

6-2013

# The Ideological Reconstruction of Southern Elite White Women Before During and After Reconstruction

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The Ideological Reconstruction of Southern Elite White Women Before, During  
and After Reconstruction

By  
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\* \* \* \* \*

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for  
Honors in the Departments of Political Science and History

UNION COLLEGE

June 2013

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**Abstract**

The purpose of my research is to reevaluate and extend the commonly understood time frame of Reconstruction by scholars to include Southern women's ideological Reconstruction as well as provide a particular perspective on women during this era, which is underdeveloped in literature. Elite, white women during the Civil War began a journey towards independence and involvement in the public sphere. This evolution occurred approximately fifteen years behind similar actions taken by Northern women; this paper attempts to explain this lag. Additionally, my research asserts that Southern women were forced in a sense to become independent during the Civil War while their men were fighting, once Reconstruction began, rather than publically asserting this independence instead retired into the private domestic sphere cultivating a different degree of independence until Northern subjugation was removed and women felt secure enough in their feminine role in society to move towards reform involvement. I have primarily used diaries written by women of this demographic during the Civil War and years following to show a specific ideological progression using their own words as evidence to support this thesis as well as various archives from women's groups.

## Chapter One

### Introduction

Eliza Frances Andrews was, in comparison to those of her elite class, a typical young woman in antebellum Georgia. Andrews was educated to the fullest extent deemed appropriate for a Southern belle at the seminary. Her free time was divided between parties, calling on (and being called upon) by acquaintances, and other social obligations. The institution of slavery allowed for Andrews, and women like her, to escape the domestic duties that many middle and lower class women had to perform themselves. Without this domestic labor tying women to the home they were allotted time for recreational purposes, such as diary writing.

The comfortable, leisurely lifestyle Andrews has grown up in was altered dramatically by the Civil War. When the discussion of secession arose, the Andrew's family, like many others, became divided over which side was legitimate in their claims. On one side of the national conflict there was the Confederacy made up of eventually the eleven states that seceded, and on the other side, the states that remained loyal to the Union. Andrews, along with her siblings, supported the Confederate cause, while their parents contrastingly were devout Unionists.

Andrews, who eventually became a published writer, kept a diary throughout the war and during Reconstruction. Her diary, throughout Reconstruction, became outlet for her anger about Union occupation, as federal policies was implemented around her. When reflecting on her journal later in life, during the 1900's, Andrews stated,

We look back with loving memory upon our past, as we look upon the grave of the beloved dead whom we mourn but would not recall. We glorify the men and the memories of those days and would have coming generation draw inspiration from them. We teach the children of the South to honor and revere the civilization of their fathers,

which we believe has perished not because it was evil or vicious in itself, but because, like a good and useful man who has lived out his allotted time and gone the way of all the earth, it too has served its turn and must now lie in the grave of the dead past.

With this statement, Andrews reiterated what was the mission statement of the lost cause and memorial associations. These organizations were formed to honor fallen confederate soldiers and bring back antebellum southern tradition. For a woman who stepped out of traditional gender roles by earning money with her writing her language also perpetuated the patriarchal tradition of the South, as that concept permeated antebellum society.

As a female author in the South, Andrews began writing for *The Washington Gazette* under a male pseudonym. She did this because did not believe a woman's name should be printed in the newspapers. This illustrates the influence southern patriarchal culture had. Her writing gained national recognition and she continued to express her opinions in a variety of newspapers and eventually the books she wrote. Andrews covered a wide range of topics in her writing, from more trivial articles about hair color, to more serious opinion pieces about race and gender. In 1869 Andrews wrote vehemently in opposition of women's suffrage, complementing a group of women in New Hampshire for vocalizing their anti- suffrage views, and going as far as to say the image of a woman going to the polls would be a " revolting one to Southern minds." Andrews' non- fiction writings tended to give very traditional views on women, and gender roles. Ironically, in many of her written works of fiction, she presents contrasting, very non-traditional view of gender, in which her female characters aim to be independent and pursue their careers and educations. The heroines of these works are said to be very much in agreement with

her beliefs.<sup>1</sup> In her 1908 novel, *A Family Secret*, Andrews comes through as the character Julia. Julia, regarding the position of women, states

There is no middle ground of us women except marriage-  
no door of escape from the miseries of poverty and dependence. I  
have tried every kind of “ honest labor “ that a woman in my  
situation could put her hand to, but I am utterly unsuited in them  
all.<sup>2</sup>

A sense of the frustration Andrews had with her gender is felt through this piece. Julia, the speaker, was also an unmarried wealthy Southern white woman, a character similar to the Andrews herself.<sup>3</sup> This inconsistent depiction of southern women shown by Andrews could be attributed to the complicated relationship women had with independence throughout their ideological reconstruction. This complication is a result of centuries of tradition and upbringing being transformed in a span of less than fifty years. Another possible explanation is that Andrew’s felt more comfortable expressing her progressive views in fictional stories. Fiction writing could have been a safe outlet for her opinions which she did not necessary need to accept or defend, as her own.

Many women, such as Andrews, were hesitant to vocalize their opinions and pursue public roles initially but became increasingly political and vocal in their opinions. The purpose of my research is to contend the scholarly notion of elite white southern women as non-political beings by detailing their ideological Reconstruction, during and after the Civil War.<sup>4</sup> In order to prove this, I will be exploring three phases, during which an evolution of these women into

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<sup>1</sup> Andrews, Eliza Frances, and S. Kittrell. Rushing. *Journal of a Georgia Woman, 1870-1872*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 2002. Xxiii,xxii,xxiv,xxvi, xxvii,xxix

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., xxxvi

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., xxxv

<sup>4</sup> Janney, Caroline E. *Burying the Dead but Not the Past: Ladies' Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2008. 40

public figures was demonstrated. These phases mark the gradual shift in mental and emotional priority for these women, from male centered, to the domestic sphere, and finally to themselves. By doing this I hope to understand why it took approximately fifteen years after the Confederate surrender at Appomattox for Southern women to catch up to their northern counterparts and begin advocating on their own behalf by championing for female suffrage. From this research I theorize that the spark of political freedom that women experienced during the Civil war could not be extinguished entirely, but changed form during this gradual ideological transformation. This change of form occurred because of the strong northern presence during the Reconstruction years in the South, as well as Confederate soldiers' feelings of failure after the war. Women, under these circumstances, were obligated to relinquish the political autonomy they had gained during the war. While women, physically had to step out of the public sphere to a degree during this time, mentally, there was no turning back.

Southern women were forced, in a sense, to become independent during the Civil War while their men were fighting. Once Reconstruction began, unable to assert this newfound independence as men returned home, women retired into the private domestic sphere. Here they continued to assert themselves publically, yet, through different channels. When northern subjugation was removed after formal reconstruction, women became more comfortable with reform movements. They did not feel the goals of these organizations were imposed on them by the North and therefore through a systematic progression took these reform goals as their own.

Southern women's role in the Civil War and Reconstruction received little coverage in historical literature prior to the late 1990's and early turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Until this time the primary focus of Reconstruction study was primarily the effects of policy and cultural change on former slaves and white southern men contrastingly. The development in research done on



women during this time most likely came out of what is known as “ Third-wave feminism.” Women during the 1990’s were making their own history, for example the debut of the WNBA (Women’s National Basketball Association), the appointment of two female Supreme Court justices, as well as Madeline Albright to the secretary of state position. These publicized events were major achievements for women, and from them, a reassessment of history with a deeper emphasis on women emerged. Third wave feminism is different than waves prior, in that it focuses on women in western culture through the lenses of “ oppression, masculinity, femininity, class, race and colonialism.” Literature written before, during and after this wave addresses topics that directly affect women and that women’s issues overlap into. This version of feminist theory makes the Reconstruction era south a particularly appealing scheme through which to view femininity. This era provides a plethora of links to the themes of third wave feminism. <sup>5</sup>

### **Time Frame**

A defined start and finish point of Reconstruction is important to its understanding. Established dates are essential in answering many questions about the era. For this paper in particular, in order understand the experience of Southern women in each phase, the use of historical context in a time period is relevant. Typically, the “ Era of Reconstruction” is thought to start in 1865 and end in 1877.<sup>6</sup> These years are chosen specifically because they mark the year the Civil War ended, bringing with it the end of slavery and the year of the compromise or 1877, following the disputed 1876 election of Rutherford B. Hayes to the Presidency.<sup>7</sup> The commonly

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<sup>5</sup> *Feminist Philosophies A-Z*, s.v. "Third Wave Feminism,"

[http://www.credoreference.com/entry/edinburghfem/third\\_wave\\_feminism](http://www.credoreference.com/entry/edinburghfem/third_wave_feminism)

<sup>6</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. "Reconstruction", accessed October 19, 2012,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/493722/Reconstruction>.

<sup>7</sup> Compromise of 1877 also known as the Hayes-Tilden Compromise of 1877 “A secret “gentlemen’s agreement” in the USA between the leaders of the Republican Party, representing the Northern bourgeoisie, and the Democratic Party, linked with the plantation owners of the South. The compromise resolved a political crisis that had arisen as a result of the presidential election of 1876, in which R. Hayes was the Republican and S. Tilden the Democratic candidate. The agreement ensured that the congressional committee investigating the voting results in four contested states would decide in favor of Hayes. In exchange, Hayes pledged, among other things, to withdraw federal troops from South Carolina and Louisiana, thereby ensuring the de facto

understood era of Reconstruction does not necessarily hold true for women. Women arguably experienced a distinct form of Reconstruction a roughly a decade after the perceived failure of both Presidential and radical Reconstruction. This form is distinct, as it offers an ideological rebuilding of women's principles rather than the attempted social and political refurbishment of the South.

These specific 12 years deemed Reconstruction, however, are not agreed upon universally. Editors, Paul A. Cimbala and Randall M. Miller of The Great Task Remaining Before Us make ample use of the broad sense of the word "Reconstruction", understanding that it cannot be placed into a neat compartment as beginning and ending in exact years all across what was then the United States. The author (s) boldly claim that Reconstruction was not the reunification process that it is made to be but instead made Southerners "more Southern," more tied to the cause, and was in fact a continuation of the Civil War, which was only formally ended at Appomattox. The notion of a further sectionalized North and South is frequently acknowledged in Reconstruction literature. Reconstruction, by Eric Foner, is a noted and comprehensive look at Reconstruction, which aims to compartmentalize the era into a time frame. He states that while 1865 is the year in which Presidential Reconstruction started under Andrew Johnson reconstruction had begun earlier. The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 given by Abraham Lincoln, he believes, began transforming the South from a slave society to a society of entirely freedmen and women. Abraham Lincoln also in this year presented his ten-percent plan, which was a part of his Reconstruction agenda. This transformation was arguably the most drastic change to come out of Reconstruction, along with black enfranchisement. The

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transfer of power in all the Southern states into the hands of the former slaveholders." Citation: *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia, 3rd Edition*. S.v. "Hayes-Tilden Compromise of 1877." Retrieved November 1 2012 from <http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Hayes-Tilden+Compromise+of+1877>

ability to vote and movement toward political independence would be impossible without emancipation. For African Americans in particular this Proclamation was the formal signal that things in the upcoming years would be different.<sup>8</sup>

The South, in theory could then have begun Reconstruction prior to the conclusion of the war. Foner, along with author Sarah Gardner, concurs with the universally understood 1877 finalization of the era. LeeAnn Whites argues that Southern white men were politically and socially redeemed in 1877, thus potentially insinuating that other groups had not been redeemed. The questions that arise with this assessment are, who are these other groups, were they ever redeemed, and if so when? The loose end of her statement could lead to a debate on the real final years of Reconstruction. Bertram Wyatt-Brown noticed that the beliefs, political styles and actions by the state, which were installed during Reconstruction, remained after redemption; this gives rise to a fuzzy understanding of the precise end of the era. William Gillette in Retreat From Reconstruction also calls the final year of Reconstruction into question. This author aims to fill a gap in the literature about the years 1869-1879, the years he referred to as “national Reconstruction.”<sup>9</sup>

These ten years are deemed a retreat for a number of reasons. To mention a few specifically, the lack of support by the public, the Northern desire for reconciliation, the shrinking size of federal troops in the South, which led to the demise of federal election enforcement and brought the underlying racist mentality to the forefront, as well as the restriction of federal action by the judicial system and other causes led to this label of retreat. The election dispute of 1876, which began the retreat, Gillette claims was “no more than the

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<sup>8</sup>Cimbala & Miller, *The Great Task*, xiv, xii. Eric Foner. *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988, 1, xxv

<sup>9</sup> LeeAnn Whites. *Gender Matters: Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Making of the New South*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. 93. Bertram Wyatt Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1890s*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2001. 132. William Gillette. *Retreat from Reconstruction: 1869-1879*. Baton Rouge: La ix

sensational drum roll of the finale.” The Southern policy implemented during the Hayes presidency, despite heavy criticism aimed to reunite the North and the South. The reunion, if successful, would bring peace and create a unified United States, which was the goal of Reconstruction. Because of this unification goal, these years can arguably be included in the commonly understood “Era.”<sup>10</sup>

The most important years in terms of women’s social, political and economic independence came over a decade after Appomattox, in the 1880’s and arguably lasted another century or longer. The agreed upon final years of Reconstruction marked a turning point for women, which makes the time frame important.

### **Changes for African Americans**

The major focus of Civil War and Reconstruction literature by historians is the implications it had on former slaves and Southern white men. Southern white women, through their relationships with these men were consequentially affected by the war, but their role remains underdeveloped in scholarship. The Civil War is often taught or understood by the masses as a war to specifically end slavery in the South. Scholars understand that while an end to slavery did come as a result of the Civil War, it was not the sole reason for the four years of fighting, additional causes include political and economical differences. Nonetheless, with the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 slaves in the Southern states were promised their freedom.<sup>11</sup> Even before the Proclamation, with Union troops infiltrating Southern towns, slaves were able to express their true sentiments on bondage. Slaves frequently fled to Union camps, acted defiantly towards their masters, or simply refused to work.<sup>12</sup> It is repeated in literature that slaveholders

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<sup>10</sup> Gillete. *Retreat from Reconstruction* xi, 334, 350-51

<sup>11</sup> Abraham Lincoln was careful to specifically free slaves in the Confederate states and not the slave holding border states.

<sup>12</sup> William Kauffman Scarborough. *Masters of the Big House: Elite Slaveholders of the Mid-nineteenth-century South*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2003. 157

often were disillusioned by these acts of rebellion, as they lived under the pretense of affection and familial closeness with their slaves, which they now understood was one sided.<sup>13</sup> This newly obtained freedom after the January 1 Proclamation, meant many things for former slaves; their entire concept of life, from birth to death, was altered when they became people rather than property. It also meant many things for Southern whites, who now were faced with the demise of a culture, economy, and political structure built upon slavery.

The plight of African Americans during this time drew many parallels to white women and women understood this comparison. While white women were inherently free by virtue of their race, when compared to white men, they were very much prisoners of their gender. Laws and social rules restricted women from many things; in some situations they were more restricted than the slaves. Both blacks and women were members of disenfranchised groups due to characteristics outside of their control and were both expected to behave submissively to white men. One woman wrote, “There is no slave, after all, like a wife.” LeeAnn Whites makes an interesting claim that white women did not frequently align themselves with the slaves over mutual oppression, they were inclined, rather to align with the white men fighting for their cause. One could assume that similar arguments made against extending civil rights to blacks could be used against women, for example the argument that Africans, by nature and genetics were better suited for slavery could translate to nature and genetics making women suited for domestics. Rather than aligning themselves with freedman as some Northern women did, Southern women chose to defend ex-Confederates and rebuild their ego which emancipation in some ways destroyed. Scott argues that the understanding of similarities between blacks and women led

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.,

some Southern women to be abolitionists and also noticed the overlap of grievances between the groups.<sup>14</sup>

The Dunning School of thought established by William Dunning and John. W. Burgess made a bold interpretation of Reconstruction, which states that African Americans could not be faulted for their handling of newly gained freedom through emancipation. Instead, it was the fault of northern politicians who forced freedom upon them, without taking into account how incapable they (freedmen) were of handling it properly. This argument furthers that of which was made by the editors of The Great Task Remaining Before Us, that Reconstruction made southerners, more southern in a sense and thus put the blame on northerners. This interpretation of Reconstruction has since been debated by a number of historians. Scholarship now understands that freedmen were intellectually capable of handling freedom and that outside circumstances, such as a ruined economy, racism, and lack of opportunity were major faults behind any failures of Reconstruction. The Dunning School is still noted today simply because of the vast amount of alternate Reconstruction literature it provoked. W.E.B Du Bois, Howard K. Beale and C. Vann Woodward are among these historians who argued against the Dunning interpretation.<sup>15</sup>

Eric Foner asserts that blacks were not “passive victims” during Reconstruction, quite the contrary, they, through their actions set emancipation rolling and then continued to push for independence throughout the era. The establishment of black codes in the South showed the resistance to social change, which was enhanced with sharecropping. The black codes continued a modified enslavement despite the legal freedom of blacks. These institutions showed the

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<sup>14</sup> Jane Turner Censer. *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 1865-1895*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2003.50, Whites, LeeAnn. *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1890*. Athens: University of Georgia, 1995. 24, Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 51,52

