining the Confederacy, its women, and its demise, it is also necessary to make the essential distinction that Anne Sarah Rubin has made, that the Confederate *state* and the *idea* of the Confederacy were two separate entities. Many Southerners, as

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<sup>4</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*; Rable, *Civil Wars*; Ash discusses the ways in which women became upset with the actions of the Northern soldiers. Ash, *When the Yankees Came*, 53.

<sup>5</sup> William Blair, *Virginia's Private War: Feeding Body and Soul in the Confederacy, 1861-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Anne Sarah Rubin, *A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861-1868* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Gary W. Gallagher, *The Confederate War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). By the 1990s, influenced by the Vietnam War and Cold War, many historians accepted a view of Southern defeat that emphasized a "failure of national heart" (Blair, 3) rather than military defeat. Blair however, argues that Confederate nationalism was real and many of the common people supported the government. Agreeing with James McPherson that ideology was central to the Confederacy, Blair argues that rather than losing the war because of a lack of nationalism and a will to fight, until the end of 1864, "when the pressure of the Union army and the lack of resources finally took their toll on the spirits of all but the heartiest souls" (4), the Confederacy maintained a resolve that was strong enough to win the war. Using a chronological approach, Blair builds upon the unity and interconnectedness of communities in Virginia and demonstrates that discontent arose as shortages caused by the war created dissolution, which peaked in 1863. Yet, while other scholars such as Escott and Williams emphasize the opposition to regulations from people who felt that governmental control undermined states rights, Blair argues that many people welcomed regulations to provide order and stability. Rather than presenting a "rich man's war and a poor man's fight" (Williams, 195), Blair shows that by ending substitution and providing price controls, the Confederate government pushed the war toward a "rich man's fight" (81). Blair's analysis of Confederate identity in Virginia shows the ways in which the war defined Confederate identity. Virginian's perceptions of Union troops as the barbarous antithesis of Southern honor helped create a collective Confederate identity that combined local and national ties.

noted in the previous chapter, easily and quickly shifted their loyalty to the Confederacy from the Union in 1861, when the state was little more than a blueprint. Women thus could become discouraged with the actions of the Confederate government without rejecting the overall cause. Indeed, the women examined in this study ardently supported the Confederacy, and encouraged their men to fight to protect the ideals for which the South stood. The war did create internal conflict for many as they strove to live up to patriotic as well as traditional expectations while at the same time intensely hoping that the war would end and that their loved ones would return home. Loneliness tested women's loyalty to the Confederacy and caused discouragement. Many commented on the physical hardships of the war and the actions of the Confederate government.<sup>6</sup>

Women increasingly voiced their complaints in their diaries and in their letters, referring to it as "unholy," "cruel," and "terrible."<sup>7</sup> Their sense of discouragement, however, was different than the disillusionment that Faust and Rable present. Women still believed in

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<sup>6</sup> Lizzie to Anna Mercur, Eufaula Alabama, December 17, 1860, Anna Mercur Papers #751-z, SHC-UNC; Helen Swift to Anna Mercur, Eufaula Alabama, March 16, 1861, Anna Mercur Papers #751-z, SHC-UNC; Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, September 30, 1860, January 8, 1861, SPR262, April 25, 1861, August 21, 1861, ADAH; Elodie to Dawson, Selma, September 22, 1861, December 8, 1861, April 15, 1862, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, April 26, 1861, SPR2 ADAH; Rubin, *A Shattered Nation*, 1-3; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (New York: Verso, 2006); Jason Phillips, *Diehard Rebels: The Confederate Culture of Invincibility* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 116-146.

<sup>7</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, August 21, 1861, May 29, 1864, June 17, 1864, SPR262, ADAH; Elodie to Dawson, Selma July 23, 1861, September 22, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC; Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, June 1, 1861, February 13, 1861, February 18, 1861, February 19, 1861, February 20, 1861, June 1, 1861, Elizabeth Rhodes Diaries, transcripts in author's possession; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, July 25, 1863, SPR2 ADAH; Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, September 12, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC.

the principles that had defined them in the antebellum years, had driven them to support secession, and sustained them throughout the war itself. In fact, defeat in many ways actually strengthened the sense of Confederate identity many women felt as Jacqueline Campbell has persuasively argued. In justifying the Confederacy throughout the war, they rationalized and validated the cause for which they and their loved ones had sacrificed so dearly. Were they to reject it they would, in fact, be turning their back on not only their own personal sacrifice, but also the sacrifice of their loved ones.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Jacqueline Glass Campbell, *When Sherman Marched North from the Sea: Resistance on the Confederate Home Front* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 69-71, 105. See also Faust, *Mothers of Invention*; Rable, *Civil Wars*. Rod Andrew Jr. argues for a similar process in the life of Wade Hampton, who spent his life after the war trying to achieve self-justification and vindication for his efforts supporting the Confederacy and the Old South. Andrew sees the process beginning during the war itself. See his *Wade Hampton: Confederate Warrior to Southern Redemption* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), xiv. He wrote, “hundreds of thousands of southerners still deeply grieved the loss of loved ones. Reflecting on such themes as wasted sacrifices and misguided causes could bring no comfort. To most, denying that the cause had been noble or asserting that the sacrifice of life had no moral value would be akin to spitting on their loved ones’ graves. Only praise for the virtues of the dead and their cause could bring ‘consolation’” (249). “With his hometown in ruins and his father’s estate in ashes, there was little felt for other than vengeance, duty, and honor, and the memory of lost loved ones” (267). With the end of the war he continued his “search for redemption and vindication – an unending determination to vindicate the honor of his state, the Confederate cause, and his dead comrades, and to refute his enemies’ portrayal of him as a ‘moral and financial bankrupt’” (306). “Clearly, the Lost Cause could be part of a political argument, but it was also a statement by which Hampton sought personal and collective vindication for himself and those who had fought alongside him” (323). Many of the sentiments that became known as part of the Lost Cause were present in the wartime writings of the women examined here. According to historians such as Gaines Foster and Charles Reagan Wilson, among others, it was out of the chaos of defeat that the Lost Cause mythology sprang up as not only a means of continued rebellion, but also as a method through which the defeat of the Confederacy could be explained and faced. See Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980); Karen L. Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003); Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence*

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While the white women examined in this study supported the ideas behind the Confederacy and continued to advocate the justice of the Confederate cause, they also wrote in various ways about their new government. While some commented favorably, women were more likely to write about their belief in the idea of the Confederacy even as they complained about the actions taken in Richmond.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the same women who so vocally expressed their devotion to the Confederate cause and belief in its invincibility were also the ones who voiced the most negative views of the government controlling the Confederacy.

Most openly and consistently supported the Davis administration. Kate Cumming lamented that the “poor government is blamed for every thing. I have many a time heard it charged with faults which I thought were owing to subordinate officers.”<sup>10</sup> Others reprimanded their loved ones for opposing governmental policies. M. E. Thompson reproved her son for challenging the president. Challenging authority went against his

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*of the New South, 1865 to 1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2001); Gary W. Gallagher, “Battlefields, the Lost Cause, and the Legacy of the Civil War,” in Gary W. Gallagher, *Lee and His Generals in War and Memory* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998): 264-83; Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan, eds., *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>9</sup> Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, 21, 84.

<sup>10</sup> Kate Cumming, August 3, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

early teaching, she said, which emphasized the sacredness of all governmental offices.<sup>11</sup> Writing to her husband about the first Conscription Act, Elodie Dawson chastised him for being in “such a bad humor with Congress.” She agreed with him that the bill was “very unjust,” but believed that it was better to sacrifice now because the men were “so much needed” rather than “to suffer forever, from the Tyranny of the North.” She then continued that “if the Government think it for the good of our country to take such a step we must not turn against our President, but try and help him as much as we can, and if in no other way, bear cheerfully this new trial.”<sup>12</sup> While she did not want Nathaniel to reenlist in the army, she also realized that sacrifice would be needed for the Confederacy to be victorious.

