THE SOCIAL RULES OF ENGAGEMENT: RACE AND GENDER
RELATIONS IN CIVIL WAR REENACTMENT

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ABSTRACT

Existing perspectives on race and gender dynamics subsume one to the other, view them as instances of a common discriminatory phenomenon, or treat them as interlocking parts of a single system of domination. I argue that race and gender dynamics must be examined comparatively to see what is common to both, while also using each to highlight the specificity of the other. This paper undertakes such a comparative analysis by examining race and gender dynamics in Civil War re-enactments. Civil War reenacting represents an ideal location for an examination of contemporary race and gender issues because the fault lines of present-day race and gender tensions and conflicts are especially visible in efforts to represent the past.

Based on 29 in-depth interviews with "re-enactors" or "living historians" of the Civil War era and field observations of two Civil War reenactments, I show that certain parallel processes operate with respect to both race and gender: (1) idealization of the past; (2) reproduction of oppression in the present, and (3) dynamic renegotiation and contestation of past and present. However, these processes do not play out the same way for race as for gender. Racism among participants in the re-enactment subculture is difficult to contest, despite the existence of a strong taboo against overt racial displays, because of its furtive nature. Conversely, the challenges of contesting sexism stem not from its hidden nature, but rather
from its greater social acceptability. These differences are not essential to the nature of race and gender inequality, I argue, but result from the divergent outcomes of anti-racist and anti-sexist movements in our society.
This work is dedicated to the memory of my mother.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Methods</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idealizing the past</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obscuring racial injustice</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renegotiating race?</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idealizing the past</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reenacting sexism?</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renegotiating sexism?</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Well it definitely is sexist, I can tell you that. Most of the reenactments are put on for the benefit of the men. They do things for the men reenactors, make sure their horses have hay, and water, and places to put them...but they don’t even usually have a place...for the female reenactors. We just kind of tag along like everybody else does...when we’re in a freaking hoop skirt.

-Lena, a 43 year-old white female

It bothers me when you go to these things and slavery just kind of gets left out of the picture. I mean, everybody wants to be buddy-buddy with everybody and not stir any waves, and bring everybody in, but the whole, the whole history of slavery just kind of gets lost in everything...it’s not talked about.

-Arthur, a 30 year-old black male

As Civil War reenactors, Lena and Arthur are commonly pursuing a re-creation of the past. If they had been alive during the actual Civil War, Lena would most likely have been more privileged in society as a white woman than Arthur would have been as a black man. However, as reenactors in our modern age, Lena and other women like her are openly discriminated against by white male reenactors. Arthur and fellow black reenactors are welcomed with seemingly open arms by white reenactors, but are often subject to a sanitized portrayal of an ugly historical period. Revealed in their own words, Lena and Arthur are deeply frustrated by the way the reenactment community addresses issues of gender and race.

Civil War reenacting is considered a mostly white male pursuit, with black and female reenactors occupying minority statuses in reenactment. While many consider reenacting a hobby for history buffs or gun enthusiasts, the activity itself has greater social implications regarding race and gender. Civil War reenacting is a valuable site for a comparative
examination of race and gender because the attempt to reconstruct and represent the past exacerbates present-day social tensions, brings them to the foreground, and makes them easily visible. The racial tensions and gender conflicts within a reenactment of the past highlight the divergent politics of race and gender in the present. Thus, what is sociologically important about Civil War reenactment is not what it says about the past, but what modern-day values regarding racial and gender roles are being sanctified in the pursuit.

A comparative analysis between race and gender within reenactment is a methodologically sound approach for examining the differing nature of race and gender politics. Existing perspectives on race and gender dynamics often try to subsume one to the other, view them as instances of a common discriminatory phenomenon, or attempt to treat them as interlocking parts of a single system of domination. What is needed within these approaches are explicitly comparative analyses which not only explore parallels, but also ask how and why the form and content of racism and sexism, as well as their contestation, differ. This paper shows that, although it is difficult to contest racism and sexism in contemporary U.S. society, the difficulties with respect to each are different, and arise for different reasons. Racism can be difficult to contest, despite the existence of a strong taboo against overt racial displays, because of its often furtive nature. Conversely, the challenges of contesting sexism stem not from its hidden nature but from its greater social acceptability. These differences are not essential to the “nature” of race and gender inequality, instead resulting from the divergent outcomes of anti-racist and anti-sexist movements in our society.
THEORY