<sup>15</sup>Foner. *Reconstruction*, xx,xxi,xxii

unwillingness of white Southerners to immediately change their thinking and treat former slaves, whom for centuries were seen as biologically inferior as intellectual equals. The legalization of black voting rights further incentivized white Southerners to modify “freedom” and through literacy tests and poll taxes maintained the notion of white supremacy. Voting rights aside, basic human rights were denied with the establishment of black codes, further ingraining racial separation, and racial violence became prevalent. The class system in the South in antebellum days gave even the poorest whites an aura of superiority as they still had a group, slaves, to look down upon. Without this group steadily holding the lowest level on the social hierarchy, white Southerners, especially yeoman devoted themselves to prove their dominance of the social, political and economic arenas. Affluent women in the South were in a similar situation to these yeomen in that their race now was not enough to ensure supremacy to blacks. The defense of freedman’s intellectual ability could also translated as a defense for women’s intellect.<sup>16</sup>

The enfranchisement of the freedman at a time when many wealthy Southerners had their voting rights stripped due to Confederate affiliations is reasoned to have brought about further bitterness toward African Americans. These feelings and concerns of a race war heightened racist feelings. The fear of a “Negro uprising” is common in Reconstruction literature; this fear grew once the ban on firearm ownership for blacks was lifted. The fear was compared to that of before the war, when the white South lived in constant fear of a slave riot, which came to a head with Nat Turner. The aforementioned Black codes could have contributed to this oppressive fear that the white South functioned under during Reconstruction. Some white men considered the rights allowed with the black codes were already giving former slaves too many privileges. The racism and opposition to black suffrage was not confined solely in South. Marilyn Mayer Culpeper’s assessment of racism and racial bias of both Northerners and Southerners falls into

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<sup>16</sup> Foner. *Reconstruction*, xx,xxi,xxii,xxiv,199, 447,181( This was the sentiment of President Andrew Johnson as well )

alignment with William Gillette's understanding of a national Reconstruction. Blacks would have voting rights in the North as well as in the South; therefore it could not remain a regional issue.<sup>17</sup>

According to Eric Foner's interpretation of the Reconstruction timeline sixteen African Americans were members of Congress yet this was dispersed among the years. He also notes that majority of decisions with any importance were made by the white politicians. In agreement, Laura Edwards in her book *Gendered Strife* paraphrases a Southern man acknowledging that only wealthy white men could withstand political life and that "mere numbers" over intellect should not sway governance. This argument, while in context refers to freedman could easily be adapted as an argument against women's suffrage. Former slaves and the policies enacted as mentioned, dominate early Reconstruction literature prior to the third wave of feminism. For this reason it is important to understand the plight of former slaves as it can directly render expectations for women and their fight for independence after Reconstruction.<sup>18</sup>

## **Honor**

Literature on the Civil War and Reconstruction use the term "honor" frequently when discussing the South, and the Confederacy. The most well-known and comprehensive understanding of Southern honor comes from author Bertram Wyatt-Brown. Honor, he claims is the underlying force, or "vital code" of Southern culture, predating slavery. Slavery perpetuated honor but was not its foundation. Honor can be defined by three factors, self worth, self assessment before peers and judgment, or reputation among peers. Giselle Roberts author of The Confederate Belle also discusses Wyatt-Brown's honor criteria. She also points out that

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<sup>17</sup>Kauffman Scarborough. *Masters* 404, Marilyn Mayer Culpepper, *All Things Altered: Women in the Wake of Civil War and Reconstruction*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland &, 2002. 96, Summers. *A Dangerous Stir* 52, Laura F Edwards. *Gendered Strife & Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction*. Urbana: University of Illinois, 1997. 187

<sup>18</sup>Foner. *Reconstruction*, 352, Edwards. *Gendered Strife*, 187



Southerners lived and died, in instances by their honor.<sup>19</sup> By having a firm understanding of the expectations set by “honor” in the South, we can access broad topics through a Southern perspective. Topics such as patriarchy, loyalty and religion were present in the South since its founding. These inborn traits played an integral role in how the South fought the Civil War but more importantly for this paper how Southerners (specifically women) handled the home front during the war, the subsequent defeat and dealing with Reconstruction policies afterward.

Within general honor there exists sub-categories, one regarding how men conduct themselves honorably when presented with conflict or to use Wyatt-Brown’s phrasing, a man’s primal honor. The particular large-scale conflict I will be looking at paralleled with primal honor is the Civil War and period following. Rather than the reputation among peers primal honor is a more personal form, aligning with the factor of self worth. The four degrees of primal honor according to Wyatt-Brown include bravery, particularly in the form of vengeance on those threatening the community or family, the opinion of others, ones physical appearance as morality and the defense of ones integrity as a man (along with a balance of love and fear of women). In the context of the Civil War, primal honor would be the driving force beyond, secession, steadfast combat despite odds, and stubborn, defiant Reconstruction attitudes. Secession was appealing to many because they felt their liberties had been threatened through many federal laws. This endangered their communities, their economics and their families. Also with these spheres being threatened men may feel the need to defend their integrity.<sup>20</sup>

Southern women, in accordance to their commitment to familial honor made it their job to restore honor to the defeated ex-Confederates.<sup>21</sup> According to Wyatt-Brown, a woman’s honor

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<sup>19</sup> Bertram Wyatt-Brown. *Honor and Violence in the Old South*. New York: Oxford UP, 1986. 62, 14. Roberts, Giselle. *The Confederate Belle*. Columbia: University of Missouri, 2003, 2

<sup>20</sup> Wyatt-Brown. *The Honor and Violence*, 14,23 , Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 3

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 47

was linked directly to the honor of her male family members. If this were true, it was in a woman's best interest that her male kin regained their self worth and honor. He also claims that women are burdened with a "multitude of negatives" to not alter a man's honor, they must devoutly practice abstinence and restraint in all aspects of life. Roberts references and directly disputes Wyatt-Brown's assumption that women did not have their own honor, as it was reliant upon a man's. She believes that a woman's honor was established through following the ideal set for Southern women and she gained honor from preserving familial status. Roberts also acknowledges the lack of sufficient literature on the topics of female honor in the South and how honor affected Confederate women, which is important because my thesis draws upon the topic of female honor.<sup>22</sup>

The prevalence of honor that Roberts and Wyatt-Brown can agree upon brought with it a sense of sectionalism. Wyatt-Brown contends with this notion of honorable alignment to the Confederacy by stating mothers of brave men, i.e. honorable men must be brave themselves. The notion of brave mothers, or social mothering is frequently addressed in the discussion of restoring male honor during Reconstruction<sup>23</sup> Even with loss of individual battles or the war in its entirety women were able to separate the loss from the honorable men who fought.<sup>24</sup> This trait could be the reason that during Reconstruction they stood unwavering in their dedication to the men who returned, confident in their bravery, while men struggled more to differentiate their honor from surrender.

### **Planter Ideology**

An majority of literature agrees that antebellum south was a male dominated society even though some historians are not willing to call it a patriarchy outright. These men, apart from

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<sup>22</sup> Wyatt Brown. *Honor and Violence*, 86 Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 3,4.

<sup>23</sup> Censer. *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood* 199

<sup>24</sup> Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 124

slaves, were the Southern economic backbone, heads of their households, controlled the social-class structures along with local politics, took educational priority over women, and shaped the culture of the area. The overwhelming control that this demographic had over the South cannot be underestimated.

When discussing the topics of Southern elite white women it is impossible not to mention a great deal about their male counterparts. A misconception about Southern women during the Civil War is that they did not possess any power of their own and were simply vessels for childbirth and task managers for domestic slaves. Many accounts of women during this time insist that they did, in fact, possess power. Their power was more confined to the domestic sphere however when considering honor in appearance, the importance of raising children properly, and maintaining familial honor, women were in control of certain aspects of their lives. LeeAnn Whites argued that Reconstruction in fact empowered women through their retreat into domesticity because it brought men into their arena where women could “exalt their feminized place.” The question about power is whether or not, when compared to a man’s power, it was mundane and trivial. That question cannot necessarily be answered in general terms as each woman felt differently about her role in the household. Some women were frustrated with the male power in the home even before the Civil War and probably remained so during Reconstruction. The feeling of frustration seems unheard of for the time when women were supposed to be dedicated to supporting and raising up of their men. Others felt a surge in worth from cultivating the domestic world.<sup>25</sup>

Southern men relied on their relationships with others to hold their elite position, their relationships with other men, their children, wives, and slaves were crucial to maintaining the

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<sup>25</sup> Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender* 147, Censer. *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood* 31, 83 Anne Firor Scott. *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1995. 19

dominance. This is reiterated in the value of reputation in individual honor. Honor was not a concept designated only for the wealthiest of Southerners, all Southerners could process honor. Honor only required wealth as a means to an end.<sup>26</sup> The wealthiest men (and women) in the South tended to be white and of the Planter class, those individuals who, pre-emancipation had vast slave run plantations. During Reconstruction some freedman had to return to sharecropping on their former master's or another wealthier white families plantation in order to survive. The relationship of sharecropper and landowner was very similar to that of pre-emancipation, some freedman were told to "submit at all times" to the land-owner and told how to behave.<sup>27</sup> The promise of 40 acres and mule to all freedman encouraged by General William T. Sherman would not come to fruition.<sup>28</sup> This sharecropping could be seen as a slightly more independent form of ownership over the black population by the elite whites. The freedman was still, to an extent dependent on those in the "big house" for shelter and land to grow food and money from selling the crops grown back. This did not help their cause in asserting independence or proving they were able to live free.

In order for planter ideological principles to perpetuate, slaves must be a comparative group at the bottom of the social hierarchy, they were the inferior base to which the role of "master" was reliant on. Within their respective classes, women were both the compared and complimentary to men as a base for their patriarchal role. During Reconstruction, some authors felt that men's new dominance over the domestic replaced their formerly paternalist system of slavery. Author Giselle Roberts states that paternalism in its entirety was washed away and replaced with capitalism therefore it does not address the possible shift in paternalist tendencies towards women. As noted by Anne Firor Scott in her book, The Southern Lady, husbands were

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<sup>26</sup> Wyatt-Brown. *Honor and Violence*, 21

<sup>27</sup> Kauffman Scarborough. *Masters* 379

<sup>28</sup> Foner. *Reconstruction*, 70-71

refereed to as lord or master, which are also terms for the Christian God. Scott also notices the relationship between those in favor of slavery also preaching the role of submissive women.<sup>29</sup>

The relationship that these men held with women was never more precarious than in Reconstruction era. Southern men had little left when they returned, if they returned, from fighting the Civil War. They were deflated, weary from fighting, hopeless from economic and social destruction and often angry at emancipation. The only solace these men could hold on to throughout the years of fighting and Reconstruction upheaval was the understanding that the devoted women they left behind would be unchanged. *The Augusta Chronicle*, a major Southern newspaper published an article two days after Appomattox which in summary stated that married men would survive after the defeat because of the “positive female energy” and the understanding that after the humiliation of surrender, within the home they will return as monarch.<sup>30</sup> Other sources, which use direct quotes from primary sources, deemed women the “stronger sex” and argued that without them it would be impossible to rebuild the South.<sup>31</sup> This shows the power Southern women possessed.

Elite women, during the war, became heads of households, frequently managing slaves before emancipation, running the house, businesses, and families. These women suffered hardships of all forms, economically, emotionally, physically etc. as a result of secession. These elite women had a taste of independence and whether or not they relished in this is irrelevant. The sheer fact that they were forced to function without men meant the patriarchal society had become threatened and LeeAnn Whites argued antebellum gender roles could not be replicated

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<sup>29</sup> Scott. *The Southern Lady*. 16, 14. Roberts. *The Confederate Belle*. 171

<sup>30</sup> Whites. *Gender Matters* 85

<sup>31</sup> Karen L Cox. *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture*. Gainesville: University of Florida, 2003. 9 . Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 99

easily.<sup>32</sup> Anne Scott notes that men felt the need to assert their dominance and honor as a way to continuously suppress their insecurities in their elevated position.<sup>33</sup> Women's newly found self-reliance therefore would be playing into these underlying fears. Men used the domestic sphere during Reconstruction as a way to hold onto their manhood whereas men and women in the North, as victors did not necessarily suffer this strife to the Southern extent.<sup>34</sup>

### **Southern Identity**

Most historians place Reconstruction in the South as a majority of the fighting during the Civil War took place South of the Mason Dixon line, in the Confederate states. Author William Gillette however, bases his book on Reconstruction upon the ideology that its fate was not solely decided by the South, all of the actions and on the part of the federal government were done with Northern support and with many effecting the North similarly.<sup>3536</sup> The enfranchisement of African Americans for one was not reserved for the Southern states. Many Northerners held similar racist ideology with which Reconstruction policies directly battled.<sup>37</sup> From Reconstruction, constitutional amendments and other citizenship laws were born. These laws, while aimed primarily at the South also affected Northerners.<sup>38</sup> Eric Foner acknowledges the lack of attention paid to Northern Reconstruction but in his book aims at studying the toll taken on the Northern economy and their caste system, which came out of Reconstruction and brought

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<sup>32</sup> Whites. *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender* 137

<sup>33</sup> Scott. *The Southern Lady* ,18

<sup>34</sup> Whites. *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender* 136

<sup>35</sup> Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, South Carolina, Virginia,

<sup>36</sup> Gillette, *Retreat* x

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii

<sup>38</sup> Foner. *Reconstruction*, xxvi

about further political implications.<sup>39</sup> For the South, Reconstruction took immediate form with military presence, including newly freed enlisted blacks establishing and maintaining federal law.<sup>40</sup> This further enraged Southerners as they watched their world flip on its head instantly and only heightened their desire to see the government fall.<sup>41</sup> These Southerners continued to feel threatened by Yankees and longed for state's rights governance.<sup>42</sup> The moment Southern troops admitted defeat they knew their way of life before the war had come to an end and they had to now acknowledge their emotional defeat as well. This era to many should have focused solely on reparations made by the South for their wrongdoings, in which the rebel troops and their alliances concede to defeat. This was not the case; the spirit of the South often was revitalized by defeat, further establishing regional divides.<sup>43</sup> The notion of a righteous North and rebel South has taken hold of Reconstruction folklore. The "us vs. them" concept of Reconstruction had very strong potential to slow, or halt entirely the rejoining of the country in peace and freedom for all. While Reconstruction may be physically more visible in the South, the notion of a reconstructed ideology expands beyond this region.

Despite the national effort towards Reconstruction anti Northern sentiments were felt vehemently in the Southern states. One man claims that from his youth he hated Yankees, and wanted everything that was Southern, to be anti Yankee.<sup>44</sup> People agreeing with this sentiment desired an entirely separate South, and felt the Union was an "unnatural conglomerate" of two culturally different nations.<sup>45</sup> This desire for sectionalism was felt in antebellum times yet grew

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<sup>39</sup>, Ibid., xxvi

<sup>40</sup>Foner. *Reconstruction*, xxv

<sup>41</sup>Cimbala & Miller, *The Great Task* xii

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., xiii

<sup>43</sup> Cimbala & Miller, *The Great Task* xii

<sup>44</sup> Summers., *A Dangerous Stir*, 157

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 37

stronger with secession.<sup>46</sup> Southerners felt that if they were removed from the North they would be able to flourish culturally and were stifled by Northern attachment.<sup>47</sup> This attitude could be rationale behind Southern women's unwillingness to join in the reform movements that northern women strongly supported until after Northern troops had left the South. Once this shift occurred involvement in reform could be a distinctly Southern idea rather than being conjoined to the North.

Loyalty as defined in The Great Task Remaining Before Us is, "entering into special relationships of commitments, relationships that transcended the rights and contracts in bedded into our legal commercial world".<sup>48</sup> These editors acknowledge that those outside of these relationships were treated very differently than those inside of them.<sup>49</sup> These relationships in the Civil War would be North versus South and terms of loyalty, the war was defining as to which side you fell on.<sup>50</sup>

The war began because of loyalty Southerners felt to their liberties, their fellow Southerners and to their families. During the war, throughout terrible physical loss and emotional strife soldiers, for the most part remained loyal to the cause, and women on the home front remained loyal to their soldiers, taking on new roles and doing their part for the confederacy. Following General Lee's surrender Southerners remained tested and true in their loyalty to the Confederate cause.

Bitterness was exacerbated during radical Reconstruction as it imposed harsher reparations on the South.<sup>51</sup> This hatred by the South, for some was never overcome, and

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 35

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 282

<sup>48</sup> Cimbala & Miller, *The Great Task* 6

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Kauffman Scarborough. *Masters*, 402



Yankeephobia was a term which emerged after the war to describe the feelings held by Southerners for those who they felt stripped them of property and all human rights<sup>52</sup>

Another loyalty was rivaling that of the Confederacy and this was a loyalty to the Union, and to the United States. The demographic for this form of loyalty were those who remained true to the Union and this group increased in size during Reconstruction with the Presidentially mandated loyalty oath or Presidential pardon, which Confederate soldiers took as punishment for rebellion.<sup>53</sup> The Confederates resented this Union loyalty, as returning to the Union was a humiliation especially because their beliefs had seldom changed. Carole Eberton, in her essay on loyalty points out that it was not acknowledged that the surrender at Appomattox was not because of a change in thinking but sheer exhaustion.<sup>54</sup>

Some Southerners felt so far from United States that they contemplated moving out of country to avoid obeying laws. Others describe hating the flag and hoping for it to be carried away by another country. This unyielding bitterness and hatred toward Northerners was felt by both genders but women seemed to carry their grudges longer.<sup>55</sup> This bitterness offers an explanation as to why Southern women remained faithful to solely Southern ideas and refused to coordinate with Northerners on issues of reform. A strong example of the sectionalism felt by women is the formation of the Ladies Memorial Association, which in some regions was formed immediately after Appomattox.<sup>56</sup> These women aimed to restore Southern manhood. They met the needs of the Confederate dead, and held proper burials for fallen soldiers as well as the needs of living ex- Confederates by asking them to be event speakers and building up their self worth

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Wyatt-Brown. *The Shaping of Southern Culture*, 83

<sup>54</sup> Cimbala & Miller, *The Great Task* 180

<sup>55</sup> Kauffman Scarborough. *Masters* 402 Cox. *Dixie's Daughters*, 10

<sup>56</sup> Cox. *Dixie's Daughters*, 9

and thus honor.<sup>57</sup> The fact that defeat undermined paternalism and patriarchy is agreed upon throughout sources.<sup>58</sup> Women sacrificed their independence to rebuild the honor of men, which as Wyatt-Brown's understanding of honor dictates, therefore restored her honor as well. These women because very significant in their communities and in creating a new Southern identity.