Sarah Espy thus was almost alone among the women examined in believing that the Confederate government was not concerned with the people, largely because of the conscription laws it passed.<sup>13</sup> Yet, even in her frustration with the policy, she claimed to be looking out for the good of the nation, fearing that conscription would undermine civilian morale. None of the women examined in this study opposed it from the beginning as vocally as did Espy, who wrote that, “the conscription law seems a hard one; it takes all between the ages of 18 and 45, not considering infirmities.” She was particularly upset over the fact that a local unnamed eighteen-year-old boy was forced

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<sup>11</sup> M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, January 2, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

<sup>12</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Selma, April 15, 1862, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

<sup>13</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, September 12, 1862, SPR2 ADAH; Thomas, *The Confederate Nation*, 193-96, 204-05, 223; Escott, *After Secession*, x, 99; Rable, *Civil Wars*, 146.

into service in the Confederate army even though he was so ill he that he “looks like death.... there is a great deal of dissatisfaction in the country, about it” she complained, and then added that it would not surprise her if they were to have a “rebellion among ourselves.” She was convinced that the Confederate congress was “headstrong” and cared more “for their own interest than that of their country.” A few months later she became even more upset when she learned that the age for the draft had been lowered to seventeen, because she knew that her youngest son eventually might have to fight.<sup>14</sup>

Espy also lamented what she saw as other rampantly unfair policies in the government, and believed that they would lead to similar problems. She wrote “I suppose there never could be, more corruption in any Government than in this, tho’ in its infancy; such laws as Congress has passed can only produce a revolution among ourselves. I do not look for anything else.” Although in actuality to be exempted from the draft a person had to own twenty slaves or more, Espy’s commentary on the “Twenty Negro Law” incorrectly proclaimed that “a man who owns 6 slaves is exempt from military duty, and they have given themselves a salary of \$900 a month as badly pressed as we are to support the war, and uphold the Infant Government.” She was also enraged about the grain tax of ten percent of crops and the impressment of food by the Confederate government, noting that they were not policies that endeared the government to the people of the South.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, September 12, 1862, February 8, 1863, March 10, 1864, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., November 1, 1862, November 25, 1863, December 14, 1864.

By the beginning of 1864, Espy was writing of her disdain for the way some individuals were acting as well. She recorded how a man came pretending to be a government agent and tried to get a steer from her; she refused to give it to him. She later found out that he was a “con man,” and added that she would rather have the Yankees have her cattle than such a man.<sup>16</sup> While the majority of historical discussion surrounding disillusionment with the Confederate government focuses on conscription and other direct actions taken by the government, some women lamented its lack of action in other areas. Kate Cumming, for example, commented on the dearth of chaplains in the field and felt that the government was remiss in not providing enough of them.<sup>17</sup> Yet while women commented negatively on the actions taken in Richmond, they nonetheless still ardently supported the broader Confederate cause. Even Espy, who most actively voiced her disgust with specific actions of the government, continued to write about her support for the Confederacy even as late as 1865.<sup>18</sup> While women became discouraged by the ineffectiveness of their leaders, in short, they simultaneously remained firmly rooted in their belief in the Confederate cause.

Faith in the invincibility of the Confederacy was also evident in the conviction that Europe must eventually support it. Some of the women examined here strongly believed that the European powers would intervene because of the importance of cotton. Early on in the war, Elodie Dawson expressed the common hope that England and France would suffer from the lack of Southern cotton. She confessed that “I have little patience

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., February 9, 1864.

<sup>17</sup> Kate Cumming, September 3, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>18</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, February 3, 1865, SPR2 ADAH.

left, and wish we could take our time in allowing them to have Cotton, when their necessity forces them to recognize the Confederate States. I hope they will pay for their tardiness in giving an enormous price.”<sup>19</sup> By the beginning of 1862, M. E. Thompson expected that England would help the Confederacy and open its ports. She was firmly convinced that if England would support the Confederacy the Yankees would be the ones who would be subjugated.<sup>20</sup> In 1863, Kate Cumming related to her diary her confidence that “if Great Britain is base enough to keep back from giving us aid, from the motive imputed to her, her day of reckoning will surely come.”<sup>21</sup> As late as 1865, Sarah Espy still held out hope that England, France, and Spain would recognize the Confederacy.<sup>22</sup>

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Loneliness factored greatly into the discouragement women increasingly experienced. Some women faced separation from their husbands before the outbreak of the war, but that did not make wartime separation any easier.<sup>23</sup> As early as the end of the

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<sup>19</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Selma, January 12, 1862, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, February 4, 1863, SPR2 ADAH; Kate Cumming, May 1, 1865, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>20</sup> M. E. Thompson to her sons, Marion, January 1, 1862, M. E. Thompson to Joe Thompson, Marion, December 22, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

<sup>21</sup> Kate Cumming, November 29, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>22</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, February 3, 1865, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>23</sup> See for example Martha M. Jones to Samuel H. Jones, Tuscaloosa County Alabama, May 20th 1860, Martha M. Jones Papers, Duke. Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy



first year of the war, some women revealed their weariness at being separated from their loved ones. Elodie Dawson described “many trying privations and trials” that left her “feeling sad, lonely, and anxious.” She wrote to Nathaniel, “You write me to be more cheerful and look on the brighter side. I look straight forward as far as I can and all around and above and yet all looks gloomy and dark.” She was willing to “sacrifice gladly” for the cause of the Confederacy, but believed that the price was a high one to pay. Confederate independence would provide “poor and sad enjoyment” when it cost the lives of so many who were dear to her, yet she knew she must resign herself to “sacrifice gladly.” She continued that she had “been complementing [herself] upon bearing so bravely” in his absence, which she believed did nothing except strengthen her love for him. Even though she wanted to give up, she did not. While she missed him greatly, she admitted that she “could not love [him] if [he] had staid home content to remain inactive at such a moment.” Although she tried to grow accustomed to Nathaniel’s absence, she occasionally struggled against the “old feeling of rebellion against my fate.” She often turned to his letters to dispel her gloom, raise her spirits and cheer her “almost to great bravery and my old patriotism.” She believed that she took the “cares and troubles” of the world and of her lover’s absence “to heart too much,” lamenting that she had desperately tried to drive them away. She added, however, that she did not despair but hoped that “soon the silver lining of the dark cloud now hanging o’er us, will be visible, and we will

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Diary, December 31, 1860, January 1, 1861, February 16, 1861, February 18, 1861, February 19, 1861, May 8, 1862, SPR2 ADAH. Later, writing of her widowhood, she prayed, “May the great and compassionate Being be with us in our desolation and keep us from all evil. If only one of my brothers was alive, how much strength would it be to me” (March 23, 1861). See also Elodie to Dawson, Marengo August 24, 1861, Selma, September 1, 1861, November 9, 1861, November 17, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

be able to recognize the good intended by our trials and I know I am doing wrong to murmur so much against them.”<sup>24</sup>

Yet she also admitted that she was selfish enough to “prefer others” to make the sacrifice rather than themselves, while at the same time attempting to “bear up cheerfully” and sacrifice for the Confederacy. Almost ready to break into tears because of the long absence of her lover, she claimed that she refrained from crying because she knew it was her duty to be brave and it would not be like her to give way to tears. “My patriotism is only resting!” she then exclaimed, in order to prove that she truly was committed to the Confederate cause and was willing to endure any sacrifice necessary.<sup>25</sup>

Married women wrote of missing their husbands as the burden of running the household and family farm or plantation fell solely to them. When they felt as though they could no longer bear the separation, they took comfort in their beliefs. One woman stated that although the separation was painful she would not wish her fiancée back with her when she knew that he was needed for such a cause. Writing of her son’s absence, M. E. Thompson determined to “not murmur,” stating that “the spirit of determination does not flag, but increase under every obstacle.”<sup>26</sup> Elodie Dawson believed that “we must

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<sup>24</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Marengo July 28, 1861, July 7, 1861, August 4, 1861, August 19, 1861, Elodie to Dawson, Selma, September 15, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, Selma, March 16, 1862.

<sup>26</sup> M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, July 7, 1861, July 22, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Elodie to Dawson, Selma May 27, 1861, July 28, 1861, July 14, 1861, September 29, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC; M. Jelks to her sister, Uchee Russell County, Alabama, November 9, 1862, Louisa M. Jelks Sills Papers, Duke; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, July 19, 1863, SPR5, ADAH; Mattie C. Treadwell to E. W. Treadwell, September 29, 1861, E. W. Treadwell Papers, Duke.

conquer no matter what it costs” and “one does not suffer more than another for we all have to make sacrifices.”<sup>27</sup>

Mattie Treadwell also wished that her husband was at home, but at the same time felt guilty for “indulging in such thoughts” when her “Country demands a sacrifice of all of her children and I feel that I ought to make it willingly and cheerfully and God giving me strength I will try to do my duty in the present crisis of our dear bleeding Country.” She then added, that even though she had hoped for peace she now gave up that hope. She realized that “the present conflict will be long and bloody and many happy hearts and homes be made desolate ere we gain the boon for which we fight - Freedom and Liberty.”<sup>28</sup> While her words bespoke discouragement, she quickly added, “that be as it may our cause is just and God will be with us in this our hour of need if we will only look unto him with faith and love.” Her belief in the Confederacy meant that she would have to sacrifice her husband’s physical presence, which tormented her, however, especially because of the fact that she was expecting her second child soon. In her distress she found comfort in her religion and in her belief that “our heavenly Father is with us and that he does all things for the good of those who love him and trust him.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Selma July 31, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC.

<sup>28</sup> Mattie C. Treadwell to E. W. Treadwell, October 27, 1861, E. W. Treadwell Papers, Duke.