In examining elements of race, gender, and class, one approach postulated by social scientists is to rank some dimensions of inequality under one they consider to be crucial in explaining social position. Gimenez (2001) examines how "raced" and "gendered" positions are often decontextualized from the overarching issue of class location, thus diminishing the crucial place of class in examining relationships of inequality. Since peoples' survival is based on their employment, Gimenez asserts that the "root of what happens in social interactions grounded in "intersectionality" (author's quotes) [between race, class and gender] is class power," (p. 27). Charlesworth (1997) prioritizes gender over race in her analysis of human rights laws, claiming that "the apartheid of gender is considerably more pervasive than the apartheid of race," (p. 384). Also prioritizing gender over other social markers, Rubin (1984) explains the differences in perception of intimate relationships between men and women as attributable to gender differences. She has been subsequently critiqued for essentializing gender, and not delineating racial and class differences among her respondents (Grimes, Mann and Shaver 1999:55). In regards to race, Feagin (1986) has examined how all blacks have had more severe challenges to their success in employment, housing, and voting than other groups, due to the historically specific legacy of U.S. slavery.

A second tactic in assessing race, gender and class differences is seen in considering these differing forms of oppression as instances of common processes. This is seen in
West and Fenstermaker’s theoretical work (1995), who call for research that would “consider explicitly the relationships among gender, race, and class, and to reconceptualize difference as an ongoing interactional accomplishment,” (p. 58). Taking an ethnomethodological approach, West and Fenstermaker argue for the use of situated conduct, or the way in which aspects of social life are “actually managed achievements of local processes,” as a way to explore the simultaneous occurrences of social difference (1995:58). In theoretically adopting Bourdieu’s concept of “social fields,” Meisenhelder (2000) proposes that race, gender, and class are common factors of differentiation, guiding the distribution of capital to various positions within a specific social field (p. 76). Hogan (2001) empirically explores the paralleling nature of race, gender, and class relations in reproducing white male capitalist privilege. Finally, in her assessment of the state of race and gender inequalities, McIntosh draws parallels between the privileges accorded to whites with those accorded to males (1988).

A third conceptual approach is seen in treating race, gender, and class inequalities as interlocking systems of domination. This is seen most prominently in the work of Collins (1990), who calls for the ongoing acknowledgement of how race, class, and gender differences intersect in the social world, and how these intersections are an ongoing dialogue between larger institutional constructs of power and the individual. Collins writes that her perspective “rejects additive approaches to oppression. Instead of starting with gender and then adding in other variables...Black feminist thought sees these distinctive systems of oppression as being part of one overarching system of domination,” (p. 222). The “matrix of domination” includes oppression and its
consequent contestation on the individual/biographical level, the group or community level, and the level of social institutions (p. 227). Hooks (1990) also contends that racism and sexism are interlocking forms of oppression, and that they "uphold and sustain one another," (p. 59). Lorde (1984) speculates that we have internalized these systems of racial, gender, and class oppression, and that we must alter such mentalities to create change, for "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," (p. 123).

In accounting for the varying approaches to race and gender differences, there are existent theoretical and methodological problems. In the approach where one form of inequality is prioritized over another, there is a danger of oversimplification, unrealistically essentializing inequality to a single, paramount factor. When race and gender discrimination are considered instances of a parallel process, said research can overlook how distinct differences in past social treatment predicates the current norms and assessment of further action by members of oppressed groups. While the "interlocking system of oppression" approach can account for the unique histories and contradictory positions one occupies because of their various social markers, it becomes methodologically difficult to consider with true equanimity the result of the many different oppressions an individual experiences within society.

A comparative analysis is thus useful to assess the current state of race and gender relations in society. While both blacks and women have consistently experienced discrimination in our society, the manifestations of inequality between the two groups differ. Though the experiences of Civil War reenactors, I will comparatively address the similarities between race and gender inequality, and the divergent ways in which racism
and sexism, as well as their opposition, emerge. I will consider how an unequal racial past is idealized by some white reenactors, but with a realization that such admissions must be kept furtive, as they are taboo in our post-Civil Rights era society. Conversely, black reenactors uniformly understand that they were afforded no advantages during the Civil War. Next, I will consider how racial tensions in our modern day are largely obscured. Civil War reenactors focus on material culture and avoiding period-accurate portrayals of racial injustice, such as slavery. Lastly, I will consider the ways in which racial issues are addressed by reenactors. In this case, there is evidence that racial problems are actively avoided or scapegoated by many whites, and are only openly confronted when black reenactors and their white sympathizers insist on performatively acknowledging the realities of black life in Civil War-era America.