Another form of the new Southern identity is the notion of the "Lost Cause"<sup>59</sup>. This idea is discussed regularly in Reconstruction literature and is frequently deemed a myth. The belief in the "Lost Cause" meant that diehard believers in the Confederate cause could be reassured in their place as superior to Northerners despite loss and depression.<sup>60</sup>

Religion is frequently used in both primary and secondary to explain Southern sectionalism. A firm belief that Southerners were God's chosen people could be to some a firm rationale for their relentless hold on the Confederacy, after its termination.<sup>61</sup> Some believed that the loss by the South was God seeking vengeance for their sins; others felt that God was seeking vengeance on Northerners for their involvement in the war with the assassination of President Lincoln.<sup>62</sup> With basic biblical knowledge we can see that throughout the text, gender roles which were present nationally, but more so in the South were supported.

## Conclusion

A quote from C. Vann Woodward's essay "The Irony of Southern History", the South, "had known the bitter taste of defeat and humiliation" is shown throughout this discovery of

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<sup>57</sup> Whites. *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender*, 187

<sup>58</sup> Cox. *Dixie's Daughters*, 9, Scott. *The Southern Lady*, 16

<sup>59</sup> Janney, Caroline E. "The Lost Cause." Encyclopedia Virginia. Ed. Brendan Wolfe. 29 Oct. 2012. Virginia Foundation for the Humanities. 9 May. 2011 <[http://www.EncyclopediaVirginia.org/Lost\\_Cause\\_The](http://www.EncyclopediaVirginia.org/Lost_Cause_The)>.

"The Lost Cause is an interpretation of the American Civil War (1861–1865) that seeks to present the war, from the perspective of Confederates, in the best possible terms. Developed by white Southerners, many of them former Confederate generals, in a postwar climate of economic, racial, and gender uncertainty, the Lost Cause created and romanticized the "Old South" and the Confederate war effort, often distorting history in the process. For this reason, many historians have labeled the Lost Cause a myth or a legend. It is certainly an important example of public memory, one in which nostalgia for the Confederate past is accompanied by a collective forgetting of the horrors of slavery." (Direct quote from source)

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Gardner. *Blood & Irony*, 41, 54

Southern literature.<sup>63</sup> Bertram Wyatt-Brown embodies the purpose of this paper by saying “ The unresolved mourning that the South displayed in its statues for the glorious dead, its legends of heroism and self sacrifice, helped to perpetuate a collective sense of sullen anger. It is not too fanciful to suggest that losers are seldom magnanimous and show less charity toward the weak than victors.”<sup>64</sup> While this quote can be assumed to be about freedman and their struggles for freedom in a world dominated by elite white men, it nonetheless rings true about women from the North and South and their differing attitudes and involvement in charitable, or reform works. Southerners had suffered a distinct form of loss during the war and after and many Northerners simply did not know this sort of defeat. Because of this loss, Southern women had a different role in society and culture than Northern women.

### **Methodology**

To restate my tripartite hypothesis, Southern women during Reconstruction retreated from the public personas they developed during the Civil War and returned to a focus on domestics due to the combined Northern military presence along with the need to reestablish antebellum patriarchy. Southern women rejected getting involved with Northern women in reform movements throughout Reconstruction and only after a decade, when the South had been returned to Southerners did they begin to support and join the movement.

Northern white elite women had a very different experience after the Civil War than Southern white elite women because of both the differing cultures before the war and the fact that only one side was victorious. Southern women took it upon themselves to restore lost honor to the soldiers returning from the war and because of this had to readjust their newly obtained independence from the war and return to the ways of antebellum society. By looking at the

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<sup>63</sup>Wyatt-Brown. *The Shaping of Southern Culture*,269

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

Reconstruction setting, African Americans relationship to the era, social elements such as planter ideology, honor, and sectionalism I begin to unfold the environment of the time and how women fit into this society.

Understanding the seemingly mutually agreed upon culture of women in the South during Reconstruction required obtaining consistent evidence from the women themselves. In writing this paper I anticipated problems, which could arise. One of these potential problems would be obtaining or locating adequate primary sources. I was able to locate eight diaries of Southern elite white women from either during the war or Reconstruction along with two compilations containing diary entries of a number of women in this demographic. Women frequently used diaries to reveal their inner thoughts primarily before the war and after the war were often busy maintaining the household but took time to document important moments. Examples of the diaries being explored are Mary Boykin Chestnut's, Sarah Morgan and Kate Stone, all affluent women living in the South at the time of the Civil War. As women were very much considered a-political in society their feelings on matters tended to be outwardly suppressed but were made known in their private worlds, diaries or journals. After the war, when women did begin to become involved in reform the minutes and journals of the organizations they worked in are particularly important to this paper.

Diaries and Journals of these women were not difficult to apprehend, as they were primarily the only group able to document daily life uninterrupted. This demographic of women was chosen for more than the ample primary source material, these women are of particular interest to me and unfortunately do not receive sufficient mention in literature which this thesis aim's to correct. I also was able to locate articles published under an alias of one of the women whose journals I am reading, Eliza Frances Andrews or "Fanny". These articles are particularly

interesting because she was able to express her feelings to the public rather than suppressing sentiments only her diary as the other women did. Within these diaries I looked for the topics relating most closely to my hypothesis, examples of these being Northern occupation, discussions about “Yankees”, discussion of politics, reform, suffrage and others of that nature and was able to locate them in the material.

A question I asked myself during this research was to what extent would I need primary source material about Northern women as a contrast study. Northern women are frequently addressed in historical literature, as they were an important influence in the public sphere. Yet rather than writing a straightforward comparison on women of each region through primary source material I decided to maintain primary focus on Southern women and thus use only their primary sources as they are of greater interest to me.

This particular study of Southern women aims to, as mentioned further develop a little studied topic as well as offer an alternative exploration of literature’s assessments of the era which fail to address the ideological Reconstruction occurring after the commonly understood time frame. This is important because from this change in ideology, women on both sides, the North and the South began moving towards progressivism and brought to light the denial of human rights to women because of their gender. Questions I hope to answer with the remainder of this thesis is why the dramatic change in regard for reform movements following the perceived failure of Reconstruction and what factors influenced this change? Additionally I hope to bring about a greater understanding of the Southern woman through use of their diaries which otherwise has not been addressed. Without the eventual support of Southern women the suffrage movement would not have been a national issue but would have remained in the North;

in fact having Southern women openly oppose suffrage, as they did during the war could have halted the movement in its tracks.

### **Outline of Chapters**

In this paper I theorize the connection between Reconstruction era Northern military occupation in the former confederacy as well as the deflated honor of returning soldiers following the Civil War to the disinterest in reform movements felt by many elite Southern white women until after Reconstruction's end. In order to understand this complex relationship between Reconstruction efforts in the South and Southern elite white women's role in reform movements I analyzed many topics presented in literature in which this relationship would overlap. Women played a valuable role both during the Civil War and after its conclusion during Reconstruction yet often are left out of a majority of historical studies about this time, which instead focus on former slaves and white men.

I will be presenting evidence in the following chapters to defend this connection. Chapter two will illustrate the conditions during the war, which led to women in the South having to take on more of an independent role than prior years as a majority of men were either enlisted or drafted into the Confederate army. This chapter will also examine the distinct Southern situation in the wake of the surrender at Appomattox as the defeated side as this lays the foundation for the following chapters. Because of defeat the South had an atmosphere of devastation only to be worsened by Northern military occupation.

Chapter three details the era of formal reconstruction. This altered setting shifted Southern women's priority from assertion of independence to reestablishment of antebellum ways and rejection of Northern ideas. During reconstruction two forms of domesticity emerged, household tasks and the domestic, mothering nature of memorial associations. This change in

principles and retreat back to the domestic sphere is the topic of the third chapter, which takes place during formal Reconstruction. Diaries kept by elite white women across the South reflect this theory and directly address the topics of domestic responsibility, Northern presence and memorial efforts.

Chapter four examines the South after the commonly understood era of Reconstruction. This time was arguably for the women in this study, their own version of Reconstruction, an ideological Reconstruction. During this time military occupation of the South was removed and honor was restored to ex- Confederate soldiers. With the South essentially returned to Southerners, women did not need to make elaborate efforts to reestablish men as patriarchs and could focus on their needs. Through three distinct organizations, Southern women emerged into the public sphere. Women of the South could now, over a decade later show displeasure with gender injustices and not feel alignment with Northern women, nor selfishness in abandoning their men when they were needed most. This is shown through diaries and records of women's groups founded in the South such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

The concluding, epilogue chapter reflects on the importance of Southern women in reform movements and the indirect ideological way in which they joined these movements. This chapter also shows how my argued extension to the commonly understood era of Reconstruction is superior to prior understandings.

## **Chapter Two**

The homespun dress is plain, I know,  
 My hat's palmetto too;  
 But then it shows what Southern girls  
 For Southern rights will do .  
 We sent the bravest of our land,  
 To battle with the foe,  
 And we will lend a helping hand-

We love the South, you know?<sup>110</sup>

This was a popular song of the Confederacy depicting the wartime sacrifices made specifically, by southern women. These women, before the war were afforded the luxuries of well made dresses, expensive silver, musical instruments and other things of the like; opulence which many women could not afford. Due to hardships throughout the four years of battle these women had to now settle for homemade versions. The dresses in this song were a symbol of what the women were willing to give up for the South and for their men, the “brave” soldiers of the Confederacy. These physical sacrifices made during the war were plenty and often voluntary to aid the cause.

Apart from, yet relating to, these visible sacrifices, was one particularly major sacrifice that many women felt was forced upon them, an ideological sacrifice. This sacrifice disrupted the foundation of what antebellum southern culture was built on. The antebellum gender roles, the patriarchal society, and the idea of the “southern lady” were diminished while the war waged on.

Throughout the war, a progression is made in these southern ladies from antebellum domesticity to a newfound degree of forced independence. This is achieved through material and emotional sacrifices and it marks the first of three changes in ideology by these women between the years of 1860 and the later 1880’s. In this chapter I will explore this ideological movement and the many ways it is expressed through sacrifice, as well as the implications of this sacrifice on northern sentiment.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Carrie B Sinclair. "The Homespun Dress." *The Homespun Dress*.  
<http://www.civilwarpoetry.org/confederate/songs/homespun.html>

<sup>65</sup> I use “ideology” frequently to describe the way of thinking demonstrated by these women. Phrases such Ideological movement, shift, evolution all refer to a change in thinking taking place in these women as a result of their new experiences. Their belief system, in terms of their role in the public and private spheres is modified over time from the start of the war until the 1900’s.



The adherence to gender roles and the idea of a woman's place is something deeply rooted in southern tradition. Mary Boykin Chestnut, before the war in her diary described a scene in which she was scolded for behaving improperly, "Johnny reproved me for saying, "If I were a man, I would not sit here and dole and drink and drivel and forget the fight going on in Virginia." He said it was my duty not to talk so rashly and make enemies."<sup>66</sup> Chestnut, in this situation, acknowledged the gender roles functioning in the South. By including "if I were a man" in her speech she reiterates the understanding that men had more liberties than women. This chapter will show how women went from having to guard their speech, as to not be out of line, to taking on tasks and speaking in a manner with which before they may have only considered doing if they too, were men. This move towards independence is a change in ideology by women, which continued until the early 1900s. By looking at the preliminary cases of independence in this chapter, the groundwork is laid to show a continued progression towards public autonomy.

Women, through their gender, and societal expectations had more time for recreation than their yeoman counterparts. Diary keeping was a luxury primarily practiced by those in the upper echelons of society. This can be explained by the amount of leisure time at their disposal. Lower-class women spent their days before the war working along with their families in the fields, cooking, cleaning, and performing other domestic duties. Contrastingly, elite women had un-paid coercive labor for these tasks, their slaves. Slavery allowed these wealthy women to pursue other interests including a "ladies" education, music, reading and writing.<sup>67</sup> These diaries provide insight into world often overlooked in the discussion of the Civil War, the world of

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<sup>66</sup> Mary Boykin Miller Chestnut. *A Diary from Dixie*,. Ed. Isabella D. Martin and Myrta Lockett Avary. (1905. Documenting the American South. Academic Affairs Library, UNC-CH University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1997.) <http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/chestnut/maryches.html>

<sup>67</sup> Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 22-24

women. Their first hand accounts of secession through Appomattox will be used to provide primary evidence of an evolution in thinking.

Two southern women whose diaries offer valuable evidence in my argument for ideological progression are Myrta Lockett Avary and Sarah Elizabeth Dawson. Avary's father was an officer at the Bank of Virginia. She described her social circle as "cultivated and cosmopolitan. The Locketts were well connected with the military, and held balls and grand dinners. Military officials regularly attended these events and felt comfortable with the family. Avary's husband, when he joined the Confederate army, was under the command of Robert E. Lee. Dawson's father, Judge Thomas Gibbes Dawson, was Collector at the Port of New Orleans. The Dawson's were a prime example of how the war divided families. Dawson's father did not approve of secession and her three living brothers served in the Confederate army, two of which served under Stonewall Jackson. When the Judge died in the first year of conflict, like many families of the time, the women and children were left at home without a male figure.<sup>68</sup>

As the possibility of Abraham Lincoln's election drew closer, the argument for southern secession gained headway; women on both sides of the conflict were affected by the talk of this and, the ultimate decision to go to war. Despite their apolitical claims, many southern women felt strongly about one side of secession or the other. In Dawson's case, she chose to be a secessionist, where, as mentioned, her father was not. Dawson was not married at the time her diary was written; therefore she presumably made her own political decision in the matter. Other women wrote about secession activities throughout the South as well. In New Orleans, Louisiana, Annie Harper in her diary 1861, described thrilling demonstrations of fervent

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<sup>68</sup> Myrta Lockett Avary. *A Virginia Girl in the Civil War, 1861-1865; Being a Record of the Actual Experiences of the Wife of a Confederate Officer*; (1903. Documenting the American South. Academic Affairs Library, UNC-CH University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1997) <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/avary/avary.html> 3, 69, 23. Sarah Morgan Boston and New York: (1913. Documenting the American South. Academic Affairs Library, UNC-CH University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1997) <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/dawson/dawson.html> Xv -xvii

secessionist sentiment and disapproval by both sexes of those who did not join in the festivities. Avary describes the local militia in Virginia organizing and drilling to prepare in case it came to war, yet argues in her diary that Virginians did not think that the secession talks would end in fighting. If the decision to unify and fight was made, the notion of the South, especially Virginia in Avary's case, losing was unthinkable.<sup>69</sup>

When going to battle became inevitable, southerners alike, both men and women had mixed emotions. It was not unusual for these women to have doubts of the success of the military once the soldiers actually departed. The possibility that soldiers may never return became a reality to the women they left behind. Remaining patriotic, however, at the initial outbreak of war women were staunch supporters. Avary's husband went to war despite her initial protests because to not would be cowardly and make him a traitor to the cause. This sentiment falls in line with the notion of southern honor and dedication to defending that honor. Avary realizes this commitment to the cause and tries to remain brave on behalf of the South. She instead turns her feelings around and rather than fight her husband's decision puts herself as far as possible into war efforts.<sup>70</sup>

The idea that the Confederacy was greater than individuals and that men had to go fight was the first of many sacrificial acts made throughout the war. Despite what doubts they may have had, or the resistance to send their loved ones to war, women had to submit to the cause willingly. Mothers were giving over their young sons, wives gave husbands and girls gave brothers to fight for the South. This could arguably have been the grandest form of physical sacrifice brought on by the war. This sacrifice for the most part is done with little complaint.

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<sup>69</sup> Dawson. *A Confederate Girl's Diary*, xv. Marilyn Mayer Culpepper, *All Things Altered*, 36. Avary. *A Virginia Girl in the Civil War*, 23

<sup>70</sup> Avary, 27-30

Regardless of how the women on the home front felt about sending their men into danger, it was their duty to fight and they did so willingly. The Battle at Fort Sumter and the declaration of war that followed was the just and honorable decision in accordance with southern patriarchal values. Men were enthusiastic to pick up arms and fight for their property, country (the Confederacy) and the security of the women they left at home; many naïve to the true danger of war. Ellen Glasgow, a noted civil war- era writer, who herself was an aristocratic white woman from Virginia, writes about the compulsion of these men to fight in her fictional story Battle-Ground. While this is a work of fiction, as a woman living in the time setting for this novel, she was socially aware of the southern culture and how it came to affect the war effort. A protagonist of the story, Dan describes his drive to fight in the war with no prior fighting experience and initial immaturity as being almost inborn. He states social pressure was not behind his decision; rather he pressured himself through his southern commitment to patriotism and honor.<sup>71</sup> This illustrates the importance of honor in southern military culture as a writer of the time directly incorporated it into her story set during the war. The prevalence of men adhering to this code of honor is what not only drove them to fight, but also influenced soldier's behavior during and after the war. This concept is potent in the South and influences both male and female action.