<sup>29</sup> She wrote, “Oh! my dear husband how much consolation there is in the thought that our heavenly Father is with us and that he does all things for the good of those who love him and trust him - may he enable us to love him more and serve him better than we have ever done before - I want you to pray for me that I may live up to the discharge of my duty as a wife and mother. I feel that it will not be long until I shall become a mother a second time - oh how much I wish that you could be with me in that hour of trial and suffering. I do not know how I will bear your absence at such a time but I will try to bear

Elizabeth Rhodes mourned the prospect of a “long bloody war.” Yet she believed that if the war did not last too long the Confederacy would be at an advantage. It was high time that they bring “out our vast resources and a state of perfect Independence in not only name but reality,” because the South had “too long relied on the Yankees for almost everything.” While Rhodes longed for peace, recording that “the prayer of every southern heart should be a speedy peace,” it was not what the future held. The war would drag on for four years and eventually cost the lives of thousands of southerners. Rhodes was spared the personal loss of her husband because he did not join the military. Nevertheless, she believed that duty to country came first. When that duty meant separation from family and friends, she relied on God to bring about their safe return. When she faced problems in her life or had to deal with something, she turned to her belief in the omnipotence of God to ease her concerns. She did not wish to see her friends leave to fight, but resigned herself and those for which she had concern to “a kind merciful God” which allowed her to “feel that all will be well.” Her belief that God would protect her loved ones allowed her to deal with the harsh reality of the war. Shortly after her brother left she stated, “our prayers ascend daily to the God of battles to protect and defend him.” On the last day of 1861 she prayed that, “the close of the incoming year, find us better and our country in peace and happiness.”<sup>30</sup>

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it the best I can for your sake.” See Mattie C. Treadwell to E. W. Treadwell, October 27, 1861, E. W. Treadwell Papers, Duke.

<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, February 13, 1861, February 18, 1861, February 19, 1861, February 20, 1861, June 1, 1861, July 14, 1861, July 15, 1861, August 1, 1861, November 15, 1861, November 16, 1861, December 31, 1861, Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, transcripts in author’s possession.

As the year 1862 dawned, several women wondered what the upcoming year would bring, and faced it with trepidation. M. E. Thompson did not greet the new year with joy as she usually did because “the future is so uncertain for both their family and the nation and are anything but bright.” Yet in the face of troubles and trials, she turned to her belief that “there is a Power who has promised to be our friend and in whom we must trust” and she assured her sons that if they were there they could do nothing to alleviate her trials.<sup>31</sup> Margaret Gillis also reflected on the coming year and noted that the “old year has gone with its troubles and disappointments, but this new-year witnesses no cessation of our troubles. The war continues; each day revealing new horrors, and there is no grounds to hope for a speedy ending.” She then proceeded to lament the problems caused by Lincoln’s blockade and her fears for the soldiers in the field.<sup>32</sup> Sarah Davis noted that although they had to bear “a great many inconveniences” because of the war, her greatest wish was that she would not “live to see another lad in his last resting place.”<sup>33</sup>

Women such as Carrie Hunter were not afraid to confess to their diaries that “this is a dreary world of change and uncertainty.”<sup>34</sup> Margaret Gillis wondered, “will the silver lining of this dark dark cloud ever appear nothing but gloom and sorrow hangs around

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<sup>31</sup> M. E. Thompson to her sons, Marion, January 1, 1862, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke.

<sup>32</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, January 1, 1862, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>33</sup> Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, February 18, 1862, SPR113, ADAH.

<sup>34</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, May 7, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

now Oh! will it ever brighten?”<sup>35</sup> Some women tried to be cheerful but noted that “the heart cannot but feel sad, and cheerless while the dark clouds of sadness hang over us. Even nature lends her sympathy.”<sup>36</sup> By 1863, Mattie Treadwell wrote to her husband that she was “getting out of heart of ever seeing this war ended.” News that the Union army might raid the area “and destroy all that we have and starve us to death” caused many of the people around her to be “generally low spirited and despondent.” Yet, in an attempt to allay her fears, she added, “God only knows what we have yet to come through if I knew that such would be the case I would rejoice to see my little ones laid in the sold silent tomb before the time comes.”<sup>37</sup> Kate Cumming lamented that, “another year has commenced, alas! with bloodshed. When will it cease?” She turned to her religion for comfort and prayed, “May the God of hosts be with us!”<sup>38</sup>

Some, such as Eliza Corry, grew increasingly unable to bear the long separations from their husbands. She often “hoped against hope” that he would be able to come home and sometimes begged him to return. She wrote to her husband that although she tried to be cheerful and “think that the trouble will soon be over,” that hope quickly left her and she fell again in “the ‘Slough of Despond.’” She added that although she had been “a favored one among thousands of wives” because her husband had been stationed close to home for so long, she still lamented that “it was a bitter bitter drop in the cup of my

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<sup>35</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, July 8, 1862, Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>36</sup> Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, February 26, 1862, SPR113, ADAH.

<sup>37</sup> Mattie C. Treadwell to E. W. Treadwell, May 29, 1863, E. W. Treadwell Papers, Duke.

<sup>38</sup> Kate Cumming, January 2, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

unhappiness my husband, that you should be so far removed from me with such little means of communication between us.” Corry confessed that she did not believe she could “endure what many do” with having their loved ones always so far away and begged him to come home if he could possibly get a furlough.<sup>39</sup>

Espy likewise became so disheartened that she often felt like giving up. She again turned to her religion for support, praying “but may the Lord help us all.” Yet a few weeks later she lamented that she was “never more depressed in my life for it seems that nothing but ruin is before us. And what to do for the best I know not. O! that we were in some retired place where there was no inducement for the foe to come.” At the end of the year, she claimed that her wish of the last year that they would be no worse off was indeed a vain one.<sup>40</sup> At the beginning of 1865, Cumming lamented that “more woe and sorrow [is] in store for us!” Making a Biblical comparison, she exclaimed, “the Egyptian will not let us go!”<sup>41</sup>

While women referred to the war as unnatural and cruel from the beginning, the frequency of this reference increased as the tide turned against the Confederacy. By 1864 it had become far more common for women to express their desire for the war to end than it had been at the beginning of the war. Indeed, women steadily increasingly voiced their desire for the conflict to end until by the end of 1864 it was almost a constant comment in

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<sup>39</sup> Eliza Corry letter, September 3, 1864, December 4, 1863, December 18, 1863, February 26, 1865, Robert E. Corry Confederate Collection, 1857-1913, RG84, AU; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, September 28, 1863, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>40</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, July 13, 1864, August 1, 1864, December 31, 1864, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>41</sup> Kate Cumming, February 8, 1865, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

their diaries. “When will all of our dear relatives come home? And when will our poor prisoner boys be released poor fellows they must have a hard time, it requires courage to endure” Otey wondered.<sup>42</sup>

Zillah Brandon, however, continued to blame “this unholy war” on the North, which “under the rule of fanaticism annihilated all existing statutes, all vested right, all constitutional treaties in a word as said by one.” The goals of the Union stood “in opposition to all that is human and Divine” she believed. It was their fault that the country was at war, because it was “by the popular will of the North” that “the South had for many years been agitated by constantly decreasing privileges and encroachments” and “it is no great wonder that it last resisted” what many Southerners “considered down right monarchy.” She believed that the war was a result of personal ambition and exclaimed, “Oh that a termination of this unnatural was would come. Oh sin what hast thou wrought?”<sup>43</sup>

Margaret Gillis meanwhile noted that while “every one seems to look forward from one month to another to see something new” that would be able to “put a stop to this cruel war,” everything was still “enveloped in darkness and gloom.” She lamented that “all is still enveloped in darkness and gloom – no ray of hope penetrates the gloom,” as she and her loved ones were continually exposed to the “hated Yankees” who were

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<sup>42</sup> Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, September 12, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC.

<sup>43</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, May 29, 1864, June 17, 1864, SPR262, ADAH.