In assessing gender, I will show that there is a similar idealization of the past, but one which is shared by men and women alike. Here, notions of chivalry are iterated, and issues of 19th-century gender inequality are downplayed. Secondly, in contrast to racism, sexism is openly expressed at reenactments, manifested in the donning of traditional female roles, discriminatory treatment at the reenactment itself, and more stringent standards of authenticity for women, upheld by both sexes. Finally, I will discuss how gender roles within reenactment are dynamically negotiated by some women, but only in the face of severe discrimination.
RESEARCH METHODS

Civil War reenactment and other types of historical reenactment are forms of ritual in our modern day society. According to Durkheim ([1912] 1994), ritual serves as a cohesive social gathering wherein subgroups of society can affirm their solidarity in beliefs and actions. Babcock (1978) writes that, with ritual, “society takes cognizance of itself and communicates its major classifications and categories through both ordering them and through dis-ordering them,” (p. 296). In revisiting the past, reenactors are able to delineate and reformulate basic social archetypes of male and female, victor and defeated, servant and served (Geertz 1973). Such rituals can be utilized to “clean” the past, and perhaps more importantly the present, of its murky and thus frightening uncertainties (Turner 1982:92; 1986:47).

The ritual processes of confirming cultural convictions and defining social roles are particularly notable in relatively new social rituals, where the meanings of the events are still being formed and contested. While Civil War reenactment began as early as twenty years after the war itself, its fluctuations in popularity corresponded closely with significant social change, not reaching its level of national popularity until the 1980’s (Cullen 1995; Stanton and Belyea 2001). In the 1960’s, the South upheld reenactments with great importance, arguably in response to changing social definitions caused by the Civil Rights movement (Cullen 1995:185; Brit 1996; Horwitz 1998). Due to reenactment’s linkages with southern pride and neo-Confederate culture, reenactment has brought allegations of racism in its uses and displays (Brit 1996; Horwitz 1998; Blight 2000; Martin 2001). In addition, female
reenactors have filed formal charges of gender discrimination in lawsuits (Meyer 1993; Barthel 1996:95).

Ultimately, the negative responses towards Civil War reenacting have questioned the social motivations for reliving a period of history characterized by sharp inequalities. With such levels of social controversy surrounding this ritual pursuit, Civil War reenacting serves as an ideal site of sociological analysis. To date, published research on Civil War reenacting has not been conducted from a sociological perspective (Horwitz 1998; Cullen 1995; Turner 1989; Huber 1999; Allred 1996; Stanton and Belyea 2001). This sociological research helps to deeply explore complexities of gender and racial relations that take place in a setting where people have a vested interest in representing historical and present day group voices.

To explore the issues of racial and gender dynamics within the arena of Civil War reenactment, I conducted 29 in-depth interviews with those who defined themselves as "reenactors" or "living historians" of the Civil War era. In addition, I recorded field observations at one battle reenactment held in rural Indiana in 2002, and at one Civil War-era living history event in rural Kentucky in 2003.

Interviews were conducted in person or over the telephone. I collected these interviews between the winter of 2002 and the fall of 2003 using a purposive, snowball-sampling design. Purposive sampling is used "to ensure that certain types of individuals or persons displaying certain attributes are included in the study," (Berg 2001:32). In an interview with the publishers of the most widely distributed reenactment magazine in the country, it was estimated that approximately 99 percent of reenactors are white, and that between 35 and 40 percent of reenactors are female. Despite the overwhelmingly white, male presence in
reenacting, I sought to have the white female, black male, and black female perspectives along with the majority opinions represented in my research.