One of the reasons southern men claimed to be fighting for was the security of their women, in turn, southern women were proud of their soldiers, and did whatever was necessary to help the Confederate cause at the home front. Women's distinct tie to the cause most likely stemmed from the honor it bestowed upon their men and consequently on themselves. This is how the honor system in the South was designed. A woman's honor was linked to the men she

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<sup>71</sup> Ellen Anderson Gholson Glasgow. *The Battle-Ground*. New York: Doubleday, Page &, 1902. Documenting the American South. Academic Affairs Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1997. Web. <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/glasgowbattle/battlegr.html>>.299

was related to, rather than earned by her own accord. An example of the tie between men and women's honor can be seen in the diary of Mary Chestnut. With the Battle of Fort Sumter underway, Chestnut said, "Mrs. Henry King rushed in saying, 'The news, I come for the latest news. All the men of the King family are on the Island,' of which fact she seemed proud." Mrs. King's pride in all of the men in her family being prompt to join in war efforts shows her honor in their military gung-ho and patriotism. She as a woman, was not able to possess her own honor, and therefore was invested heavily into the actions made by her male family members.<sup>72</sup>

Women of elite status had much invested in the current system reliant on slave labor. This, along with honor was another reason for their dedication to the Confederate cause. These women, as will be discussed later, were strangers to the labor of domestic work other than delegation of tasks. As the war continued and the plantation broke down women changed their role within the household. They now were required to actually perform the labor once done by slaves. The dependency these women had on slave labor cannot be overly emphasized. The eventual removal of this institution is a major catalyst for their forced ideological evolution.

Beyond new domestic responsibilities, in regards to the Confederacy, women felt compelled to aid war efforts in any way possible. The way in which this was done was often through personal sacrifice. The various changes resulting as wartime consequences had a profound impact on these women through the things surrendered to the cause. These sacrifices ranged from ideas on marriage, the latest fashions to their homes and finances as well as the ultimate sacrifice: the men they loved. The relinquishing of items and people, for the Confederate cause, was thrust upon these women, for the most part, without their consent.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 5-6, Chestnut. *A Diary from Dixie*, 35

<sup>73</sup> Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 79

Smaller sacrifices, like new clothing, were very important in fostering independence in women. Sewing themselves, for these women, was a sacrifice in its own right. This action helped prepare women for independent household management. Sewing could range from ones own garments to sewing Confederate uniforms, flags and other things. In the antebellum past, a professional would have typically done this chore, as many women did not know how to sew. To show a point of comparison in Avary, before the war in her diary she stated she knew nothing about housekeeping and had “ never sewed a stitch” in her life.<sup>74</sup> In the same diary entry she describes how at the end of the war she was able to make clothes from scraps. Throughout her diary Avary describes sewing her husband’s uniforms and making him extra shirts to bring with him when he left. This particular sacrifice may seem trivial, yet, for Southern women who relied on the latest fashion to maintain their position in society, sewing their own garments may have been unfathomable before the war.<sup>75</sup>

Sewing, while cultivating domestic independence, also provided an avenue for financial independence. Avary used this skill beyond her personal needs for financial gain, she said, “ We devised many small ways for making a little money. We knit gloves and socks and sold them, and Miss Beth Sampson had some old pieces of ante-bellum silk that she made into neckties and sold for what she could get.” By sacrificing the store made clothing and developing a skill in sewing, Avary began independently earning money. Avary took full advantage of this skill acquisition, and utilized it in the domestic sphere as well as an entrepreneurial endeavor. She was able to use her sacrifice as a way to experience new things, which may not have come about if the blockade was not in place.<sup>76</sup>

Throughout the war women began gaining more of an independent position in connection

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<sup>74</sup> Avary, *A Virginia Girl*, 22,29

<sup>75</sup> Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 82-83

<sup>76</sup> Avary, *A Virginia Girl*, 354

to their domestic management. Maintaining security of the plantation prior to the war fell under the auspices of the male residents. Now that they were fighting throughout the South, women were in charge of protecting their homes. This correlates to the idea of sacrificing of beliefs that these women took part in, as for a majority of their lives they relied on men to protect and run the home. Women now had to adjust to taking on this role themselves. This role, as protector of the home front, was not a role for the fainthearted. The desperation of war, and the unstable, unsafe atmosphere on either side of the Mason Dixon line gave women the courage to survive on their own. The big house on the plantation, home to many of these elite women, became a tangible representation and sometimes burden of their independence. A house, in which these women had little role of importance before the war, now became their responsibility, virtually overnight. There was no longer a man in the home running finances, overseeing crop production, managing slaves or protecting the family. These tasks now fell onto the shoulders of women. For individuals with little experience running and protecting the main house, many women fared exceptionally well.<sup>77</sup>

The sacrifice of domestic security was another way in which women were forced into new roles during the war. The Dawson family frequently was moving from house to house after being scared from their own home by cannons firing and a fear of it being burnt while they were inside. Dawson and her family packed “running bags” to be able to flee, if needed, at a moments notice. She describes a scene, which occurred while the family packed to leave,

It was now three o'clock; and with my light linen dress thrown off, I was standing over a barrel putting in cups and saucers as fast as I could wrap them in the rags that covered the floor, when Mr. Larguier sent me a nice little dinner. I had been so many hours without eating - nineteen, I think, during three of which I had slept -

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<sup>77</sup> Scott, *Southern Lady*, 16, Scott states, “ Each planter is in fact a Patriarch- his position compels him to be a ruler in his household.” This statement insinuates women had no domestic control with the institution of slavery

that I had lost all appetite; but nevertheless I ate it, to show my appreciation.

This family sacrificed their home as well as the valuable possessions that they could not carry with them as well as their personal safety. Dawson describes these scenes in her diary,

I never knew before how many articles were perfectly "indispensable" to me. This or that little token or keepsake, piles of letters I hate to burn, many dresses, etc., I cannot take conveniently, lie around me, and I hardly know which to choose among them, yet half *must* be sacrificed...

Dawson describes the feelings she had as they left their home further, "It cost me a pang to leave my guitar, and Miriam's piano, but it seems there was no help for it, so I had to submit." The material sacrifices of home and possessions, furthers the notion of women's independence, as they had was no plan after these moves. Women were required to think and act quickly, making the executive decisions, that before the war, would have been made by the male head of household. Women, like the Dawson's, may have written to their husbands or fathers to ask advice yet with the mail service of the time and constant troop movement this could not be relied on. The women were for all intents and purposes, on their own after fleeing until they could take refuge in another home, which hopefully would not face the same threat.<sup>78</sup>

Southern homes became targets to pillage as Northern troops made their way through the region. The Dawson's unstable domestic situation was not unique. The homes left abandoned by those in similar situations were looted for fine silver and art, which could be sold as well as food and livestock. The soldiers knew that families would vacate their homes if it under seize. They then would have free reign over the property to do as they please. Heirlooms and expensive pieces alike were left to the hands of soldiers. Dolly Sumner Lunt describes the march of General Sherman and his troops past her home in her diary. Her home was bombarded with soldiers,

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<sup>78</sup> Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 109, Dawson 39, 202



who wrecked havoc on the property. One Captain promised her the main house would not be burnt down but they slave quarters may be. Diary entries of other women, similar to this, confirm the surrender of safety, homes, property and possessions to the war.<sup>79</sup>

Another material sacrifice made during the war by these women was due to the naval blockade imposed by the North on Southern ports. Because of this, food and other necessities became something forfeited for the cause. This imposition on the South, while aimed at wearing down the Confederate troops, may have had a stronger negative affect on the women and children. Inflation caused by the blockade made goods exorbitantly priced or unavailable entirely. Examples of this food shortage are found in the diaries of southern women. Dawson comments on the unavailability of goods and inflation distress,

The following is a list of a few of the articles that shopkeepers actually laugh at you if you ask for: Glasses, flour, soap, starch, coffee, candles, matches, shoes, combs, guitar-strings, bird-seed, - in short, everything that I have heretofore considered as necessary to existence. If any one had told me I could have lived off of cornbread, a few months ago, I would have been incredulous; now I believe it, and return an inward grace for the blessing at every mouthful.

Avary too recounts an experience of food sacrifice because of the blockade,

when we had no money, we went without those things which it took money to buy. With money a bit of meat now and then, a taste of sorghum, and even the rare luxury of a cup of tea sweetened with sugar, was possible. Without money, we had to depend upon the bags of peas, dried apples, or rice.

The North imposed the blockade, which forced sacrifice of goods, including basic foodstuffs, upon these women, in an effort to starve the southern troops. This, however,

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<sup>79</sup> Lunt, Dolly Sumner, and Julian Street. *A Woman's Wartime Journal; an Account of the Passage over a Georgia Plantation of Sherman's Army on the March to the Sea, as Recorded in the Diary of Dolly Sumner Lunt (Mrs. Thomas Burge)*. Macon: J.W. Burke, 1927. Documenting the American South. Academic Affairs Library, UNC-CH. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1996. Web.25-29 Culpepper, *All Things Altered*, 49-51

may not have been an effective strategy because of Southern women's selfless dedication to the Confederacy. Those who had food to give often provided any traveling soldier with a meal or whatever else they needed. An example of this altruistic behavior can be seen by Belle Boyd, as written in Avary's diary from hearsay,

...she met a soldier, a mere boy, trudging along painfully on his bare feet. She took off her own shoes and made him put them on; they were fine cloth gaiters laced at the side, and trimmed with patent leather. Some one remonstrated; the shoes would not last the boy long enough to pay for her sacrifice.

Avary also deemed Boyd to "feel that she has the weight of the Confederacy on her shoulders." This devotion to cause exhibits the internal independence of these women to act on their own behalf and participate in the war effort through whatever means they could. The blockade was not the only reason items were scarce. That, along with the personal demand these women put on themselves to relinquish food and items to the troops, made obtaining these items for their own use and consumption all the more difficult.<sup>80</sup>

The blockade, designed to weaken Southern soldiers, interestingly empowered Southern women. Myrta Avery chronicles an example of her newfound courage and willpower obtained through running the blockade in her diary. Avary's sister who resided in Baltimore, Maryland at the time with her children and their mother had crossed the blockade to join Avary whom she has not seen for some time. Avery was overjoyed, as the separation had begun to make her commitment to the effort weak. When it was time for her sister to return to Baltimore, Avary resolved to join her, as she wanted to see her mother and accompany her sister for safety purposes. Blockade crossing was a dangerous endeavor and something, which a younger less headstrong version of this woman would have shied away from. After enduring the war's

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<sup>80</sup> Dawson, *A Confederate Girl*, 213. Avary, *A Virginia Girl*, 354-58

hardships, an emboldened Avary told, rather than requested the permission of, her husband that she planned to cross the lines. After a slight argument, in which Avary did not back down, she commented on her husband's reaction, "Dan looked at me as if he would like to spank me! Here was his obedient, docile, girl bride blossomed into a contumacious rebellious wife!"<sup>81</sup> Regardless of Dan's reaction Avary did, in fact, cross the blockade with her sister. This adventure turned out to be more dangerous than one could initially predict. The pair crossed the blockade with the help of two Confederate soldiers yet are detained under suspicion. The war therefore provided a sort of catalyst for these women to begin their independence. Avary evolves from the childlike girl at the start of the war into the self-assure, boundary-pushing woman at its conclusion. When defending herself to her sister she states, "I may be a little younger but I am married, and I have got just as much sense about some things and I'm just as brave as you are. I'm a soldier's wife, the wife of a Confederate officer."<sup>82</sup> The Civil War, and patriotic duty empowered women to behave in a public, self-determined manner.

These women may not have even noticed nor understood the grandeur of what they were doing and what, if any, outcome it could have on the fate of Southern women. The war pushed back boundaries, which were deep rooted in the Southern traditions of honor and patriarchy and allowed women to step out of their typical roles and into a new sphere, which was otherwise closed off to them for the most part.

This blockade also furthered the intense resentment, violence, and/or disdain for "Yankees" fostered by these women. The resentment originated from Northern soldiers fighting on behalf of the Union but also extended to the entire northern culture. The dislike of Yankees was obviously not universally valid as the amount of Northerners that the women came in

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<sup>82</sup> Dawson, *A Confederate Girl* 95-100, Avary, *A Virginia Girl*.147

contact with, in relation to the entire population was very small. With this being said, out of those that they did come in contact with from the narratives, many furthered stereotypes. These stereotypes were not of a positive nature. Diaries told of impolite men, who used language, or brute force to assert their domination of the South, by symbolically destroying the moral pillar on which Southern women were put.<sup>83</sup> Additional narratives by Emma Watson of New Orleans labels the northern soldiers as “Blue devils”, Lise Mitchell deemed them “tyrants” and Sarah Lois Wadney as “impudent invaders”.<sup>84</sup> Avary portrays this symbolic violation of Southern women in a scene while on a Northern boat she called the “flag of truce” which was bringing Southerners back South. On the ship belongings of women were ruthlessly searched and items confiscated, as they were Northern and not to be brought back to the South. Small items such as buttons, pins, shoes for children, which these women “spent their last dollar” on were taken from them as they begged and pleaded with the men to stop to no avail. Independence and self-sacrifice are once again demonstrated by the acts of these women. They, before the war, may not have even gone to the store themselves, but would rather have a slave act in their place. Elite women would know little of prices and the like, let alone dare to blockade run and attempt to smuggle goods into the South.<sup>85</sup>

The diaries kept by these elite women detail their evolution from the start of the war until Appomattox. Women were changing as a result of the war, whether they recognized it or not. Dawson does see this change and described the phenomena in her diary. She notes that a change has come over herself specifically and women in general. Her own transformation is reflected in her reference to herself in the third person in the first few pages of her diary. She does this

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<sup>83</sup> Andrews, *The War Time Journal*, 36,46. Dawson, *A Confederate Girl*, 245, 318

<sup>84</sup> Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 131

<sup>85</sup> Avary, *A Virginia Girl*, 213

because she feels there are two versions of herself, the pre-war carefree child whom has since died and current Sarah Dawson, the “aged- lady” who occasionally suffers heartache in silence. Of other women, Dawson wrote, “This war has brought out wicked, malignant feelings that I did not believe could dwell in woman's heart” Dawson faced an internal conflict, which many women shared. The conflict between morality, honor, feminine duty and piety and then the feelings brought on by war of hatred and anger and roles forced upon women of independence had emerged in the minds of many Southern women. Dawson later surprisingly comments about her own independence claiming that if she were more independent she would not be sitting idly by doing women’s tasks of sewing or reading. She likens herself to a chained bear, as she cannot help the dying men as she feels it is her mission to do so.

Die, poor men, without a woman's hand to close  
your eyes! We women are too *patriotic* to help you! I look  
eagerly on, cry in my soul, "I wish -"; you die; God judges  
me. Behold the woman who dares not risk private ties for  
God's glory and her professed religion! Coward, helpless  
woman that I am! If I was free -!

Interestingly, one page prior to this assertive entry Sarah states a woman’s role is not politics, yet the comparison to a chained animal could have been a metaphor for women of the time. The passion and core of this entry that Dawson feels so strongly about this issue shows the stirrings of political thought within her, possibly without her conscious understanding of it. Through Dawson’s diary we see that while the physical independence of being on her “own” without a male figure was occurring, alongside it a stir of ideological independence was brewing as well.<sup>86</sup>

Ideological independence, for many women in the reconstruction years, was fostered with education. Dawson only had ten months of formal education yet was well on her way towards a new way of thinking in terms of her sex, and the unequal opportunities that came with it. While

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<sup>86</sup> Dawson, *A Confederate Girl*. 5, 79-81

contemplating the idea of her home being overrun, begins to think about the possibility of her late father's finances being lost forever and their being destitute and without a home. She resolves to teach despite the fact of her limited formal education. The rest of her knowledge was self-taught purely through her desire, and her well-written diary is a testament to her competency. She acknowledges she may not be capable, but would rather "die than be dependent". From a woman who thirty pages prior denied that a woman's mission could be political, this a major conscious shift.<sup>87</sup> Her lack of formal education self-questioned later in the diary, and she asks herself if an injustice has been done to her and who is to blame for her "self taught ignorance". The ten months of education is once again mentioned, and is a true source of humiliation for Sarah. These entries relating to education could be an awakening in Sarah that she was in fact done an injustice and that her denial of education was because of gender. Dawson was willing to, and did, sacrifice her antebellum ideology regarding gender roles in order to be financially independent. This ideological sacrifice may have been the hardest to accept by these women, as the idea of the "Southern lady" was engrained in years of tradition and generations of acceptance.<sup>88</sup>

Despite the seemingly limitless sacrifices these women and many others in their position made for the Confederacy, fatalities were rising on both sides and the Southern cause was weakening. The realities of war began to set in as more notices of those killed and wounded in battle made their way into Southern homes and it became more difficult to hold onto hope for victory. After Appomattox the sacrifices made seemed worthless. Avary, nearing the end of her diary remarks about Richmond falling to the Union and the sounds of sobbing throughout the house, was describing it as sounds of death. She asks incredulously, "Was it to this end we had

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<sup>88</sup> Dawson, *A Confederate Girl*, 248-250, 105, Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender*, 4-6

fought and starved and gone naked and cold? To this end that the wives and children of many a dear and gallant friend were husbandless and fatherless? To this end that our homes were in ruins , our State devastated?”<sup>89</sup>

The South, as the defeated side of the sectional conflict faced different circumstances when General Robert E. Lee surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant at the Appomattox courthouse in 1865. With the war primarily taking place in this region, the physical damage of was devastating. Beyond the damage to infrastructure in the area, the mental scar that was left on Southerners, whether they were secessionists or unionists was stifling. A dark cloud hung over the United States as both North and South mourned the loss of loved ones. Americans were now left to deal with the utter astonishment that after these four long years, the war was finally over. The South had no idea what was to come in the following years, now that their entire way of life had been demolished. All of those who thought the South could not lose felt the shock of defeat and humiliation.