“gaining ground on us” as every “little success on our side is nearly always followed by a great victory on the Yankees side.”<sup>44</sup>

Kate Cumming too lamented that peace was still far away and that, “our land is drenched with the blood of martyrs!” She then implored, “Lord, turn not thy face from us, and save us, O, save us from this terrible scourge! ‘Let not our sins now cry against us for vengeance! Here us, Jehovah, for mercy imploring: from thy dread displeasure, I, bid us be free!’” Then, revealing her justification for the Confederacy she prayed “God grant that their lives have not been offered up in vain, and that the time is not far distant when triumphant peace will spread her wings over this now distracted land.”<sup>45</sup>

By 1865 some women believed they had taken all they could bear. They recorded their lamentations in their diaries, all the while still trying to submit themselves to what they believed was God’s will for their lives. Sarah Espy noted her deep depression because of the rumors of the enemy coming closer, yet rather than simply praying for peace, she ardently wished that the Lord would want it for them.<sup>46</sup> As far as she was concerned, the South would not have peace until God willed it. Margaret Gillis lamented that “as regards the war this seems the darkest time we have had” and she attributed that to the fact that “Pres. Davis against the views of almost ever other man in the Confederacy relieved Joseph E. Johnson from the command of the Tennessee Army and put Hood in his place; and all has gone wrong ever since till now the whole country

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<sup>44</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, February 9, 1864, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>45</sup> Kate Cumming, December 31, 1864, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>46</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, January 1, 1865, SPR2 ADAH.

nearly seems demoralized.”<sup>47</sup> Otey admitted that it “is hard to be truly patient and submissive to the will of God,” yet, as everything seemed to be crumbling down around she wrote that it was her daily prayer to “feel and to say ‘Thy will Oh God, be done.’”<sup>48</sup>

Even though many women wrote about their loneliness to their loved ones, it generally did not translate into support for desertion from the army. Only a few of them specifically discussed desertion. None mentioned it throughout 1861, and in 1862 it only merited brief comment. One soldier wrote to his “dear devoted wife” that if he were to pass through his home town he would be very tempted to desert.<sup>49</sup> Hunter wrote of a young man who became tired of soldiering and simply returned home to turn his attention to farming. Cumming wrote about how many of the men who had been wounded were getting furloughs to return home. By the end of 1863 Cumming recounted her sympathy and horror after a man who had pretended to be ill deserted and was subsequently captured because she knew he would be tried.<sup>50</sup> Espy wrote with great fear about deserters who not only resisted the law but also had already killed two local men. She added that the deserters were “plundering the secession party; this is what I have long

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<sup>47</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, January 22, 1865, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>48</sup> Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, February 8, 1865, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC.

<sup>49</sup> E. W. Treadwell to Mattie C. Treadwell, June 30, 1862, E. W. Treadwell Papers, Duke. For a discussion of the desertion of Alabama troops from the Confederacy see Bessie Marten, *A Rich Man's War, A Poor Man's Fight: Desertion of Alabama Troops from the Confederate Army* (Columbia University Press, 1932; Reprint, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003).

<sup>50</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, before June 22, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC; Kate Cumming, January 11, 1863, August 28, 1863, August 30, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

feared, that a tory party would be formed which will be more dreadful to us than the Yankees.” In 1864 Espy wrote about many desertions from the army. She also heard of a man deserting and joining the Union army, and noted that it did not surprise her because it was becoming a common occurrence.<sup>51</sup> Yet none of her family members deserted.

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While women were sometimes rather well informed on the major battles, particularly early on in the war, more often than not they received conflicting reports that worsened their distress. As the war progressed it became harder and harder for them to obtain accurate news. Indeed, the unreliability of news disturbed many and led them to not trust anything they heard. As Elodie Dawson lamented, “these Battles and rumored battles keep me miserable all the time and the changes so constantly being made, render it utterly impossible to keep me posted as to the whereabouts of my Brothers, or any one else with any degree of certainty.”<sup>52</sup> After recording a rumor of a Union victory, Otey

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<sup>51</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, January 12, 1863, February 2, 1863, January 24, 1864, July 30, 1864, SPR2 ADAH.

<sup>52</sup> Elodie to Dawson, Selma, April 15, 1862, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC; Elodie to Dawson, Marengo August 19, 1861, Elodie to Dawson, Selma, May 15, 1861, July 14, 1861, September 15, 1861, November 9, 1861, November 17, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC; Carrie Hunter Diary, September 28, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC; Annie Strudwick Diary, June 3, 1862, June 4, 1862, Annie Strudwick Diary and Letter # 1838, SHC-UNC; Rebecca Vasser Diary, September 22, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke; Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, February 18, 1862, SPR113, ADAH; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, June 22, 1860, SPR5, ADAH; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, May 20, 1862, SPR2 ADAH; Jason Phillips, *Diehard Rebels: The Confederate Culture of Invincibility* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 116-146.

added that, “nothing certain is known of the military movements.”<sup>53</sup> Women often related news of battles that never occurred. Espy, for example discussed her horror at receiving news of a battle supposedly fought at Corinth, Mississippi. Upon confirmation of the fallacy of this rumor she disgustedly wrote, “it seems there are people in our country whose only business is fabricate news.”<sup>54</sup> Throughout the war, other women oscillated from elation to despair as rumors from the front came to them. Rebecca Vasser hoped that the good news from Virginia was accurate and “till farther confirmation,” decided it was best to believe the news and to “thank God for this success.”<sup>55</sup>

As the war dragged on, and major battles were lost, some women became disheartened and tired. Living in constant fear did not help the morale of Confederates; as Octavia Otey noted, “it is hard to have to live this way.”<sup>56</sup> Upon hearing of the fall of Fort

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<sup>53</sup> Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, October 3, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, January 1, 1861, June 3, 1861, July 4, 1861, May 20, 1862, December 7, 1863, SPR2 ADAH; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, January 22, 1865, SPR5, ADAH; Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 9, 1863, SPR262, ADAH; Rebecca Vasser Diary, June 11, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

<sup>54</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, March 23, 1862, March 25, 1862, April 6, 1865, SPR2 ADAH; Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, March 3, 1862, SPR113, ADAH; Carrie Hunter Diary, June 30, 1862, in the Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC; Mary Warring Diary, April 10, 1865, ADAH; Kate Cumming, February 4, 1865, February 8, 1865, February 27, 1865, March 25, 1865, April 5, 1865, April 6, 1865, April 17, 1865, April 22, 1865, April 26, 1865, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*; Phillips, *Diehard Rebels*, 116-146.

<sup>55</sup> Rebecca Vasser Diary, September 11, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke; Carrie Hunter Diary, September 28, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC.

<sup>56</sup> Octavia Wyche Otey Diary, October 1, 1864, October 3, 1864, Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, SHC-UNC; Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, April 13-25, 1862, SPR113, ADAH; Eliza Bedford Weakley Papers, December 27, 1864, Eliza Bedford Weakley Papers #1605, SHC-UNC; Kate Cumming, April 8, 1862, December 25, 1864, Kate

Donelson, Margaret Gillis worried that it would demoralize the Confederates.<sup>57</sup> When

Sarah Davis heard those same and subsequent reports of the Northern incursions into the

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Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, July 6, 1860, July 13, 1860, March 19, 1861, March 5, 1862, January 31, 1863, June 9, 1863, December 31, 1863, July 30, 1864, August 1, 1864, September 7, 1864, September 12, 1864, October 22, 1864, December 7, 1864, December 14, 1864, SPR2 ADAH; Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, July 8, 1862, July 19, 1863, SPR5, ADAH; Carrie Hunter Diary, December 3, 1861, May 28, 1862, September 28, 1862, December 3, 1861, February 3, 1862, February 5, 1862, February 15, 1862, May 7, 1862, May 28, 1862, September 28, 1862, October 3, 1862, October 5, 1862, November 23, 1862, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC; Elodie to Dawson, Selma, May 19, 1861, June 12, 1861, June 16, 1861, July 14, 1861, July 23, 1861, August 4, 1861, September 15, 1861, November 9, 1861, March 16, 1862, April 15, 1862, April 15, 1862, September 4, 1864, Marengo August 24, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson Papers, 1851-1915 #210, SHC-UNC; Rebecca Vasser Diary, June 9, 1862, June 11, 1862, September 14, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke; Annie Strudwick Diary, April 6, 1862, April 10, 1862, April 12, 1862, April 16, 1862, June 10, 1862, Annie Strudwick Diary and Letter # 1838, SHC-UNC; M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, December 11, 1861, M. E. Thompson to Joe Thompson, Marion, December 22, 1861, M. E. Thompson to Elias Thompson, Marion, November 21, 1861, December 22, 1861, M. E.; Thompson to her sons, Marion, January 1, 1862, Marion, May 22, 1864, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke. Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, July 7, 1861; M. E. Thompson to Joe Thompson, Marion, August 30, 1861; M. E. Thompson to her son, Marion, July 7, 1861, M. E. Thompson to Joe Thompson, Marion, December 22, 1861, Benson-Thompson Family Papers, Duke; Mattie C. Treadwell to E. W. Treadwell, September 7, 1861, September 15, 1861, September 29, 1861, E. W. Treadwell Papers, Duke; E. W. Treadwell to Mattie C. Treadwell, Camp Jones, Huntsville, Alabama, September 9, 1861, E. W. Treadwell Papers, Duke; E. W. Treadwell to Mattie C. Treadwell, October 12, 1861, E. W. Treadwell Papers, Duke; Eliza Corry letter, December 4, 1863, December 18, 1863, September 3, 1864, February 26, 1865, Robert E. Corry Confederate Collection, 1857-1913, RG84, AU; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 116; Catherine Kerrison, *Claiming the Pen: Women and Intellectual Life in the Early American South* (London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 29-33.