To obtain my sample, I interviewed both cold contacts found through reenacting group Internet websites, as well as a small number of respondents who have been acquaintances of my associates. From these initial contacts, I used the snowball, or chain referral technique of sampling, and asked interviewees to provide contact information for other reenactors. I quickly learned in the process of conducting my research that the reenacting community is densely networked, thus one interview generally spawned a multitude of referrals to fellow reenactors both in the area and in neighboring states.

Interviewees ranged in age from 21 to 70 years old. In regards to gender and racial characteristics, fifteen of the interviewees were white males, five were black males, seven were white females, and two were black females. To represent the regionally diverse voices of reenactors, interviews were conducted with respondents from the states of Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, and the district of Washington, D.C.

In terms of geographical relevance as it relates to historical events, Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina and South Carolina were four of the eleven Confederate States of America during the Civil War. Kentucky was a deeply divided, slave-holding border state, and Illinois, Indiana, West Virginia and Ohio were Union states. Colorado was still a territory (Morris 1996).

Nine interviewees considered themselves to be primarily Confederate reenactors, with five of them living in historically Union states or Kentucky. Of these confederate reenactors,
seven were white males, one was a black male, and one was a white female. Fourteen interviewees considered themselves to be primarily Union reenactors, all of whom lived within the historically Union states or Kentucky. The Union reenactors included nine white males, four black males, and two white females. Four interviewees were primarily civilian reenactors, living in equal distribution between the northern and the southern states. Of these civilian reenactors, all were white females. Two interviewees were slave reenactors, both black females living in southern states.

On the whole, the respondents had high levels of education. All of the interviewees were high school graduates, and 23 of the 29 respondents had some college education beyond high school. Four respondents had associates degrees. Thirteen respondents had obtained bachelors degrees, with five of those respondents holding graduate or professional degrees as well. Occupations of the respondents were quite varied, including a retired factory worker, a small business owner, a high school history teacher, and a museum curator, among others.

I will refer to both ethnographic field notes and interview transcripts in my findings. To assess the states of race and gender relations within the reenactment population, I developed a semi-structured interview schedule. The preponderance of questions asked was open-ended in nature, such as “What do you see as the major controversies taking place within the reenactment community today?” Out of fifteen possible scripted questions, only four were close-ended, such as demographic questions or length of involvement in reenactment pursuits. In addition to these scripted questions, I would pose probing questions as prompted by the nature of the interview and the respondent’s answers. Interviews were tape-recorded and lasted anywhere between one hour and four hours, with the average
interview lasting approximately one and a half hours. Finally, in presenting my findings, I have assigned pseudonyms to my respondents and the places they describe.
FINDINGS

RACE
Idealizing the past
When asked about slavery, Union, Confederate and civilian reenactors uniformly defined it as a negative institution, describing it with such words as “terrible,” “awful,” and “ugly.” However, when discussion turned to ideal aspects of the Civil War period, a number of white reenactors, Union, Confederate and civilian, cited positive aspects of the era. In private interviews, several of the Confederate reenactors idealized and mitigated the unjust racial relations of the Civil War era and successive periods of racial inequality. Reenactors neutralized their questionable viewpoints on race through a minimization of slavery’s ills, emphasis on willing black participation, and a blaming of political influences for changing racial relations. With the exception of the sole, black Confederate respondent, all other black respondents conveyed that there was nothing ideal about the Civil War era.

Four white Confederate reenactors and one black Confederate reenactor espoused a belief that while blacks were in a servile position in the antebellum period, there was a greater level of equality between whites and slaves than is usually perceived by the public. Louis, a white reenactor in his early fifties, stated, “[I]n the south, most whites worked in the fields, right along side with the slaves. Slaves were almost treated as part of the family. There was a level of respect toward slaves and they were rarely mistreated.” Similarly, Darryl, a 53 year old Confederate reenactor, explained a gentler treatment of slaves than is commonly perceived by likening a slave to a material investment: “A slave was like an expensive tractor
or any other piece of farm equipment. If you want it to keep working for you, you treat it well.” In their statements, Louis described slaves as holding a familial position, while Darryl dehumanized slaves in his commodifying description.

In addition to minimizing slavery’s wrongs, reenactors also expressed a belief in black “pride in service” for whites after emancipation. Dan, a white Confederate reenactor in his late forties, described this in the following statement:

In the south, up until very recently, the domestic staff were always black, always. And they took a professional pride in that...it was just as true among the black professionals in the south that waited tables, and performed the butlers’ services, and kept the estates, as it was...among the staff that made up the great manor houses of England.