The Southern men if they returned at all did so defeated, weary of years of battle, and humiliated; striped of their honor by loss. What independence these women obtained throughout the war had to be put aside as Southerners attempted to return to their pre-war lives in which patriarchs remain dominant. This however would prove impossible. The pristine homes they left behind as shelter for their women and children, in many instances were destroyed, ransacked by soldiers or worse. Their families, facing extreme austerity may have had to relocate staying with relatives or wherever was safe.<sup>90</sup>

With the end of the war, whatever resentment and disdain for Yankees that developed during fighting was exacerbated. Women feeling this agony of loss turned their feelings into

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<sup>89</sup> Avary, *A Virginia Girl*, 363-4

<sup>90</sup> Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender*, 148 Dawson, *A Confederate Girl*, 174-5. Andrews, *The War Time Journal*, 133

resentment of the victors. Dawson wrote, “ Does it take thirty thousand men, and millions of dollars to murder defenseless women and children?” This outburst of anger gives an undertone of desperation at what was left of the South. The soldiers who inflicted this, or so they believed, needed to be “blamed.” This was also an effort to bring down northern men as easy targets and thus build up Southern men. The idea of Southern women working to rebuild the ego of Confederate men will be elaborated on in the following chapter. This disdain for Northern ideas, people and actions had both short term and long term affects on Southern society. The resentment festered in women and they began to, unconsciously perhaps, turn away from all things Northern including the reform movements. These reforms for women like Dawson could mean advanced education and independence. Because Northern women were involved in these movements, and that these same women also were the wives, mothers, or sisters of the soldiers who inflicted this pain upon the South, their movements were insulted and avoided.<sup>91</sup>

This chapter detailed the involuntary movement towards independence in elite white southern women, which was brought on by the Civil War. This catalyst, the war, would prove to be essential in women’s journey towards autonomy. Through their wartime sacrifices women displayed their willpower and perseverance, maintaining the home front and doing whatever they could for the Confederacy. After the Confederacy surrendered, women felt strong resentment to the north. This was understandable considering how heavily invested in victory these women were through their many sacrifices. Northern resentment would not end with reconstruction; it instead gained strength, as presented in the following chapter.

### **Chapter Three**

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<sup>91</sup> Scott, *Southern Lady*, 21



During the Civil war, women were forced to become independent through both physical and ideological sacrifices. If this statement is true, then Reconstruction era womanhood could have, at its surface, been understood as a step backwards in their independence. This chapter asserts the notion that, during the commonly understood era of Reconstruction, southern elite women progressed in their journey towards political autonomy. This chapter will explore two styles of domesticity during formal Reconstruction and clarify how this phase in women's ideological evolution should not be seen as a retreat. This chapter will explore Ladies Memorial Associations, as well as detail women's new experiences within their households. These experiences validated to women that their gender was not synonymous with fragility and weakness and they too could be public, political figures in their own right.

As mentioned two different forms of domesticity emerged during Reconstruction. Both categories of domesticity were avenues for elite white southern women to move towards autonomy in their communities as well as within the home. While not being active in the public arena as they were during the war, the movement forward had not been stopped. From 1865 until the end of Reconstruction in 1876, factors surrounding southern defeat such as male honor, patriotism, and a notion that women were non-political, brought women back into the domestic sphere of society. This domesticity should not be seen, however, as a relinquishing of the freedoms fostered during the war. One, of the two types was the public expression of a nurturing, mothering, and woman caring for the fallen soldiers. The other form was domesticity in the private sphere, which involved housework. Women did comply with the gender roles established through paternalism and southern tradition during Reconstruction and there are numerous

reasons behind this compliance. I argue that these factors were not primarily concerned with female submission to the opposite sex.<sup>92</sup>

The devotion to the lost cause by women during Reconstruction can be understood as domesticity through its connection to mothering and support for the former Confederates. Because women were not present in battle or defeat, some authors argue that it was all the more difficult for them to accept the failure of the Confederacy.<sup>93</sup> The avocation of the lost cause provided women with an outlet for their patriotic feelings after the war's end. Amanda Worthington exemplifies this understanding by stating in her diary, of the war and afterwards. "I have never written of the end of the war for it is a subject on which I feel too deeply to express myself." She goes on further to describe the "misery and humiliation" she feels regarding defeat. This devout patriotism led to the manifestation of the lost cause theory.<sup>94</sup>

The term "Lost Cause" was first printed in 1866 as the title of Edward Pollard's history of the Civil War. This book, The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates details the causes leading up to the war, southern politics and culture along with in-depth looks at individual battles. The lost cause is understood to be an attachment to memories of the Confederacy, before and during the war. Worthington carried her Confederate alliance into politics, of which she says regarding an up-coming election, "I find I take some interest in this election, as all the candidates have been in our dear Confederate army and I know them all."<sup>95</sup> This fond perception of the Confederacy may or may not be accurate, yet the accuracy is almost irrelevant, as it shaped Reconstruction southern culture regardless. Her feelings show the

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<sup>92</sup> Whites, *The Civil War as Crisis in Gender*, 149. Whites argues that a shift in domesticity forced women to relinquish their self of self and they did so because of subordination to "the needs to their men's egos"

<sup>93</sup> Worthington, *Delta Diary*, 86

<sup>94</sup> Edward Alfred Pollard. *The Lost Cause; a New Southern History of the War of the Confederates. Comprising a Full and Authentic Account of the Rise and Progress of the Late Southern Confederacy--the Campaigns, Battles, Incidents, and Adventures of the Most Gigantic Struggle of the World's History. Drawn from Official Sources, and Approved by the Most Distinguished Confederate Leaders.* (New York: E. B. Treat &, Baltimore, Md., L. T. Palmer &; [etc., Etc., 1866.) 750

<sup>95</sup> Worthington, *Delta Diary*, 101

penetration of the lost cause into all aspects of southern life during Reconstruction. In the final chapter of Pollard's history he describes the concept of the lost cause without using the term directly. As Pollard understands the southern ideology after the war, "The people of the South have surrendered in the war what the war has conquered ; but they cannot be expected to give up what was not involved in the war, and voluntarily abandon their political schools for the dogma of Consolidation."<sup>96</sup> The things that Pollard believes to be outside of war presumably would include the role of woman, and their notion of the southern belle. The South would remain true to their ideals and values while respecting defeat. Furthermore, their defeat would only be accepted to the extent to which it was fought over. Pollard further defines the nature of the lost cause,

Defeat has not made " all our sacred things profane." The war has left the South its own memories, its own heroes, its own tears, its own dead. Under these traditions, sons will grow to manhood, and lessons sink deep that are learned from the lips of widowed mothers. It would be immeasurably the worst consequence of defeat in this war that the South should lose its moral and intellectual distinctiveness as a people, and cease to assert its well-known superiority in civilization, in political scholarship, and in all the standards of individual character over the people of the North.

This southern distinctiveness would not be lost with Reconstruction policy. Their separation in-fact would be strengthened, as shown with Worthington's connection to former Confederate candidates and not others. Women fervently perpetuated this uniquely southern understanding of the war. The womanly tasks associated with the lost cause were tending to fallen soldiers, building back up the egos defeated southern men and raising children to be properly educated in and proud of their southern heritage. They did this because it was their role,

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<sup>96</sup> Pollard, *The Lost Cause*, 750

as mothers and as the nurturing sex, to protect the domestic sphere.<sup>97</sup>

The lost cause rhetoric proved to be powerful enough to influence many aspects of Southern culture. Ellen Glasgow in The Battle-Ground, a fictional story, taking place during the Civil War and immediately after, makes ample use of this concept. The closing chapter of this novel particularly highlights the feelings of defeat in returning soldiers, and the romantic impression and memories from antebellum days. A Confederate soldier, and main character of the novel, in protesting why his love interest should not marry him states, "I am a beggar, a failure, a wreck, a broken-down soldier from the ranks." He confesses that this is not the way that he wanted to return to her and could not marry her in his current state.

Glasgow, writing this novel as a southerner, would have been familiar with this interpretation of history. Additionally, as a woman she would have also been aware of her sexes' strength throughout the war. This is also highlighted in her writing especially through the main female character Betty. While the aforementioned soldier, Dan, emotionally exposes his failure as a man to Betty, she is there to comfort him, "With a smile she lifted her face and he caught the strong courage of her look." The theme of female courage is also noted in the final page of the book where the couple faces the unknown future of Reconstruction, "'We will begin again," she said, "and this time, my dear, we will begin together. This shows the role of women during Reconstruction to be that of carrying their men into the next phase of life in the South. This fictional novel provides insight into how women may have viewed their function in the post-war world, as figures responsible for rebuilding men. Supplementary to what Glasgow was writing about, her prominence as a southern female author is evidence for women becoming increasingly

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<sup>97</sup> Pollard. *The Lost Cause*, 750

public.<sup>98</sup>

For women who worked tirelessly to aid the Confederacy during the war, defeat was not something easily accepted. As illustrated in chapter two, women often fostered resentment for Union troops occupying the South, and in turn the United States government who put them there. For them, continuing their wartime patriotism was a way to get a handle on a seemingly hopeless future. An example of how women opposed the occupying Union troops was by advocating the lost cause mentality and continuing support for the Confederacy. One of the largest organizations working to memorialize the Confederate war effort was the Ladies Memorial Association. The Ladies Memorial Association was initially founded in Winchester, Virginia in the year of surrender. The initial reason behind this group's formation was the lack of proper burials for many fallen Confederate soldiers. The idea of a Ladies Memorial Association soon spread to the other former Confederate states and even individual counties began their own organizations.<sup>99</sup>

Scholarship often cites claims from this time period that women were nonpolitical and should not be involved with politics because it would only taint their pure and good nature.<sup>100</sup> Regardless of what was said about these women, historians argue that the actions of women were in fact political in nature. The members and actions of Ladies Memorial Associations during reconstruction are frequently involved in this discussion. Lee Ann Whites in her study of gender crisis in the Civil War and Reconstruction looked at the various LMA's. She understands that while their actions were an effort to, "maintain the conventional forms of public gender subordination", that this was a conscious decision. Whites asserts women were aware of the gender roles at play, using evidence from 1870 newspapers in which the Ladies Memorial

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<sup>98</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle Ground*, 510, 512

<sup>99</sup> Janney, *Burying the Dead*, 39.

<sup>100</sup> Spruill, Marjorie Julian. *New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the Southern States*. New York: Oxford UP, 1993.7, 72 Cox, *Dixie's Daughters*, 6

Association of Augusta, Georgia deny political motives behind their work. This article (which can be assumed to have been written by a member of the LMA) states that they “frankly acknowledge their dependence on Southern men, and waiving ‘women’s rights’ and parliamentary usages, they claim the privilege of having their public announcements made by men.” Another article states “Southern ladies naturally shrink from contact with the outside world” My research proves, through action, rather than written word, that women in these organizations were not dependent on men and were political beings in their own right.<sup>101</sup>

This argument of apolitical women is weakened repeatedly in the documented histories of these associations. Confederate honoring and memorial efforts were a way for women to get involved with the lost cause while remaining in their domestic roles. Contradictory to their language, when men were gone during the war, the courage and spirit of these women ultimately proved ability to function in the public on their own and political capacity. Women also were not shrinking from the public eye as stated was their nature.

Women were willing to defy federal troops in order to honor their fallen confederate heroes. The LMA of Raleigh, in doing so acted politically during an incident occurring at the first memorial celebration in Raleigh on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May. This date is significant as it marks the anniversary of the day Stonewall Jackson was killed. The women of this LMA, after being threatened by federal troops feared being fired upon if such a large group were to converge in a procession upon their newly made cemetery to honor Jackson. Rather than giving up on the idea, the members formed small (2 or 3) person groups at various street corners, and separately went to the cemetery under federal officers watchful eyes. This action “demanded courage and independence.” This direct insubordination and its link to the confederacy is precisely how

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<sup>101</sup> Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender*, 184, 189-90

memorial associations aided women in their political evolution. Women using southern patriotism as an indirect way to assert themselves into the public domain demonstrated their conscious efforts to step out of their domestic roles.<sup>102</sup>

The Augusta, Georgia LMA and their Confederate monument provided evidence-supporting women stepping into the public, rather than shrinking away. The year after the aforementioned newspaper articles were printed, financial collections began for the monument, which culminated in its construction in 1878. Whites mentioned this monument in her study and gives further evidence, which contradicts what the women, wrote in the cited newspaper. Using Gertrude Thomas, an active LMA officer in 1878, Whites explains a passive aggressive dispute between Thomas and a group of “the town’s prominent male citizens.” This debate was over the location of the monument and it was published. Thomas goes so far to accuse these men of being ashamed to put the monument in a very public place.<sup>103</sup>

Women, under the pretenses of memorial efforts, were performing what was commonly understood as men’s work in public. On the first day of building the building the monument, the women of the LMA that was responsible for it, were to lay the first bricks. The atypical job of getting dirty and doing “men’s work” was observed in the first page of this history, “It was indeed a novel sight to the large number of spectators to see the ladies, with delicate, ungloved hands, laying bricks and handling the trowel, but it was a holy duty they performed.” The author acknowledges the unfeminine aspect of this task, yet warrants it because of the cause. “The ladies at once set to work energetically to accomplish the object for which they had organized.

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<sup>102</sup> Charlotte Bryan Grimes Williams. *History of the Wake County Ladies Memorial Association, Confederate Memorials in Capitol Square, Memorial Pavilion, the House of Memory and the Confederate Cemetery*. (Raleigh, NC: n.p., 1938. *Archive.org*. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill/University Library. Web.) <<http://archive.org/details/historyofwakecou00will>>. 8-9

<sup>103</sup> Clement Anselm Evans and Charles C. Jones. *Ceremonies in Augusta, Georgia, Laying the Corner Stone of the Confederate Monument*. (Augusta, Georgia.: Chronicle and Constitution Job Printing Establishment, 1878. *Archive.org*. University Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.) <<http://archive.org/stream/ceremoniesinaugu00ladi#page/n1/mode/2up>>. 1,16, 17

Further evidence of this monument agrees with the understanding that a degree of supplemental aid by men in the community was crucial to the goals of the LMA, “Their worthy efforts met with a hearty co-operation from the part of the male portion of the community.” These women, “knew no such word as fail.” The various LMA’s were in-fact acting politically and independently, under the auspices of a nurturing, patriotic organization when performing tasks beyond their gendered guidelines.<sup>104</sup> By being careful in asserting their political agendas, women were able to gain support of male members of the community.

Women of The LMA of Charleston, S.C, who were willing to stand up against the state government in order to properly bury fallen soldiers, disprove further these apolitical arguments. This LMA planned to establish tombstones for the Confederate soldiers that they could obtain, and bury them in Magnolia cemetery. The women obtained large financial donations, along with a donation of granite, which was not needed for the State House in Columbia. When the women could accept this donation (in physicality) the government had already given the granite to another party, and had “no sympathy” for the ladies. The (female) president of the memorial association convinced the government to restore to them their granite donation, and was commended by Col. A.K. Haskell for her “persistent efforts.” Women were acting politically regarding issues they were passionate about through their actions. By accomplishing their goals these women legitimized their LMA and asserted themselves in a political setting.<sup>105</sup>

Caroline E. Janney, in her book Burying the Dead But Not the Past: Ladies Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause, includes an argument made by Anne Rubin, which states women became involved in these individual state based organized as a form of “political

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<sup>104</sup> Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender*, 190

<sup>105</sup> Frederick A Porcher. *A Brief History of the Ladies' Memorial Association of Charleston, S. C., from Its Organization in 1865 to April 1, 1880. Together with a Roster of the Confederate Dead Interred at Magnolia and the Various City Church-yards.* (Charleston: H. P. Cooke &, Printers, 1880. *Archive.org*. Sloan Foundation/ Library of Congress.) <<http://archive.org/stream/briefhistoryofla00ladi#page/n1/mode/2up>>. 6-7



ventriloquism” for their men’s opinions on politics.<sup>106</sup> According to political ventriloquism any indignation of the North was done by women, rather than by the men who actually felt these sentiments.<sup>107</sup> This was because as “non-political” figures women speaking out and rallying behind the Southern cause would not be seen as disloyal to the Union, yet from a man it would be. My research does not support the claim of politically ambiguous women, nor the understanding that they joined these organizations on behalf of their men. An LMA meeting occurring at the Methodist Episcopal Church of Montgomery, Alabama in 1866 offers evidence against members as nonpolitical. At this meeting the women discussed fundraising measures, meeting objectives, decided on a Chair, elected committee members and made a list of resolutions for the organization. This account does not mention men’s involvement in the meeting beyond their attendance. The way in which these women went about their meeting can be viewed as an attempt to legitimize their organization and make their chapter publically respectable and valid. The use of elections, an executive branch and the drafting of resolutions conveys the political consciousness of these women. If they were merely acting as puppets for men, it can be inferred that they would have more of an influence in the group. The goals of men would also be present in the resolutions of the group; however, none of the resolutions make any mention of living men at all.<sup>108</sup>

While men may have not been the overseers of these associations, it does not mean that they were not involved at all with the LMA. Men did in fact; participate in Ladies Memorial

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<sup>106</sup>Caroline E Janney. *Burying the Dead but Not the Past: Ladies' Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2008. 65. Anne Rubin initially used this phrase, which Janney slightly modifies, in her study. Rubin used newspaper articles to show how former confederates permitted women to speak on their behalf against the Union army. Janney’s modified interpretation is that men allowed women to take “center stage” at memorial ceremonies. Janney also points out the fact that women facilitated men in their anti-Yankee sentiments through this ventriloquism and therefore displayed their interest in politics. She also states that women were not political puppets in reference to the concept of political ventriloquism.