<sup>57</sup> Gillis wrote of the fall of Fort Donelson to the Yankees, who were “fifty thousand strong” and who after “after three days of hard fighting killed and took prisoner twelve thousand of our noble boys among whom was my brother Jimmie and several cousins.” She believed that the news of the fall of Fort Donelson had severely damaged the moral of many Southern soldiers. She lamented the news that Nashville was “now in the hands of the detested foe.” Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, March 13, 1862, SPR5, ADAH. For more information on Fort Donelson and its role in the Civil War see,

South she noted that “gloomy indeed are the prospects of peace and liberty for us.”<sup>58</sup> Indeed these defeats essentially opened most of North Alabama up to the possibility of Union invasion.<sup>59</sup> At the beginning of 1863, Brandon firmly believed that “mercy surrounds us amidst our woes,” and “Freedom will yet find a home where my beloved children have lived and died exhibiting to the world the worth of virtue and patriotism.”<sup>60</sup>

The Confederate defeats at Gettysburg and Vicksburg in July of 1863, however, were particular causes for much distress, even as some initially hoped that these were nothing more than false rumors. When Sarah Espy heard the news, she wished that “this awful war could end!” Yet she realized that the “prospect is gloomy now.” She wrote despairingly that it seemed to her that the North was “straining every nerve to crush us” and right then and there the “death struggle is now to be made.” Rather than allow her fear to get the better of her, she also turned to her religious beliefs and prayed ardently, “Would an all-powerful God stand up for our help, they would yet be put to confusion but it seems he has given us over into the hand of our cruel foe.”<sup>61</sup>

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National Park Services U.S. Department of the Interior, Fort Donelson, <http://www.nps.gov/fodo/> (accessed September 20, 2008).

<sup>58</sup> Sarah Lowe Davis Diary, March 18, 1862, March 19, 1862, SPR113, ADAH.

<sup>59</sup> As Malcolm C. McMillan noted, “with the fall of Forts Henry and Donelson and the withdrawal of the Southern army from the field at Shiloh on April 7, 1862, all of North Alabama was open to invasion.” See his, *The Land Called Alabama* (Austin, TX: Steck-Vaughn Company, 1968), 205.

<sup>60</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 22, 1863, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>61</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, July 9, 1863, July 17, 1863, July 25, 1863, SPR2 ADAH.

Kate Cumming likewise lamented that “all looks gloomy; there is scarcely one bright spot to be seen. General Lee went into Pennsylvania, and had a desperate battle at Gettysburg.” She added that after “losing many of our best men, he was compelled to retreat.” All of these “disasters only serve to prolong the war; for I am certain that, happen what will, we will never be slaves to the foe.”<sup>62</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes meanwhile responded to the news by relying upon the “Ruler of the Universe” to “e’re long bring the most perfect order out of confusion and disorder.”<sup>63</sup>

Zillah Brandon’s sons fought at Gettysburg. Although devastated by the Confederate defeat, she emphasized the valor with which the Confederates had fought and claimed that there were “30,000 of their people” lost, which was “a vengeance of Heaven sent down as a just retribution for their crimes and cruelty.” While the defeats caused grave despair, she still believed that even in defeat the Confederates had done their duty and that God had chastised the North for its crimes against the Confederacy by allowing so many Union soldiers to die in the fight. In August she continued to lament that while the Confederacy was fighting for its liberty, the Union was straining every nerve to “engulf all their hellish passions craves.”<sup>64</sup> Although an “overwhelming torrent of the enemy has burst into the heart of our country” she clung to her conviction that those men who fought for the Confederacy in “Gods name stand invincible.”<sup>65</sup> By the end

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<sup>62</sup> Kate Cumming, July 9, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>63</sup> Elizabeth Rhodes Diary, July 8, 1863, Elizabeth Rhodes Diary.

<sup>64</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, August 22, 1863, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>65</sup> She continued, “but blessed be the name of our God that their savage barbarity is turned to naught by the brave men under Jackson The two Hills, Lee, Longstreet Bragg

of 1863, despite the Confederate defeats at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, Kate Cumming also firmly believed that although “Lincoln may get men to fill his last call,” if the “South is only true to herself, she can never be conquered,” then turning to her religious beliefs for comfort she quoted the verse, “The battle is not always to the strong.”<sup>66</sup>

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As the war progressed and turned against the Confederacy, women became more discouraged. Yet at the same time, they had sacrificed so much for the cause, including loved ones, that they could not turn their back on the Confederate nation even then. Many women instead increasingly commented on the barbarity of the North. As Campbell has argued for the women who experienced Sherman’s march in a first hand manner, many Confederate women saw a “direct link between the survival of their families and the survival of the nation; thus they could defend one in the name of both. These women understood that, together with their menfolk, they had a vital role in defending the institutions on which Southern society and its way of life depended.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, as they were threatened by the Union army and potential defeat of the Confederacy many of the elite women examined in this study turned to their sense of identity and belief in their cause to sustain them. By 1864, Brandon had such a vested interest in the Confederate cause

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Morgan, Forest, Wheeler and a score of others.” Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, January 22, 1863, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>66</sup> Kate Cumming, November 29, 1863, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>67</sup> Campbell, *When Sherman Marched North from the Sea*, 71.



because of the death of her two sons in the army that she wrote loathingly that the “enemy like an avalanche has spread over our while country Disregarding all rights social, religious and political.” She added that her family longed to preserve the Union so long as there was a possibility of “securing our rights” and “of saving ourselves from war,” however, “when every hope was destroyed they were loyal to our dear South to their hearts inmost core.” Once the North completely ignored all of the “grievances from the South” and “every privilege claimed by the South was indignantly spurned” each state “acting on its own sovereignty withdrew from the union.” Hence her family went out to defend the South against the “enemy” who had “like an avalanche has spread over our while country Disregarding all rights social, religious and political.”<sup>68</sup>

By the end of 1864, some women also had realized that the end of the Confederacy was near. Margaret Gillis recorded the fall of Atlanta and lamented the ways in which President Davis was handling the war. She also thought that the “whole country nearly seems demoralized.”<sup>69</sup> Zillah Brandon wrote of the horrors surrounding Sherman’s route of destruction through the South and used not only Biblical metaphors, but also comparisons to the siege of Troy. Apparently her daughter encountered Sherman, and he told her that God had authorized him to do what he did. The mother commented, “if I have any knowledge of what is taught in the seventh chapter of Revelations I should say he had rather received his authority from the ‘Beast’ to who he is giving his powers and strength for ‘one hour’.... It is very evident” she continued, “that such as Sherman and

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<sup>68</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, May 29, 1864, SPR262, ADAH; Rubin, *Shattered Nation*.

<sup>69</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, June 17, 1864, January 22, 1865, SPR5, ADAH.

Grant are two of those horse whose power is received from the beast who has issued from the bottomless pit. To whom with one mend they given their power and strength and will at last with the false prophets who works miracles in their sight be cast alive into a lake burning with brimstone. It is evident to my mind that Lincoln is one of the heads of the Beast and the above named two of the horns.”<sup>70</sup>

Two months later, Brandon continued to make historical comparisons, writing, “let the inquisitive read the horrors of the siege of Troy. The history of Jerusalem taken by Titus? The one may be found in Homer the other in Josephus... but if doings of a later date are preferred we have only to call you attention to al least forty hard fought battles and six hundred thousand lives lost, and expenses beyond numeration that attended this modern Pharo’s reign.”<sup>71</sup>

As the year 1865 dawned, Hunter felt as though the doom of the country was drawing in around her. She wrote of her general fear about the future and about the events that had taken place in the past year. By May of 1865, Hunter knew for certain that the “country’s doom” was “drawing in around” her.<sup>72</sup> Others clearly believed God was testing them, and they longed to be able to bear their burdens with humility. Kate Cumming, for example, noted toward the end of the war how a sermon on the text “Thy will be done” fell “upon our saddened ears with a mournful cadence.” She believed that “no matter what befell” them, it was their duty to “bow in meekness to ‘Him who doeth

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<sup>70</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, October 29, October 30, 1864, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., December 9, 1864.

<sup>72</sup> Carrie Hunter Diary, January 13, 1865, April 19, 1865, May 7, 1865, September 21, 1865, Cobb and Hunter Family Papers #1745, SHC-UNC;

all things well.” She added that she believed that the war had played out the way it had because of God’s greater plan, ““For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth: that the trial of our faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried by fire, might be found unto praise, and honor, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.... This is a severe ordeal” she concluded, but believed that God in His mercy would give them “comfort through it.” After hearing of the fall of Richmond, Cumming exclaimed, “I am not sorry, as I feel certain we shall never have peace until the enemy has possession of all our large towns, and then they will see that they have work still before them to conquer the South.”<sup>73</sup>

News remained challenging to receive. At one point Cumming wrote that a man had arrived claiming that the whole army had been captured, only to reveal that it was nothing more than a joke. Sarah Espy heard many different accounts as to what was taking place including one, which she did not believe, that Joseph Johnston had captured Sherman. While rumors of Lincoln’s assassination circulated, so too did claims that a French fleet had engaged in a battle with the Federal one and had taken New Orleans, and forced an armistice.<sup>74</sup>

Rumors flew, yet when women finally faced the reality of defeat, many reacted with complete disbelief and denial. There was no way that their nation, backed by God, could have been defeated by the sinful cruel Yankees. In the face of defeat it became

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<sup>73</sup> Kate Cumming, April 6, 1865, April 17, 1865, April 22, 1865, April 26, 1865, April 30, 1865, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*; Genovese, *Consuming Fire*, 32; Rebecca Vasser Diary, June 8, 1862, Rebecca Vasser Diary, Duke.