<sup>107</sup>  
<sup>108</sup> Marielou Armstrong Cory, *The Ladies' Memorial Association of Montgomery, Alabama; Its Origin and Organization, 1860-1870*, (Montgomery: Alabama Print., 1902. *Archive.org*. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill/University Library.) 55 <<http://archive.org/stream/ladiesmemorialas00cory#page/n5/mode/2up>>.

Associations, even in high-ranking roles. This was not, however, the intention of the group when it was founded. In fact, only dues paying female members were to be official members. The allowance of men into the associations was not without consideration of the female members. Their decision to allow men was in itself a political act. Men were often links to the community or gave speeches at events as requested by women. By inviting various members of the Confederate army to speak, the ladies continued their connection to the lost cause and the memorial efforts.<sup>109</sup>

An illustration of men's involvement as a supplement to the efforts of women was found in a history of the Charleston, S.C. Ladies Memorial Association. Many complications in the removal of Confederate soldiers from the Gettysburg battlefield arose, a goal of this LMA. These complications included requested payment for bodies as well as the fact that some bodies lay on a Union cemetery. Dr. Weaver finally stepped in to obtain the bodies located on this cemetery when the President of the LMA could not. She did, however, manage to negotiate with the farmer's wife, the owner of the land, and did not have to pay for the bodies. This supplemental assistance can be viewed as the women stepping cautiously out of their prior domestic roles, not wanting to terminate their efforts by "getting an inch but taking a mile." While women were working towards public freedom, politics was still a man's sphere. In order to accomplish their purpose, women had to work with men. This cooperation does not, however, diminish their political abilities. Men also, as seen through the lost cause theory, were returning home humiliated and feeling as if their honor was disgraced by defeat. These women would have been aware of these feelings and used the memorial associations as a way to bolster the male ego, as they felt needed and important again in their role as soldiers.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Janney, *Burying the Dead*, 7-8,80

<sup>110</sup> Porcher. *A Brief History of the Ladies' Memorial Association of Charleston, S. C.*, 6-7

Memorial associations were one approach to domesticity; the other was a more literal understanding of the term. Household chores became a new aspect of everyday life for southern former plantation mistresses. Defeat left many wealthy Southerners impoverished, the world, as they knew had been destroyed. Former planters and their families were left to their own devices as slaves left plantations to begin their lives as freemen and women. While it may seem difficult to feel sympathy for former masters now that their slaves had gone, such a drastic transition brought with it many struggles. Kate Stone recounts the problems with this transition in her diary “Our future is appalling- no money, no credit, heavily in debt, and an overflowed place.” While some hardships were felt equally by both sexes such as death of a family member or homelessness, certain aspects of Reconstruction affected women more than their male counterparts.<sup>111</sup>

For women who relied almost exclusively on enslaved labor to perform the day-to-day housekeeping tasks, the new domestic role they found themselves was eye opening. This new role, although difficult, was another way for women to continue on their path towards independence. This independence came from no longer relying on others for things and being able to do them on their own. Even if they did not relish the idea of doing chores, this autonomy was a progression. Of course there were exceptions to the post war situation, yet, based on a number of similar expressions shown in ladies’ diaries, these sentiments regarding housework can be viewed as typical for women of this social standing.

Many examples of documented domestic work were found in the diaries of elite white women during Reconstruction. Marilyn Mayer Culpepper, in her book All Things Altered: Women in the Wake of Civil War and Reconstruction gathered information from a variety of

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<sup>111</sup> Kate Stone, and John Q. Anderson. *Brokenburn; the Journal of Kate Stone, 1861-1868*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1955.) 362

first person narratives by women. One diary she looked at was that of Anna Logan. Logan, before the war, lived on a vast plantation utilizing the labor of over 200 slaves in Virginia. Her family, comprised of eleven children and their parents, faced extraordinary debt and a seeming hopeless future after defeat. The Logans faced endangerment of losing their home, as her father had no skills other than as a planter to bring to another profession. The Logans found themselves with no “help” after urging their “servants” to find new homes, due to inability to pay them. Logan and her family faced this new degree of domesticity like so many other Southern women did, women who before the war, relied on coercive labor for the running of their households. Logan commented, “ We had to bring in our wood and do our cleaning, and all the children helped.” Culpepper shares the sentiments of another women, Amanda Worthington. Worthington spoke similarly of this new domestic role.”... we have most of the housework to do all the time, and one thing certain, it does not make me like the Yankees any better...”An untold number of diaries from elite Southern women during Reconstruction recount their domestic duties. Myrta Avery states “Sue Williams said she was going to wash her clothes herself we all got up our washings, and went down into the back yard with her. We found some tubs and drew our water, and made up some fire under a pot, as we had seen the negroes do.” Amanda Worthington frequently mentioned chores she had done during the day including, “Sewed a good while on some pants for father”, “ Sewed some, taught sister how to make rolls and was preparing to make fresh yeast..”, “mother and I were peeling some pears.” Worthington does not seem run-down by these tasks and this could be due to the fact that she was only sixteen at the time of this diary and would have had less housework to do than say her mother. Much of Worthington’s writings discuss things typically associated with the diary of a young woman:

men, books, friends, etc. The plethora of diary entries entailing the responsibilities of these women shows the heightened role they played in the domestic sphere.<sup>112</sup>

Upon entering the domestic world, following emancipation, these women found new challenges to which they were not accustomed. Simple tasks such as washing clothes, as these women mentioned, were fostering a sense of independence through accomplishment in these women. Knowing that when put to work, they could succeed without complete reliance on unpaid labor gave women a sense of faith in themselves. Amanda Worthington wrote after washing her own corsets and their looking almost new that she “was charmed with her success”. An example from the diary of Eliza Andrews further demonstrates this self- assurance,

I don't think I shall mind working at all when I get used to it. Everybody else is doing housework, and it is so funny to compare our experiences. Father says this is what has made the Anglo-Saxon race great; they are not afraid of work, and when put to the test, never shirk anything that they know has got to be done, no matter how disagreeable. But it does seem to me a waste of time for people who are capable of doing something better to spend their time sweeping and dusting while scores of lazy negroes that are fit for nothing else are lying around idle.

This statement is particularly interesting in the ironic understanding of race. The white Southern elites, to which Andrews refers, did very little of their own work during antebellum years, rather they utilized the labor of “lazy negroes” to build their plantations and fortunes.<sup>113</sup>

While housework may not seem to be a step towards self-determination, for women who had never considered or possibly been allowed, to do these tasks, it became a symbol of sovereignty. Myrta Avery in her book depicting the South during Reconstruction discusses her domestic responsibility stating “there was honour in the “gritty” way the Southern housewife

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<sup>112</sup> Culpepper, *All Things Altered*, 274, 123, Avery 306-307, Amanda Worthington and Troy Woods. *A Delta Diary: Amanda Worthington's Civil War Diary*. ([S.l.]: Olivewoods, 2008.)98, 102, 104.

<sup>113</sup>Worthington, *Delta Diary*, 104. Andrews, *The War-time Journal of a Georgia Girl*, 374

adapted herself to the situation, humour in the way spoiled maiden played the part of milkmaid Bridget.” This feeling of accomplishment came in tandem with the reliance on ones-self that domestic work provided. While housework may not seem to be a step towards self-determination, for women who had never considered or possibly been allowed, to do these tasks, it became a symbol of sovereignty.<sup>114</sup>

Many Southerners faced financial uncertainty and destitution during Reconstruction. Because of the high casualty rates, many women were left widowed, and faced the utter necessity to support families. These circumstances forced some women into occupations beyond the home. These women now found themselves in yet another degree of independence and occupations were another step in the public and political direction. Anna Logan was happy to accept a position as a teacher in Salem, Virginia and she was able to bring her sister as an assistant. As previously shown, Anna was also maintaining the domestic responsibilities of her home. Gertrude Thomas also had begun teaching and Mary Boykin Chestnut began an entrepreneurial endeavor selling butter and eggs with her maid. These examples of women working, who previously may not have considered a job beyond the home is a more direct path toward independence. By now were earning their own wages women not need to rely on men to provide for them and were public figures within their communities.<sup>115</sup>

With the emancipation of slaves, Southern women found themselves in unfamiliar territory as noted, performing the tasks that usually would be done by a domestic slave. Between the potential for resentment of freed slaves as demonstrated by Andrews, and the emphasis on the lost cause, racial tension during Reconstruction reached its highest point. Eliza Andrews acknowledges these tensions stating “ A race war is sure to come, sooner or later, and we shall

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<sup>114</sup> Myrta Lockett Avery. *Dixie after the War; an Exposition of Social Conditions Existing in the South, during the Twelve Years Succeeding the Fall of Richmond.* (New York: Doubleday, Page &, 1906.) 189

<sup>115</sup> Culpeper, *All Things Altered*, 276, 228

have only the Yankees to thank for it.” Avary, in Dixie after the War, includes testimonies from what can be assumed to be friends or acquaintances of hers. These testimonies describe emancipation from the side of the plantation women. One woman chronicles thievery and “humiliation by impertinence” by freed slaves. She goes on to say “ This is the first rule in their lesson of freedom to get all they can out of white folks and give as little as possible in return.” The irony in this statement is quite obvious, in that slave masters used the labor of their slaves to the fullest extent yet provided them with only the barest of necessities. Another woman writes, “We had thought there was a strong bond of affection on their side as well as ours! We have ministered to them in sickness, infancy and age.” She also likens freed slaves to either cage born birds, released into the world highlighting their naïve vulnerability, or as predatory animals such as hawks, who are now free “ to do mischief.” These examples of thought regarding the freedman and women fueled the fire of racial prejudice and strife. <sup>116</sup>

This prejudice is what opened the door for groups such as the Ku Klux Klan to be formed in an effort to scare former slaves back into submission. As recorded by Mary Polk in her 1912 memoir, “What could be done? There was no law! The Ku Klux filled the needed want, and by thorough superstition awed the Negroes into better behavior.” This friction between the races did not end with Reconstruction and will become increasingly worse through the ratification of the 15<sup>th</sup> amendment. While racial tension was an unfortunate outcome of the civil war, it proved an important factor in the progression of women into political beings. The understanding that men who once were property, had more political rights than white women became a catalyst for consciousness rising. Through enfranchisement of African Americans, women became aware of the injustice of their current situation. <sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Andrews, *The War-time Journal of a Georgia Girl*, 316 Avary, *Dixie After the War*, 188-190

<sup>117</sup> Branch, Mary P. *Memoirs of a Southern Woman: " Within the Lines and a Genealogical Record"* (Chicago: JOSEPH G.

## Chapter four

In this chapter I will be examining the final phase in white elite southern women's ideological reconstruction. This evolution is shown to its full extent in the period following formal Reconstruction. Women's enrollment in organizations was increasing and the sphere in which they functioned was expanding. The type of organizations women joined reveals insight into their priorities. As women ideologically evolved their focus shifted from the confederacy, to the domestic sphere and ultimately to themselves and their own self-advocacy.

From a forced independence during the Civil War to the conscious involvement in the public sphere to memorialize the dead during formal Reconstruction, women in the South were reshaping their belief systems. During the final evolutionary phase women became more involved in groups to honor the Confederacy as well as reform groups. The United Daughters of the Confederacy, Women's Christian Temperance Union, and Southern Suffrage movement were organizations that contributed to women's self-empowerment. Through these groups women gained administrative skills and expanded their thinking to include things such as the right to vote. The skills acquired through these groups were things were very new to wealthy women of the South who had only, in the recent past, started to do their own chores. Coordinating elections, organizing meetings, spreading information on these groups, all were public roles which came with responsibility and brought women into the community.

Southerner's unwillingness to participate in, or support northern born concepts after the war, stems from a fear that along with their politics, and slaves, their ideology would be the next aspect of Southern culture to be taken from them. Majorie Spruil Wheeler in her book , New



Women of the New South, cites a Georgia minister commenting on Reconstruction “ the victory over Southern arms is to be followed by a victory over Southern opinion.” Because of this fear the previously mentioned idea of the Lost Cause enabled Southerners to commemorate the fallen soldiers as well as preserve the idea Southern honor.<sup>118</sup> Eliza Andrews described the foundation of the Lost Cause mentality and exemplified the resentment of Northern society and culture,

I hate the Yankees more and more, every time I look  
at one of their horrid newspapers and read the lies they tell  
about us, while we have our mouths closed and padlocked.  
The world will not hear our story, and we must figure just as  
our enemies choose to paint us.<sup>119</sup>

Southern white women were slowly breaking down barriers between the sexes by forming organizations such as Ladies Memorial Associations. Through these groups women immortalized the confederacy, and were able to assert themselves into the community. These groups were essential to women’s evolution because the lost cause did not necessarily aid women in their progress, as the idea of traditional gender roles were not excluded in their commitment to the past. To those on the outside of these groups looking in, it could seem that women regressed in their journey to independence. These women were once again playing a subservient role to men through memorial services. In reality these memorial services and association activities were simultaneously maintaining the idea of a southern lady to society while fostering independence within the groups. These groups, along with an increased number of women in the work force, and women’s newly required household tasks without slaves made domesticity a necessary route to independence. Belle Kearney said, “ Since beginning to teach, every question that related to the attainments and possibilities of women was of intense interest

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<sup>118</sup> Spruill, Marjorie Julian. *New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the Southern States.* ( New York: Oxford UP, 1993.) 5

<sup>119</sup> Andrews, *War Time Journal*, 317

to me; but especially her developed power of bread winning.” Her self discovery through things considered women’s work showed a progression in ideology.<sup>120</sup>

The end of formal reconstruction in the south is an important factor in women’s ideological reconstruction because the previously mentioned threat to southern ideology was expelled. The disputed election of President Rutherford B. Hayes in 1876 marked an end to reconstruction and the risk of ideological forfeiting was removed. After an elimination of military presence in the South, the animosity towards the North lost some of its strength. Without the presence of troops, defeat was not hanging over the heads of Southerners as it was during Reconstruction. Elizabeth Avery Meriwether, in her published recollections of 1824-1916 years describes the carpetbaggers returning to the North, upon realizing they could no longer “use the ignorant Negroes as their tools to exploit the South.” While Meriwether does not show Northern sympathy she acknowledges the population transition back to native Southerners. Meriwether’s father was a physician and her mother was the daughter of a large plantation owner. She later married Minor Meriwether, a civil railroad engineer who fought for the Confederacy despite freeing his slaves and relocating them to Africa. Minor Meriwether also was a part of founding the Memphis Ku Klux Klan with Nathaniel Bedford Forrest. Meriwether regarding the end of Reconstruction stated “we saw the long night of “Reconstruction” giving way to a day of Freedom and Justice and common sense.” The KKK was also associated with the notion of the Lost Cause in its goal to restore white supremacy and order to the South.<sup>121</sup>

In this new phase of the post war South, further attempts to reestablish the white supremacy of the antebellum age were made. The conditions in the South following the war

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<sup>120</sup> Belle Kearney. *A Slaveholder's Daughter*. ( St. Louis: St. Louis Christian Advocate, 1900.) 107

<sup>121</sup> Elizabeth Avery Meriwether. *Recollections of 92 Years, 1824-1916*. (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1958) 198

made these organizations possible.<sup>122</sup> The periods in which these groups operated were overlapping yet had distinct goals in formation and consequences for the women involved. Now that the South was once again in the hand of southerners, things once considered Northern and therefore rejected could be seen through a new, southern light. Women in particular were able to see reform movements such as temperance and suffrage without having to submit and agree to Northern thought. By making these movements southern in formation in their own time, in their own way, more women were willing to participate.

The most far-reaching result of Reconstruction policy arguably was the emancipation and enfranchisement of the freedman. Because of these new federal legislations, racial tensions reached a high point as white southerners now felt the need to defend their social positions. This blow to white supremacy throughout the South sparked outrage in its citizens. \*Gertrude Thomas in her diary shows the previously noted hatred of Yankees as well as African Americans, “I must confess to you my journal that I do most heartily despise Yankees, Negroes and everything connected with them.” The elevated status of the white race to the black prior to emancipation had been easily identifiable, slavery. Slavery functioned on the basis of the southern social hierarchy. Even the poorest white man could take comfort, of sorts, in the fact that he was above slaves in southern social ranking. With emancipation, this hierarchy was broken down. The white race was now politically equally to the black race, which a short time ago was its owner. This realization led southerners to seek additional means to assert their superiority over the freedman. This included acts of violence, such as lynching to prove dominance.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Elna C. Green *Southern Strategies: Southern Women and the Woman Suffrage Question*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1997.) 2

<sup>123</sup> Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas., and Nell Irvin Painter. *The Secret Eye: The Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1848-1889*. (Ed. Virginia Ingraham. Burr. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1990.)

Without northern troops enforcing the reconstruction amendments, southerners began to reclaim the south in their own fashion, and attempted to reestablish antebellum culture in the “new south.” One way to reclaim traditional society was to solidify the old hierarchy in the south which put slaves, or freedman, at the bottom, and wealthy white men on top. To combat the “negro vote,” legalized with the thirteenth amendment, it was not uncommon for states to discuss the possibility of giving women the right to vote. The rationale behind this suggestion was that white women would vote in line with their men, which would double the white vote and thus negate the black vote all together. This discussion, while it would give women the voting rights they ultimately wanted, it would be under the presumption that women were nonpolitical beings and would vote with their male counterparts rather than based on their own opinions. This plan was not a guarantee, as women may not vote accordingly, and instead Southerners imposed a number of voting requirements to be met by African Americans before they could actually vote. Southerners implemented legal measures to contend white supremacy. These requirements included a poll tax and a literacy test. These means of avoidance allowed for the retention of white supremacy without giving the vote to yet another group. In this way the racial tensions provided both a boost to the suffrage movement as well as a derailing factor. Without the freed slaves posing a threat to white supremacy the topic of women’s suffrage may not have been discussed, however, the assault on men’s ego from this enfranchisement made them all the more hesitant to add another group to the vote.<sup>124</sup>

During the period after Reconstruction, women’s “ideological” reconstruction fully unfolds. Women, during this time, initially continue to focus their attentions on memorializing the Confederacy and advocating the lost cause. Rationale for this focus stemmed from many things; a desire to make the South distinct from its Northern brethren, a commitment to restoring

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<sup>124</sup> Green, *Southern Suffrage*, 34-6

the broken ego of the Southern man through bringing honor back to the cause, an extended apprehension of displaying the independence which has been building in women for the last fifteen or more years, or any combination of the three. These memorial groups were important in raising the consciousness of these women that they were capable of being in the public sphere and taught them how to maneuver cautiously around the patriarchal society that was the “ old South.”<sup>125</sup>

The United Daughters of the Confederacy offered southern women another opportunity to immortalize the southern version of the Civil War, as well as allowing them access into the political sphere. The United Daughters of the Confederacy was founded in 1894 as primarily a Confederate memorial group. In the 1890’s, following the popularity of the Ladies Memorial Associations, groups called Daughters of the Confederacy emerged until brought together to form the United Daughters of the Confederacy. The UDC aimed to expand the goals of a memorial group and pass on the Southern culture to future generations. Actions taken by this group went beyond burying fallen soldiers. The UDC also cared for living Confederate veterans, tended to war- widows, published textbooks that advocated the South as well as formed groups such as Children of the Confederacy.<sup>126</sup> Karen Cox in her book, Dixie’s Daughters claims that the unofficial objective of the UDC was vindication. This vindication was for the generation that risked or gave up their lives for the Southern cause. I feel that members of the UDC used the objective of vindication and their devout patriotism as license to speak and act freely and sanction their position in the public setting.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 10,14

<sup>126</sup> United Daughters of the Confederacy, North Carolina Division. *Minutes of Organization [serial] : And of 1st and 2nd Annual Conventions, United Daughters of the Confederacy, North Carolina Division.*(North Carolina: Daughters, n.d. Print. 1897-98.)<sup>17</sup>

<sup>127</sup> Cox. *Dixie’s Daughter*, 19-20,142

Southern women turned to methods outside of politics in an effort to preserve their place on the hierarchy. With the economic hardships of Reconstruction hitting even the extremely wealthy Southern families, the lines that once distinguished classes among whites began to fade. Women who did not work and had slaves for housework once meant that family was well off. In the post Civil War South, without slaves and many formerly elite families relying on the income of women, it was not as simple to prove status. Through groups such as The Ladies Memorial Associations as well as the United Daughters of the Confederacy, white women were able to reestablish themselves in their former positions on the social hierarchy. These groups were accessible (for the most part) only to dues paying members. In order to pay dues one must have the means to do so thus creating a group of wealthy women. Cox asserts that the political and psychological changes that occurred in the South during the 1890's aimed to reaffirm states rights and white supremacy, thereby opening the door for women to influence politics in their own way. In accordance with white supremacy, the UDC often sympathized with the Ku Klux Klan and their efforts to reestablish their racial hierarchy of the past.<sup>128</sup>

One of the goals of the UDC was to establish an accurate portrayal of the South and the Civil War from the position of a southerner. Mildred Lewis Rutherford was a prominent member of the Georgia United Daughters of the Confederacy. Rutherford was born into the planter elite class of Athens, Georgia. She also was an author, writing numerous books on the South, as well as presiding over her local UDC and functioning as the Augusta chapter historian general. In this historian position Rutherford spoke frequently in the public, advocating the notion of the "lost cause" as well as an urging for the South to rewrite its history. Rutherford states in regards to the "wrongs" of history, "The have condemned us; they are condemning us; and they will continue to condemn us, if we longer remain indifferent". Rutherford also makes it abundantly clear that

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<sup>128</sup> Cox, Dixie's Daughters, 14, 37

she does not want unjust writings on the North to appear in textbooks in order to promote the South. She also points out the very distinct circumstances that each section had leading up to and during the Civil War. This distinction is important to the evolution of southern women's independence along with the notion of the lost cause.<sup>129</sup>

The Women's Christian Temperance Union and the southern suffrage movement were two major groups Southern women joined in great numbers. This progression within the world of reform movements demonstrates a shift in focus and a change in women's ideology. The temperance and suffrage movements were, to a degree, more political than previous women's organizations. Through a slow progression of autonomy attained from various public groups, these women, along with others, pushed the boundaries of the established gender roles in the South. The UDC acted politically yet functioned under a veil of domesticity, much like Ladies Memorial Associations. For the purpose of my research I looked primarily at the narratives of three women who were born to wealthy families of the antebellum South, all of whom were involved in both temperance and suffrage reform.

Southern women were behind their northern sisters in reform work, but would work to catch up with help from an influential activist. Francis Willard was a Northern temperance advocate who gained national and international accreditation for her work with temperance, was able to bring this reform movement into the South. The Women's Christian Temperance Union was a reform organization founded in New York, which made its way South almost a decade after its founding. This reform group aimed at eliminating alcohol from the country, state-by-state and closing down bars and saloons. Willard traveled South frequently in her role as

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<sup>129</sup> Mildred Lewis Rutherford. *Truths of History ... a Fair, Unbiased, Impartial, Unprejudiced and Conscientious Study of History. Object: To Secure a Peaceful Settlement of the Many Perplexing Questions Now Causing Contention between the North and the South.* (Athens Ga.: S.n., 1920. *Archive.org*. University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.) 4  
<http://archive.org/details/truthsofhistoryf00ruth>

president of the W.C.T.U. She found the South to be highly receptive to her ideas despite her being the “unpalatable combination, “a woman, a Northern woman, a temperance woman!” Willard is spoken of most favorably by the women she worked with. Caroline Merrick offers a description, which could explain why Southern women did not feel threatened by such a confident woman entering their world; “She proved to the world that a woman can be strong-minded, gentle-mannered and sweet-hearted at the same time, and that the noblest are the simplest souls.” Women in the South slowly understood that they could assert their opinions while remaining feminine and Willard fit this profile.<sup>130</sup>

Alcohol in the South was, to women, a particular nuisance in the Reconstruction and post Reconstruction eras. Men felt emasculated and defeated in their roles as providers because of the economic situation of the South following the collapse of the slave economy and decline in agriculture. These feelings frequently lead to drinking and drinking can lead to mismanagement of available funds as well as domestic abuse. Willard, in her book, Glimpses of Fifty Years argues that alcohol was not as big an issue in the South as it was the North, however, this assertion would be difficult to prove. Alcoholism in the South may have gone unmentioned by women for decades because of the underlying patriarchal mindset. If this were so, commenting on abuse of the substance would not have been women’s place. The South was not exempt from the “evils” of alcoholism and some women did allude to the overuse of alcohol by their husbands. Nell Irvin Painter wrote of Gertrude Thomas’s hints that her husband struggled with alcoholism, and this was a potential rationale behind her involvement in the W.C.T.U. Painter cites Thomas’s diary entries, which mention “ closeted family skeletons” as innuendos of her

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<sup>130</sup> Frances E. Willard *Glimpses of Fifty Years: The Autobiography of an American Woman.* (New York: Published by the Woman's Temperance Publication Association, 1889.) Willard, Frances E. *Glimpses of Fifty Years: The Autobiography of an American Woman.* (New York: Published by the Woman's Temperance Publication Association, 1889.)328, Caroline E. Merrick *Old times in Dixie Land; a Southern Matron's Memories.*, New York: Grafton, 1901. *Documenting the American South.* (Academic Affairs Library, UNC-CH University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1997.) 146



husbands problem.<sup>131</sup> The domestic implications that alcohol leads to made the politics of reform an acceptable mission for ladies of the South. By using motherhood as a cloak for the political implications of a woman dominated reform movement, the W.C.T.U. was able to avoid many disturbances by opponents.

From the memorial and patriotic groups, the Ladies Memorial Associations and United Daughters of the Confederacy to the temperance movement, a shift in priorities is shown. Initially the groups were male centered, focusing on the restoration of the male ego and restoring the patriarchal structure of antebellum days in a time of immense change. With the W.C.T.U. the focus shifted from men, Confederates, to the family and domestic. Women began to feel more comfortable in their public roles as men began to reassert themselves into the “New South”, socially and economically. The domestic is shown in the mothering position taken on by those in the temperance movement. Gertrude Thomas, Caroline Merrick and Belle Kearney were all members of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. These women were all brought up in elite families in the South during antebellum years.

A common theme among these women was the progressive and accepting nature of their families, even prior to their involvement in reform. Not all families in the South had this same disposition towards change and modernization of women in the public. These women should not be considered exceptions as the Union was established in every state as well as internationally. Statistically, in Texas, Virginia, North Carolina, Alabama and Tennessee combined women involved in the W.C.T.U. that were also suffragists is drastically higher than those who were

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<sup>131</sup> Nell Painter, the writer of the introduction to Gertrude Thomas’s journal presumes that more concrete evidence of Jeff Thomas’s drinking problem was documented in Gertrude’s journal from 1871-’78 which are not available. The editor of this journal, Virginia Burr is of the same opinion regarding Mr. Thomas’s struggle alcohol stating there is “little doubt” of his problem. She also presumes more evidence would be in the lost journal of the 1870’s. She cites specific phrases used by Thomas throughout her diary insinuating the domestic issue also, “A thorn in the flesh”, his use of profanity and “inflamed eyes”

anti-suffragists.<sup>132</sup> The overlap between these movements shows a snowball effect of independence and self-determination.

Women learned skills and gained confidence in their public roles through memorial associations and then brought these attributes into reform work. Gertrude Thomas was an example of a woman who moved from working within the UDC to reform. Her experiences after the war illustrate the transfer of reliance from her husband to herself. As mentioned, Thomas had personal reasons behind her fight for alcohol reform. While Thomas was deeply involved in the W.C.T.U. she does not cite the organization by name at all in her journal. According to secondary sources Thomas was a member of the United Daughters of the Confederacy prior to her involvement in the W.C.T.U. along with many other groups. Thomas once mentions her involvement in the Ladies Memorial Association only to say she could not attend a meeting she had been made aware of.<sup>133</sup>

The public spheres for many women did not solely relate to organizations and reform work, taking on new employment opportunities was another way for women to insert themselves into political society. During Reconstruction in order to earn money to assist her families dire financial circumstances brought on by the Civil War, Thomas wrote many articles and books as well as worked as a teacher. Thomas became the primary breadwinner for her family with her husband's continued business failings. This dramatically new role for her was a further push into the public sphere. Throughout her journal, Thomas mentions her salary, debts, bills and things relating to her family's economics. Thomas said relating her job as a teacher, "It has come to the point that I count the weeks and calculate how I can best spend the amount made." As far as her writing was concerned, Thomas sent many articles to papers and publications. When an article

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<sup>132</sup> Green, *Southern Suffrage*, 195. Suffragists (N=500) :30 Anti-Suffragists (N=383): 3, in 1920 and prior.

<sup>133</sup> Thomas, *The Secret Eye*, 396

she submitted was published under her name, Thomas said, “ I am a public woman now- would like for the patrons of my school to have an idea that I am capable of writing an interesting article.” Despite not directly acknowledging her involvement in the many public groups she was a member of, Thomas does frequently realize her involvement in the public sphere.<sup>134</sup>

Not all women initially accepted the call to reform movements in the South. Caroline Elizabeth Merrick initially turned down a position in the Women’s Christian Temperance Union when it was offered to her stating that it “was the most unpopular and hardest reform ever attempted.” Merrick was born in Louisiana. Her mother died when she was very young and her stepmother was a Massachusetts native. Being brought up by a Northern woman could have been a factor in Merrick’s progressive position in Reconstruction and post Reconstruction era Southern politics. Despite her hesitance to join the movement, Merrick went to hear Frances Willard speak in New Orleans. Upon hearing Willard speak Merrick described the woman,

unassuming, delicate, progressive woman, with her sweet, intellectual face, her ready gaiety and her extraordinarily enlarged sympathies, which seemed to put her spirit at once in touch with every one who spoke to her.

As noted, these characteristics were seen as highly favorable in the South, where a more imposing woman may not have had the same reception. Willard’s winning personality in the South is why two, of the three women explored in this section, joined the movement.<sup>135</sup>

In order for the temperance movement to integrated into southern culture, women had to trust and support the organization’s leaders. Francis Willard was supported in the South, and by encouraging women to participate in temperance reform as a religious endeavor she tailored the

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<sup>134</sup> Thomas, *The Secret Eye*, 13, 16, 326 , 400 Thomas also states, “ I wonder if we will ever live to know this feeling of freedom [from debt]. I greatly fear not.” In regards to her financial decline during reconstruction

<sup>135</sup> Caroline E. Merrick. *Old times in Dixie Land; a Southern Matron's Memories*,. New York: Grafton, 1901. *Documenting the American South*. Academic Affairs Library, UNC-CH University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1997. 6-7,142-4

movement to southern culture. She does not function under the façade that there was no distinction between Northern women and Southern women. Willard, in her memoirs points out that ideally, temperance could become a movement, which breaches the Mason-Dixon line. This movement, she believed could bring together Northern and Southern reformers to work towards a common goal, negating the tension brought on by war. In 1882 Willard told Merrick she would be president of the New Orleans W.C.T.U. This came as quite a surprise to Merrick who had no prior affiliation with the group, yet she accepted this challenge. Contrary to Thomas, Merrick joined this association because of her enthrallment with Willard rather than a strong conviction to the reform. Merrick is mentioned specifically within the pages of Willard's memoirs as well, showing her influence within the organization.<sup>136</sup>

Women were aware of the positive implications that temperance reform had on women's position in southern society, and would continue to have in the future. This conscious awakening would have only made women's commitment to the movement stronger. Regarding the W.C.T.U. Kearney poetically states,

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union was the golden key that unlocked the prison doors of pent-up possibilities. It was the generous liberator, the joyous iconoclast, the discoverer, the developer of Southern women. It, above all other forces, made it possible for women to occupy the advanced and continually advancing position they now hold.

This sentiment of the W.C.T.U. speaks to the evolution in white women of the former planter class in the years during and after the civil war. Kearney acknowledges the potential of women and that this potential was "pent-up", until temperance work liberated them. This organization as a liberator acknowledges the oppressed conditions of antebellum womanhood and the painstakingly slow journey towards public autonomy that generations of women worked

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<sup>136</sup> Merrick. *Old times in Dixie Land*, 144.

towards. Kearney later directly proclaims that this reform movement was the “natural outcome of their desperate struggles for individual freedom.” Kearney’s father urged her to see Francis Willard speak when she came to speak in Jackson, Mississippi in 1889. Prior to hearing Willard, similarly to Caroline Merrick, Kearney had no little knowledge or interest in temperance. While at the annual convention of the state W.C.T.U. Kearney was appointed state superintendent and organizer of the L.T.L. and Y.W.C.T.U. without having even been aware of the movement for more than a few weeks.<sup>137</sup>

Women in the temperance movement had to be mindful of their approach when addressing southerners in light of the traditions, which permeated the southern culture. In her role within these groups, Kearney claimed to have worked tirelessly for the cause. She stated that to get things done “every possible orthodox means was used.” This dedication to the cause and assertive attitude in her role was a product of the reform movement and the development of Kearney’s public role. Caroline Merrick asked Kearney to speak to the young women’s branch at the state convention of the W.C.T.U. in New Orleans. While in Louisiana, she too notices the idea of suffrage developing in the minds of women, “particularly those who have been connected with W.C.T.U. work.” Kearney began traveling frequently to other Southern states and spoke of the acceptance that Southerners have to “new ideas” and the chivalry these men give women who request it if “she comes to them also as a lady.” This understanding could explain why women of the former planter class and the very feminine figure of Frances Willard were successful in their work throughout the South. Women could not address this topic

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<sup>137</sup> Belle Kearney. *A Slaveholder's Daughter*. (St. Louis: St. Louis Christian Advocate, 1900)118, 132, 137, 142 L.T.L. stands for Loyal Temperance Legion, Y.W.C.T.U. stands for Young Women’s Christian Temperance Union, both juvenile organizations.

aggressively or appearing in an un-ladylike fashion or it could have crippled the movement. Southerners would not have accepted this version of womanhood.<sup>138</sup>

Understanding that in order to make progress in temperance reform, women would need legislative backing, they simultaneously poured their skills into the southern suffrage movement. The movement for women's suffrage began in 1848 New York with the Seneca Falls convention. Northern women dominated the suffrage world for almost a generation before Southern women aligned themselves with the reform. The South before, during and after the civil war distinct in politics, culture, and economy from the North. The things that separated the North and South furthered feelings of sectionalism as can be linked to the prolonged acceptance of Northern ideas. Following the end of the war the South was forced to adapt in a world without slavery. This fresh start included industrialization, a widening of women's public sphere, and redefining of citizenship and voting rights. The South now was beginning to resemble the North in certain areas, such as industrializing, a degree of racial equality, and even the influx of northerners from reconstruction, therefore it was possible for the question of women's suffrage to come about.<sup>139</sup>

A shift in priorities observed from gradual progression into highly public and political organizations can be seen in women throughout the South. The three women I researched, who were involved in the W.C.T.U. also became involved in the suffrage movement. Elite women had various motives behind their reform work. The fact that these women and many others in the South united to obtain women's voting rights does not mean that this was not a radical, progressive notion. Many Southerners, men and women alike were against the idea of women's suffrage. This sentiment is shown in the fact that when the federal government passed the

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<sup>138</sup>Kearney. *A Slaveholder's Daughter*, 155,17, 17, 185, *The New Orleans convention* was the first invitation to speak outside of Mississippi offered to Belle Kearney.