<sup>74</sup> Kate Cumming, April 6, 1865, April 17, 1865, April 22, 1865, April 26, 1865, April 30, 1865, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*; Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, April 6, 1865, SPR2 ADAH.

even more important for women to justify the cause for which they had sacrificed too much. When she received word of the Confederacy's defeat, Kate Cumming exclaimed, "I can not believe that we are subjugated, after enduring so much; but it is useless to be miserable about an uncertainty." After witnessing the returning of Confederate soldiers and hearing of Jefferson Davis's capture, she extolled his virtue and called him a true patriot. Yet she also added that, "the patriot is now a prisoner, for devotion to freedom and his country's good. He has the consolation of religion to support him, and also the consciousness of having done his duty to his country."<sup>75</sup>

When she heard the news of the downfall of the Confederacy, Sarah Espy reacted with mixed emotions. She tried to put a positive spin on the bad news by noting that if the terms of surrender were only that the Confederate states had to re-enter the Union, then it was not as bad as it could be. At the same time she still denied that the war could possibly really be over. Even when she saw soldiers passing by on their way home and it looked like the war really was over she feared that it was only a lull in the tempest.<sup>76</sup>

Reflecting on the fall of the Confederacy, Gillis wrote of the Union army coming into Selma in April, burning and looting. Her father took the stock out of harm's way as Gillis returned home from teaching and remained with the children. She was horrified that the invaders met with "no resistance from our flying demoralized cavalry." "Oh! I can never forget that week" she exclaimed. With her father gone trying to protect the stock, Gillis added that the "negroes were constantly running to us telling us tales of

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<sup>75</sup> Kate Cumming, April 13, 1862, April 26, 1865, May 7, 1865, May 14, 1865, Kate Cumming, *A Journal of Hospital Life*.

<sup>76</sup> Sarah Rodgers Rousseau Espy Diary, May 6, 1865, May 14, 1865, SPR2 ADAH.

barbarity and cruelty, such as stripping the women to find their valuables and whipping them and other things more barbarous.” Her misery was only slightly lessened by the fact that she claimed that God never allowed the Union army to reach her home, although they were “within a few miles of us all the time. We could look out ... and see the flames of burning.” Then came the final blow; “the *awful* news that we were subjugated, and our President in the hands of the enemy, and he is still a prisoner, his fate doubtful. Our property destroyed, negroes freed and no law or order. This is the present state of affairs my health became such that I could not teach any more, so I have been at Pa’s ever since And now our own family is quite broken up by death that ruthless invader.”<sup>77</sup>

The end of the war actually caused Mary Warring to again pick up her journal after a “lapse of two years” to record the events taking place around her. She placed a “firm trust in God,” and hoped that “our troubles will end speedily, so that we may all be united once more.” She did not desire a reunion with the North, but rather one with her loved ones. When she heard that the Spanish Fort had been evacuated she could not acknowledge it, but instead quickly set about to justify the cause for which many had given their lives. “Just one week today since the bombardment commenced,” she wrote, “and our *dear, gallant* men have fought hard and bravely. They certainly deserve our highest commendation and admiration, and all the encouragement we can heap upon them” and she still believed that they would “succeed in our noble cause.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Margaret Josephine Miles Gillis Diary, October 22, 1865, SPR5, ADAH.

<sup>78</sup> Mary Waring Diary, March 28, 1865, March 31, 1865, April 3, 1865, April 9, 1865, April 11, 1865, ADAH.

Brandon also wrote about the fall of the Confederacy. In 1864, she began promoting the idea that the North had an “overwhelming number of foreigners as allies.” She still believed at that time that with “Gods help” the North would be crushed. She added, “I speak confidently for I believe the Lord of Hosts is with us and will vanquish our enemies” because the Southerners had “humbly betaken themselves to the source from whence help has never failed to come.” Yet when the Confederacy did fall she did not lose her faith or question her belief that God had supported it. Because of the vested interest she had in the Confederate cause, due to the death of her two sons, she clung to her conviction in the noble uprighteousness of the Confederacy. She praised those who had fallen in service of their country and stated that “no eulogy [was] too grand to be annexed to the character of those noble men who stood by their officers, even when they realized our glorious cause was lost, like true soldiers fighting for our countrys rights the liberties of their wives and children and their own honor, while they were deserted by many of their own countrymen.” She continued, “What may we say of you loyal, dignified, independent Southerners. Your enemies may kill you but they have the souls of men they will yield to you their administration.”<sup>79</sup>

Brandon also demanded that anyone put forth a “parallel in history” that could match the “pious fortitude chivalrous heroism, aristocratic dignity” of the Confederacy and added that “even while dying” it remained strong and loyal to its Christian values. Prior to the war many had “passed a happy and brilliant life,” which was taken from many, as with her sons, who “died defending their country while invaded, threatened with

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<sup>79</sup> Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, June 17, 1864, July 6, 1865, SPR262, ADAH.

destruction insulted dishonored.”<sup>80</sup> She then continued, “though now crushed by overwhelming numbers despoiled of every right claimed by a free people, oppressed, driven by a storm that caused our country to founder, yet can not rob us of our birth right Truth and Honer,” and although “feel that we have been conquered by might rather than right we are not degraded.” Indeed, she felt that the “grand patriotism of 76 is burning in our souls as brightly as if it had been of this hours handling. We have just passed four years freighted with historic intrest where scenes of ruthless violence and sin has desecrated our soil, our people have been insulted our home pillaged our churches destroyed, and at last our leading men has yielded to superior force and to terms dictated by Federal officers whose record for Southern rights and privileges is only partly developed.” She then exclaimed, “God of Heaven and earth shield us from the spoilers forever; calm the storm that distracts us as a people. Lead us our Sheppard.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> She lost three children in the war, James Brandon, Hines Brandon, and Jerome DeArmond. See Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, July 6, 1865, SPR262, ADAH.

<sup>81</sup> She then continued, “I left the last chapter with the modern Hanibal and his confederates sustained by half a million of troops pressing upon General Lee in Richmond and General Johnson in Tennessee who with a few [men] that cling to their generals as their leaders with grand Loyalty continue continued to defend their country (and ours) while destruction and death overpowered them.” She lamented the “oppressive tax imposed by the Northern government is ruinious. Our rights as citizens are all taken from us, our ancient land marks are removed our states governed as Territories. Our sons denied the right to stand in the Cabinet, from as field as rulers A host of Civilians, statesmen and soldiers has been born and bred hire possessing the eloquence of Patrick Henry many with strong intellect and classical acquirements that would place them among the best writers of the nation. Our ancient zeal as Southern states was seatland before the union under her own legislators and holding our President as a common bond we only asserted the rights of a fee people; just such as God made us to be, through the promulgation, of sound morals in the exercise of the elective franchise.” Zillah Haynie Brandon Diary, July 6, 1865, SPR262, ADAH.

Thus, as the war ended women clung tenaciously to their sense of Confederate identity. They could not question the Confederate cause, even if they disagreed with some of the policies of the Confederate Government or President Jefferson Davis. In the end, women turned back to their religious beliefs to support and justify their belief in the Confederacy. Their faith provided a mainstay and a pillar of support in their times of turmoil and trouble. Everything in their world had changed, except their God. Their conviction that He was in control of the events taking place around them and had a plan for their lives helped many cope with the immediate aftermath of the Civil War.

While it is important to look at the different approaches to understanding the fall of the Confederacy, it is also essential to keep in mind that disillusionment with the policies of the Confederate government and a desire to see loved ones return did not automatically translate into the collapse of the Confederacy. The women examined in this study were willing to suffer any form of sacrifice for the Confederate cause. They became lonely and discouraged and sometimes questioned events taking place around them. While some might have momentarily felt utter and complete despair because of the war and the loss of their loved ones, they still ardently supported the Confederacy in order to validate, explain, and justify their suffering and sacrifice. As the war progressed, women increasingly vocalized their discontent with the absence of their loved ones and the hardships they faced, but at the same time, they believed that they should not feel that way that they were somehow failing in their Christian duty because of their complaints.