<sup>139</sup> Green, *Southern Strategies*, 2

amendment giving women the vote, many states did not oblige. Regardless of its success in practice, the road towards getting an amendment passed in the South shows the final phase in these women's ideological Reconstruction. Women now began to focus on their own needs rather than others'.

The metaphor Merrick used to detail women's inability to vote interestingly uses the a domestic situation as a point of comparison. This is interesting because suffrage was, in terms of women's ideological reconstruction, the antithesis of the domestic. She stated, "It is as unjust as it would be for me to invite a party to dinner and then to summon half of them to the table while the other half are required to remain as spectators only of the feast to which all had had the same call." By using a situation which elite white women could relate to, a dinner party, Merrick was able to connect with them. Merrick, Gertrude Thomas and Belle Kearney went from being born into elite Southern families to working within the W.C.T.U. and eventually being strong suffrage supporters. Their journeys indicate an ideological movement forward.<sup>140</sup>

Another way in which the suffrage movement gained the support of southern women was the utilization of religion and religious argument for equality. Gertrude Thomas spoke at the first Georgia Women's Suffrage Association's first convention and was quoted in the Atlanta Journal as saying "Woman was not taken from the head of man- she is not his superior, she was not taken from his foot- she is not his inferior; she was taken from his side and there she should stand his equal in the work of the world."<sup>141</sup> This argument relates to the biblical story of Adam and Eve which states eve was created from one of Adam's ribs. This religious hint would have been recognized by a majority of Southerner's and gave a moral argument for the cause of

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<sup>140</sup> Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land*, 23

<sup>141</sup> Thomas, *The Secret Eye*, 453

gender equality. Religion had a powerful presence in the south and this use of the bible to support gender equality could be seen as a political tactic to gain support.

Primarily, elite white women operated the suffrage movement and it is possible that these women were advocating for their own right to vote rather than universal female suffrage. Caroline Merrick was deeply involved in the temperance movement and later became an advocate for female suffrage. Women's desire for suffrage seems to stem from an anxiety or resentment of former slaves, illiterate and uneducated, voting before women. Merrick and Belle Kearney, who will be explored in depth later, advocated suffrage to women who were educated and literate. The theme of education during the Civil War was shown to be an inequality between men and women separating their intellect and subsequent public worth. Women now felt comfortable in their intelligence after furthering their education by necessity and it no longer was a dividing factor between men and women. Mrs. Keating as quoted in Merrick's recollections argued the point of intelligent female voters would bring aid to the supporting political party, "the party which favored woman suffrage would poll twelve million votes. She made clear that the fact of sex could not qualify or disqualify for an intelligent vote."<sup>142</sup>

Without legislative support, the W.C.T.U. could have thousands of supporters with little actual power. In terms of women's independence, temperance reform arguably came before suffrage yet in terms of actual reform efforts, suffrage would be an aid to temperance legislation. Merrick and Willard shared the desire to vote along with their work in the temperance area. Willard advocated suffrage mainly because with the vote women could be more influential in their temperance reform efforts. Merrick was in contact with Susan B. Anthony in relation to the suffrage movement aiding temperance efforts. Temperance reform would have strongest effect if it were backed by a majority vote. Belle Kearney, very much like her Southern female

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<sup>142</sup> Thomas, *The Secret Eye*, 127-9, Kearney, *Slaveholders Daughter*, 100



predecessors became involved with the suffrage movement through her temperance reform work. The ballot was the best way for women to directly influence the movement they so avidly fought for in temperance. Kearney too was familiar with Susan B. Anthony and by Anthony's request spent the night at her home while traveling. Kearney also in her memoirs described the additional votes that the candidate who supports female suffrage would get. She points out that these would not only be more votes but literate, educated votes. She uses current census data to prove her point," If these two and a half million educated women were made voters, their votes would offset the entire illiterate voters, both black and white."<sup>143</sup>

With enfranchisement of the freedman, women were able to see the repressed state women were living under. Diaries address the idea of a "negro problem," which included freedman's right to vote and their alignment with northern political ideology. Southerners feared the negro vote, and for this reason, discussed ways to negate their vote including granting women suffrage. Education was the key for Belle Kearney in solving the " negro problem. <sup>144</sup> She is preoccupied with the lack of education of the "negro" and the fact that it has not elevated the race rather than the lack of opportunities for a woman's higher education. This focus could be a degree of resentment that Kearney has that former slaves are able to be educated yet not taking advantage of it, while she, and many other women, had few opportunities to go to school. This understanding cannot be taken as fact, only as observation from one diary. Interestingly, when discussing working to complete her own education Kearney states, " If the thought of *working* to continue my education had entered my brain, which it did not, it would have been throttled at its inception, for my family would have considered it an eternal disgrace for me to have worked publicly." While these women were progressive in much of their lives they still

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<sup>143</sup> Kearney, *Slaveholders Daughter*, 101,194-5

<sup>144</sup> Kearney, *Slaveholders Daughter*, 97-8, 100-101

grappled with the notions of propriety and what it means to be a Southern lady. A majority of elite white women were also educated yet still could not vote, while former slaves, who had no formal education could. This realization could also have fostered resentment in these women.<sup>145</sup>

Women became empowered through their work with suffrage. A true progressive was found in Caroline Merrick who, in 1892 along with her vast reform work, founded the Portia club. The Portia club was a Louisiana state suffrage organization and from this club grew others. Merrick concludes her recollections with a keen insight into men and women and their roles in humanity and with each other. This modern understanding could be due to the fact that this is a memoir rather than a diary and was written after the fact. In the final pages of this collection she recognizes the ideological evolution occurring in women asserting, “Woman has learned the power of organization, and her full political liberty is now in sight.” This statement proves the importance of organizations in the fulfillment of women’s self-determination, which had been suppressed for decades.<sup>146</sup>

Northern women, as noted, began suffrage reform decades before southern women joined in the movement. Kearney addresses the lag in Southern women to seek suffrage. She says that it is a relatively new concept. She also defends men in their role in women not being able to vote, claiming that they cannot be faulted, “For years, in different Southern states I have heard prominent men say: “If women want to vote, it is all right. We have no objection. As human beings, they are entitled to the same privileges as we are, and require the same legal protection. We do not give them the ballot because they do not seem to desire it.”<sup>147</sup> This is a surprising comment from Kearney. She was born later than the other women and may not have been as familiar with the stringent gender roles associated with the antebellum South. As previously

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<sup>145</sup> Kearney, *Slaveholders Daughter*, 41, 100

<sup>146</sup> Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie*, 217-19, 239

<sup>147</sup> Kearney, *Slaveholders Daughter*, 119

shown women were thinking politically in the years of the Civil War and presumably before. While the vote may not have been explicitly requested, in a time when women could not ride in carriages without a male chaperone, asking for the vote may have just been too far into the future to see yet.

The women coming of age during the Civil War may not have predicted female suffrage in their lifetime based on the social constructs of the time. The process, through which women had to proceed in order to assert their liberty as citizens of the United States and valuable, political citizens at that, was slow indeed. Through the Women's Christian Temperance Union's focus on maintaining security in the domestic, women began to see their own needs. In order to make anything happen in the domestic sphere women must be equals in the public, political sphere. Turning the focus to themselves and women as a group, the suffrage movement brought out the desire for individual freedoms. The movement also showed women's conscious awareness of gender inequality, which had been perpetuated through the years. The Civil War provided a catalyst for this ideological evolution of women. Without the war removing a majority of men from the community, women could either fail or persevere. Elite white southern women chose the latter and began their progression towards public involvement during this time. This evolution redefines the commonly understood era of Reconstruction and extends it beyond the election of President Hayes. Formal reconstruction did not necessarily change the southern mindset as shown with the perpetuation of the lost cause theory. While the South may have, at the surface, been reconstructing in the years immediately following the surrender, the true mental, emotional, and political reconstruction process had only begun in these years. This ideological reconstruction had a more profound effect on southern culture in that it actually brought about a change in beliefs.

## **Conclusion**

Prior to the start of the Civil War, the demographic of women explored in my research adhered to the tradition of paternalism, which dominated the South. Southern paternalism was dependent upon compliance to gender roles, slavery, and the concept of honor. These distinct Southern factors enabled paternalism to preside over the region for centuries. Until the war, wealthy Southern women for the most part abided by this system, that is until they embarked on a journey of ideological reconstruction. This study of elite white Southern women during and after the Civil War proves this reconstruction, which evolved slowly in three distinct phases. My research shows a progression in these women, beginning with the initial discourse of war.

The term “ ideological Reconstruction” which I use frequently is the core to my argument. I use this to describe the evolution in women’s understanding of gender roles and their beliefs regarding these roles. Women initially, before the war, took their traditionally assigned role as a woman to be truth and thus acted in agreement with them. Over time, as women began to question and push the boundaries of these roles, they began to redefine what it meant to be a woman. Their belief system adapted to these newly defined roles and therefore the basic principles they lived by were reconstructed to meet their new identities.

As the war continued women emerged from their helpless and fragile typecast to maintaining Confederate moral and protecting the domestic South. This marks the first shift in beliefs demonstrated by elite southern women. Women were forced to become independent while their men were fighting. While women may not have wanted this freedom, they accepted the challenge and did what they had to do to keep the southern home front afloat until the men returned. As demonstrated by the first person narratives, women sacrificed both material goods

and their antebellum understanding of their gender roles. In relation to their sacrifice, women had to adjust to life without men and make critical decisions on their own. This mental awakening created a consciousness in women of their abilities, beyond what the tradition of paternalism dictated.<sup>148</sup>

The second shift takes place during the commonly understood era of Reconstruction. While it may seem that women retreated back to their antebellum identities during this time by their return to the domestic sphere, this was not the case. After experiencing independence during the war, women would not be able to mentally return to their old ways. The domestic experience during reconstruction was nothing like that of antebellum domestic duties. This stark contrast was mainly because there were no longer slaves performing the tasks. Former Confederate belles were now responsible for their own housekeeping and this was a new position caused by Reconstruction.

As soldiers returned home after the war, their egos deflated through defeat and feeling failure in their perceived male duties, women could not exert their newly discovered self-reliance. During this time some women branched out beyond the home, and joined memorial associations. These memorial associations kept the Confederate cause alive and perpetuated the lost cause myth. More importantly, associations allowed women to speak and act publically without pushing the boundaries of what was considered, woman's work. For this reason the mothering nature of their association actions was in accordance with the return to domesticity. Financial desperation brought some women into the work force. These slight assertions of self-determination were the next step on elite southern women's journey towards public

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<sup>148</sup> Janney, *Burying the Dead*, 4. Janney includes the phrase, "organized womanhood" as used by historians, to describe "a collected southern white woman's consciousness and activism." This term applied to my research, can be understood as the end result of each distinct phase. As women achieve "organized womanhood", their core beliefs evolve as well.

independence. For women who had never sewed, spoke publically, or worked in their lives, these new roles were a big step.<sup>149</sup>

Women became increasingly more public in the years following Reconstruction. These years, I argue, were the years in which the peak of reconstruction in southern women was reached. Through involvement in women's organizations, a continuation of efforts made during formal Reconstruction, women grew increasingly political. The United Daughters of the Confederacy offered an additional memorial group for the cause. The women who joined this group were able to assert their political influence and self worth through its works, which went beyond those of prior memorial associations. Now that northern troops were no longer occupying the South, southerners could adopt reform movements as their own and made their goals distinct to the region. Temperance and suffrage reform were two movements in which women's involvement during these years was amplified. Temperance reform, while public in action, was still a cause that could be conceived as a mothering role, and was non-threatening to men. The domestic implications of alcohol made the group still within the sphere of women yet provided women additional public presence. Many women, in their commitment to temperance reform, directed their resources into suffrage work, understanding the connection between meeting temperance goals and the ballot. Women emerged into the public sphere and began advocating on their own behalf with suffrage work. This shows the final ideological shift of elite white southern women. This shift advances women from having men and family as the center of their focus, to putting their own goals first and modifying their focus through public works. The fire of independence, which was first ignited in these women with the start of the war, had finally reemerged with their involvement in the suffrage movement.

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<sup>149</sup> Whites, *Civil War as a Crisis in Gender*. Whites claims men's public position in relation to other men was now out of their control yet their relationship with their wives and children was still a means for validation of their masculinity. 134-6 Janney, *Buying the Dead*, Janney states that within the LMA, members were in a "cloak of motherly and sisterly undertaking." 5, 61

The evolution of female ideology in South is proven through these three time periods. A distinct phase in this progression followed the cultural shifts in the South. Women had no say in the South's decision to go to war, and were forced to make sacrifices in every way. The war, however, in return for these sacrifices, provided women the stimulus for their eventual ideological transformation. The war positioned women in ideal circumstances to realize their political potential, which was culminated in their suffrage work.

This understanding of southern women and their movement towards political autonomy is a contribution to the literature on women of this time. Scholarship written on reconstruction often ignores the role of women during reconstruction, focusing instead, on former slaves and white men. Even fewer studies are done specifically on elite white women. My research addresses this gap and builds upon it, addressing their political transformation over time through the concept of ideological reconstruction. This understanding offers a new history of elite white southern women in the public sphere and the gradual transformation, which brought them there. Within the scholarship on southern women, men are frequently given agency as the facilitators or inhibitors of political action, however, my argument gives this agency to women. Women were aware of the political implications that their actions had, whether they were conscious actions or compulsory, making them the foremost influence in their evolution.

The time period of formal reconstruction typically is understood as the year in which the war ended until the election of Hayes as president. My argument offers a superior time frame to the commonly understand era, in that southerners actually underwent a transformation. While reconstruction aimed to transition the slaveholding south into a region with racial equality and suppress their rebellious zeal, it proved to only exacerbate these issues. This new understanding of reconstruction changed not only the mindset of the elite female supporters of reform, but

gained support on a larger scale from more women as well as from men. Women instigated their own reconstruction without the support of the federal government, as was the case with common reconstruction, and because of this their progress is highly commendable.

This research also suggests that regional distinctions during periods of dramatic change influence the inclination of a population to adopt the foreign customs. The distinct differences in Southern and Northern culture and the separate post-war time circumstances were arguable factors leading to a “failure” of reconstruction and the temporary nature of many of its policies. Southerners were notoriously resistant to relinquish their cultural ideals during reconstruction. Southern women, however, through this change in ideology, seem to be more willing to adapt and give up dated principles, where men were not. The explanation for this adaptability may be that women during this time experienced a consciousness awareness of the injustices done to their gender. Men, on the other hand, did not have this experience, and many did not become more cognoscente of their role in the unjust institution of slavery, despite the attempts to bring this about.

The South was resistant to keep pace with Northern culture during the time period explored in this study as proven. This resistance could be a hint at the prominent effect regional distinctions had on the culture and population of the area. Resentment of the North during the time of this reconstruction in women was at its highest point. Southern women, joining Northern reform movements while they were gaining headway, could have meant the movement in the South was dead before it even had a chance to begin. Southerners were not emotionally prepared to accept women in the public, let alone advocating for a cause they associated with the north. The emotional wounds were too fresh for the South to align itself with anything Northern. For this reason, along with others including the fact that notions of honor and regionalism were not



forfeited at any point during nor after the war, and still may not have been since, the ladies reform movement took hold in the South years after it became popular in the North.<sup>150</sup>

Through the diaries of elite white Southern women during and after the Civil war and Reconstruction an evolution is revealed. Seemingly apolitical women with little, if any, involvement in the public sphere beforehand, evolved, (through their actions) into women championing a cause. This cause, if successful allowed them absolute access into the public realm. This journey fully reveals itself with the pursuit of suffrage, yet women's march toward equality is not complete with this movement. For this demographic of Southern women, the resolution to pursue suffrage and branch out into public society, while slow to progress, was a significant development in their way of thinking.

The ideological reconstruction of women during this time enabled women to think critically about their position in society. The slow evolution of their consciousness contradicts apolitical claims and shows a developing awareness of female potential. Without the Civil War generating four years essentially without men, it is unanswerable if or when this potential would have been explored or acted on. The suffrage moment brought women fully into the public sphere as they fought for political autonomy, thus bringing their wartime hint of self-determination to fruition.

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<sup>150</sup> Green, *Southern strategies*, 20, Janney, *Burying the Dead*, 7

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