The white women in this study also voiced in a rudimentary manner what some historians have identified as part of the Lost Cause Mythology. Rather than springing from Confederate defeat, those sentiments were present in their wartime writings. As



Campbell has argued, the end of the war simply transformed white women's duty into the "rehabilitation of Southern men." The imagery portrayed of dedicated Southern women "fed into a Lost Cause rhetoric, a rhetoric that the North eventually came to embrace."<sup>82</sup> Thus the roots of the Lost Cause in wartime writings is an area that merits further study. Simply stated, if women rejected the Confederate cause, they were in essence, rejecting the years of sacrifice and the cause for which their loved ones had died. Hence, while women longed to see the war come to an end, none of the women examined here rejected the idea of the Confederacy.

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<sup>82</sup> Campbell, *When Sherman Marched North from the Sea*, 105.

## **Chapter 7 Conclusion**

The course of the Civil War had brought destruction and devastation to the lives of the elite white Alabama women examined in this study. They had witnessed their entire world as they knew it crumble around them. The very institution upon which their social order had been based was no longer present. Whiteness and privilege were still ingrained, but the question of what this would mean following the collapse of the Confederacy was open to debate. Yet as they worked through their sense of personal identity by writing about their lives in their diaries and letters, they left a valuable historical record of their thoughts and feelings during the era.

Women had ardently supported the idea of secession, even while hoping that it would not produce war. When war came, however, they struggled to reconcile their personal fears and concerns for the safety of their loved ones as well as themselves with the ideal that they and society set for womanhood. That image in many ways evolved as a result of the war. The women examined here were not closet feminists attempting to liberate themselves from the oppressive nature of the hierarchal patriarchal society of the Old South, but the departure of the vast majority of the male population upon whom they had depended for subsistence and protection mandated that they step up to the challenge and fill the roles vacated by the men in their lives, even if this simply meant that they felt the necessity to learn to fire a gun so that they could protect themselves from the Union soldiers. Yet at the same time, they did not view this as an opportunity for liberation. To

the contrary, they looked upon the new roles they were forced to fill as part of their patriotic duty to their families and to their country. Ironically, in Stephanie McCurry's words, "the protection of women – by which they meant white women – was at the heart of the Glorious Cause" and yet the actual course of the war necessitated that women sacrifice the right to protection.<sup>1</sup> Indeed not only were women required to sacrifice their traditional gender roles, which they did out of duty, but also as George Rable noted, "women's self-sacrifice for personally significant others – husbands, brothers, sons, family – was transformed into sacrifice of those individuals to an abstract and intangible 'Cause.' The effective redefinition of women's sacrifice from an emphasis on protection of family to a requirement for relinquishment of family was problematic enough to occupy a significant portion of Confederate discourse on gender."<sup>2</sup> The soldier's wife played an important role in the Confederacy.<sup>3</sup>

While women were willing to sacrifice for the Confederacy, the possibility that they would never again see their loved ones on earth led to anguish. In their trials women turned to the one constant in their lives, their religion. Religion had long provided their

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<sup>1</sup> Stephanie McCurry, "'The Soldier's Wife': White Women, the State, and the Politics of Protection in the Confederacy," in *Women and the Unstable State in Nineteenth-Century America*, edited by Alison M. Parker and Stephanie Cole (Arlington: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), 17, 30-31.

<sup>2</sup> George Rable, "'Missing in Action': Women of the Confederacy," in Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber eds. *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 176-177.

<sup>3</sup> McCurry, "'The Soldier's Wife,'" 15-16. Indeed, the concept of being a "Soldier's wife" carried with it a clearly political connotation. It "was not in any simple sense, a description of women's marital or social status; that it was, rather, a political identity occasioned by the war, and of considerable strategic value to yeomen and poor white women and their families." McCurry, "'The Soldier's Wife,'" 29.

mainstay and pillar of support for Southern white women and it comes as no surprise that when everything else around them was thrown into convulsions women became even more reliant on their belief that God controlled the events that were taking place around them. Indeed, the women examined in this study all firmly believed that not only did God control everything in the world, but that He also supported the Confederacy. Backed by God and the ideals of the American Revolution, they faced their uncertain troubled future with more assurance than otherwise possible. Yet, at the same time, their belief that they should never question the dictates of God also caused a great deal of strain in their lives, for they feared that they were failing to live up to the ideal and were somehow displeasing God if they questioned the events taking place around them.

As war followed secession they also faced the prospect of losing loved ones. Yet at the same time, this immediate connection with the battlefield and with those fighting actually strengthened their sense of Confederate identity. Through all of their struggles and even in the face of death they clung tenaciously to their firm conviction in the righteousness of their sons' and husbands' Confederacy. While they sometimes became discouraged and complained about the government, it did not translate into disillusionment or lead to the downfall of the Confederacy. Rather, women became more committed to the Confederacy as the war progressed. The more of a vested personal interest they had in the war, the stronger their sense of loyalty to the Confederacy became, as Jacqueline Campbell has argued. Hence in many ways, Confederate nationalism might actually have been at its height at the end of the war, which explains women's reactions of disbelief to the news of Confederate defeat. Unwilling to accept defeat, they continued to believe in the ideas for which the Confederacy stood and

continued to eulogize their dead and praise the sacrifice of those who had endured during the war as historians such as Rubin and Phillips have noted. Indeed, many of the ideas of the Lost Cause were merely a continuation of the wartime sense of Confederate identity and religious conviction held by elite white Alabama women.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jacqueline Glass Campbell, *When Sherman Marched North from the Sea: Resistance on the Confederate Home Front* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980); Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003); Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001); Gary W. Gallagher, *Lee and His Generals in War and Memory* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998); Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan, eds., *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Anne Sarah Rubin, *A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861-1868* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Jason Phillips, *Diehard Rebels: The Confederate Culture of Invincibility* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007).

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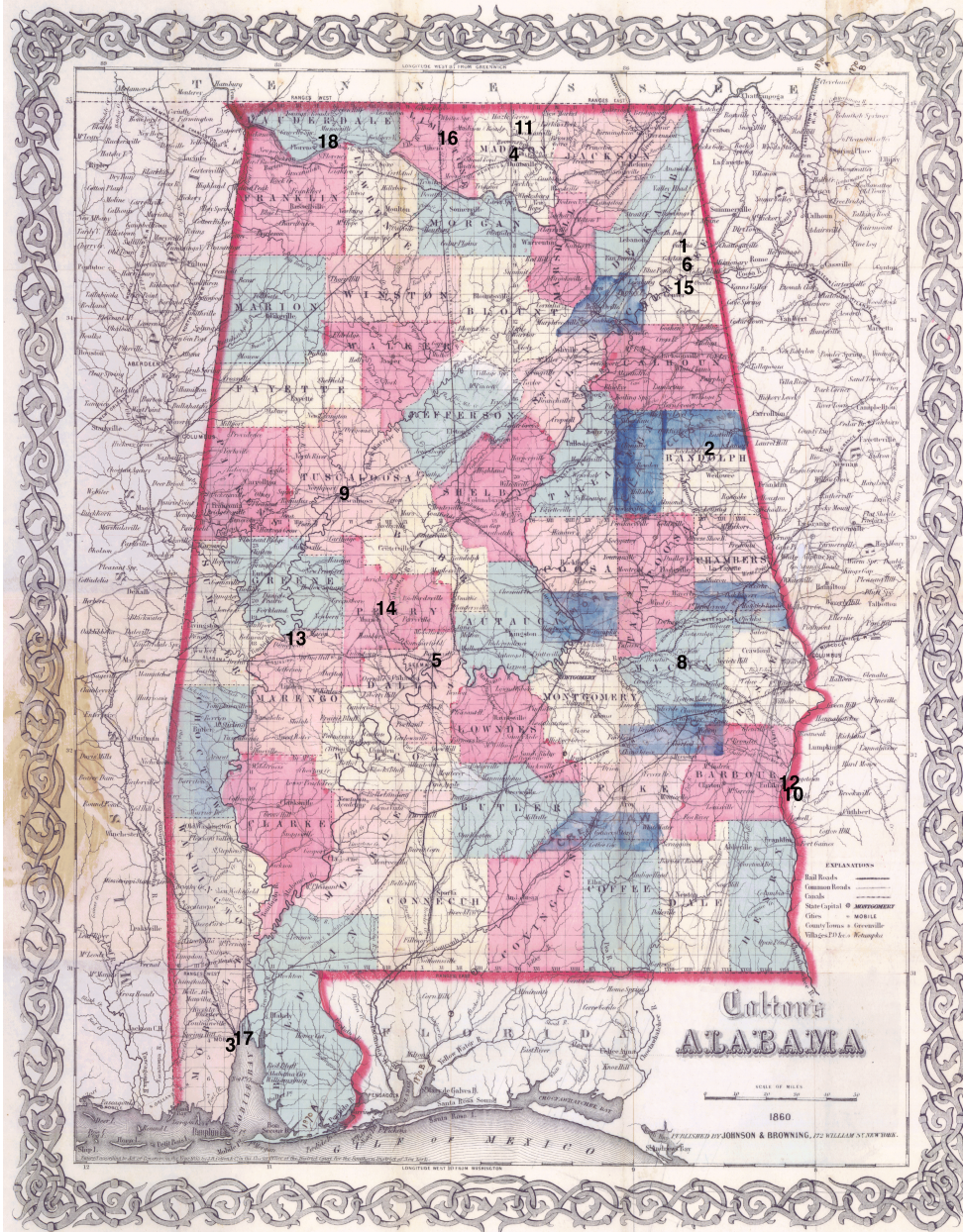
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<<http://www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk/works/novels/pirate.html>> Accessed January  
15, 2009.

## Appendix A – Maps

Map of Alabama in 1860  
See key on following page.



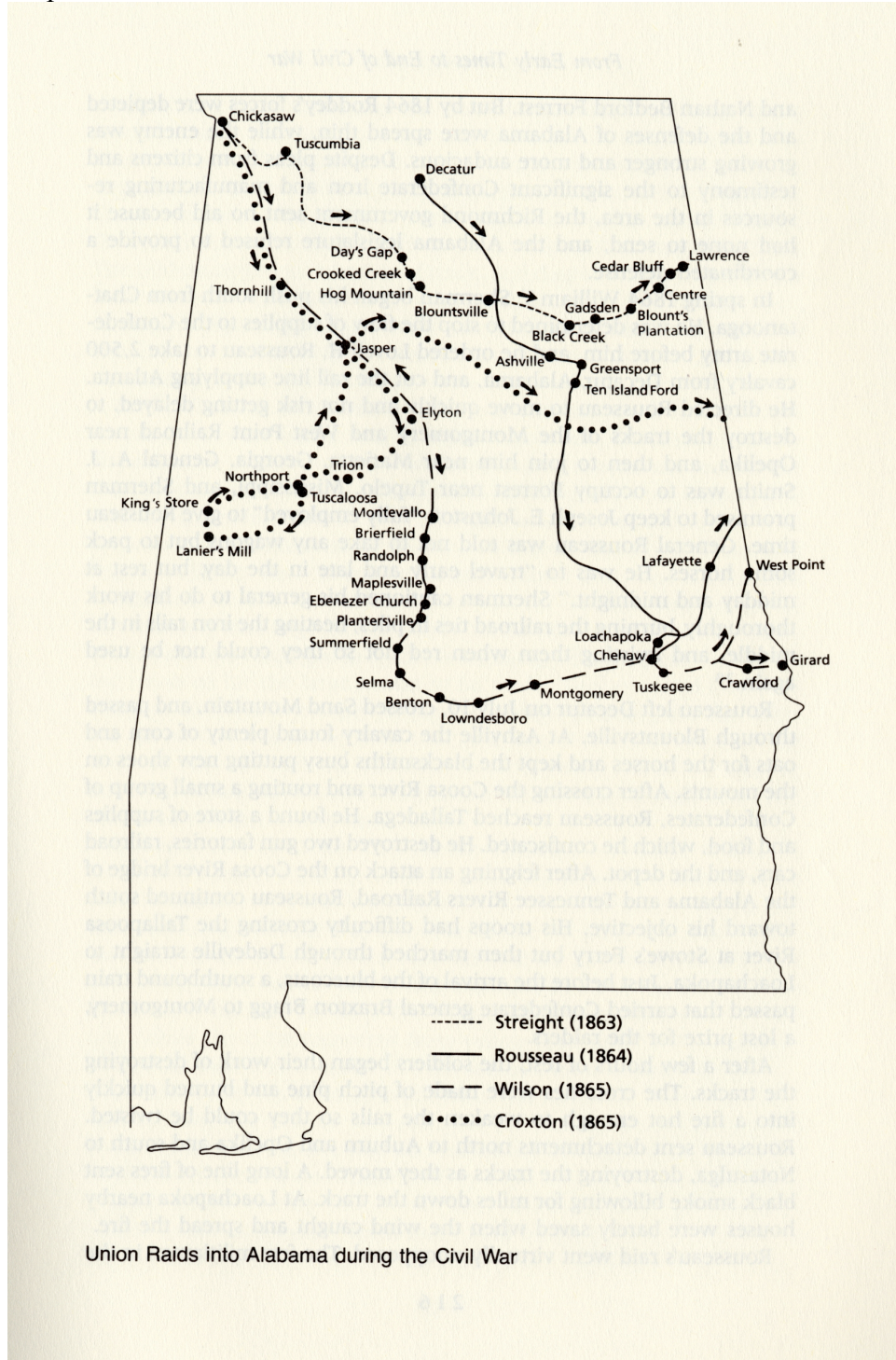
J. H. Colton, *Colton's Alabama* (New York: Johnson & Browning, 1860), courtesy of Historical Maps of Alabama, <http://alabamamaps.ua.edu>.

## Map Key

- 1 Zillah Brandon (Cherokee)
- 2 Eliza Corry (Roanoke, Randolph County)
- 3 Kate Cumming (Mobile)
- 4 Sarah Lowe Davis (Huntsville)
- 5 Elodie Dawson (Selma)
- 6 Sarah Espy (Cherokee)
- 7 Margaret Gillis (Uncertain)
- 8 Carrie Hunter (Tuskegee)
- 9 Martha Jones (Tuscaloosa)
- 10 Anna Mercur (Eufaula)
- 11 Octavia Otey (Meridianville, Madison County)
- 12 Elizabeth Rhodes (Eufaula)
- 13 Annie Strudwick (Demopolis, Marengo County)
- 14 M. E. Thompson (Marion)
- 15 Martha Treadwell (Cherokee)
- 16 Rebecca Vasser (Athens)
- 17 Mary Waring (Mobile)
- 18 Eliza Bedford Weekly (Florence, Lauderdale County)



## Map of Union Forces in Alabama



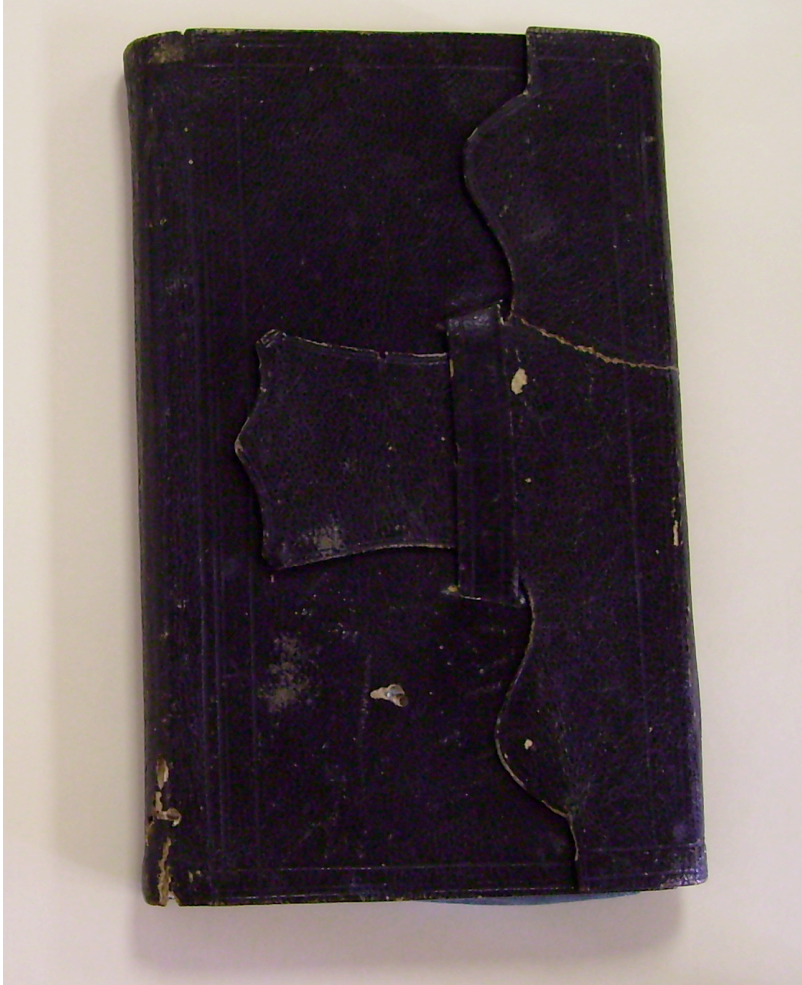
Map from William Warren Rodgers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt, *Alabama: The History of a Deep South State* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994), 215.





**Octavia Otey Diary**

Approximately six inches by four inches.



Octavia Otey Diary in Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

**Octavia Otey Diary**

Approximately eleven inches long by six or eight inches wide.



Octavia Otey Diary in Wyche and Otey Family Papers #1608, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.