Dan also romanticized an arguably revisionist sense of black domestic employment by expressing his desire to stage a reenactment with his friend A.J., a black Confederate reenactor in his mid-fifties. “I’ve often thought that it would be neat to go up to the Allenton House, and do one [a reenactment] of the [plantation] family, and have A.J. play the butler...he would be a good one to interpret that...You know, that era of service is almost gone forever.” Dan’s desire to see his friend act as his servant is coupled with a lament for the fading of black servility; paying homage to that time through reenactment can serve as a temporary reversion to that “era of service,” when whites exercised racial dominance (Winant 1998:205).

Another tactic to soften the past is seen in reenactors’ efforts to iterate the historical roles of blacks in the Confederacy. Reenactors disagree as to why blacks served in the Confederacy, however. A.J., the sole black Confederate reenactor interviewed, claimed that black soldiers fought for the South “because of the loyalty they felt for their homeland.” Dan emphasized to me throughout our interview how A.J. was living proof that blacks have
an affinity for the Confederacy, detailing how A.J was “the most rabid, unreconstructed, born-again Confederate that I’ve ever met.” Dan illustrates the notion that whites will actively seek out blacks who can dissent from their group’s majority viewpoint, thereby disputing accusations of racism in a given situation (Bell 1992). A.J. is useful to white reenactors who maintain questionably racist views, in that he serves as living proof that there are blacks who similarly idealize a period of unequal social relations.

A.J.’s southern pride was aligned with the views of all of the white Confederate reenactors and many of the white Union reenactors, who emphasized the idea that fighting for the south was a conscious decision made by some blacks. The four black Union reenactors acknowledged that blacks did serve as Confederate soldiers in the war, but expressed doubt that they were willing participants. Terrence, a black Union reenactor in his early thirties, said, “I am of the opinion that ninety-nine percent of them didn’t do it by choice.” Further, there is speculation that promoting the black membership in the Confederacy is a manipulative tool used by groups with ulterior political motives. This is reflected in Arthur’s statement:

Another thing that’s bothered me…is that you have…Sons of Confederate Veterans…who really want to push and show that blacks fought in the Confederacy. I think unfortunately some of their motivation is, when you have the disputes of the Confederate flag flying over the state capitals, they can say ‘well, hey, it isn’t prejudiced…we had blacks fighting for the Confederacy.’

Idealization was also seen in discussing how racial relations of the past compare to modern racial relations. Darryl exonerated perceptions of historical racism by explaining how current forms of racial inequality were much more insidious. “Back then, you didn’t have the mean-spirited racism that is prevalent now. Reconstruction is what pitted blacks
against whites." Taking a truly "Confederate" viewpoint, Darryl placed blame on neither blacks nor whites, but on the imposition of the federal government, for the persistent negativity of modern racism.

Reenactors who espoused ideal notions of the Civil War era often indicted the modern phenomenon of "political correctness" for vilifying social relations of the time. It was indicated that political correctness influenced people to take great measures not to offend others, thereby ignoring the beneficial aspects of traditional social relations, as well endangering individual freedoms.

You know, we're gonna have to show up to work in a plastic suit, that's stamped out like everybody else's, can't look at each other, can't talk, can't do anything because somebody might be offended. It's gonna be like "1984." And, I think that our ancestors, north or south, would be appalled by that type of political correctness that just seems...accepted today (Dan).

The strong racial viewpoints reenactors expressed in one-on-one interviews with a white researcher contrasted sharply with the direct treatment of blacks at reenactments. Black reenactors discussed receiving consistently positive treatment and praise for portraying soldiers at reenactments.

We're like celebrities...[I]t's been extremely receptive. Even people on the Confederate side always come up to us, and you know, applaud us on what we're doing...And in fact, we turn a lot of people down, because we're invited to so many different events every year (Arthur).

While a number of white Confederate reenactors and the black Confederate reenactor espoused idealized views of racial inequality, their idealizations were expressed furtively, for the most part. A.J. explained that he was open about his views, but also emphasized that his disclosure caused him to be shunned by most black members of his local community.
Obscuring racial injustice

Racial tensions are a taboo topic of discussion at Civil War reenactments. While such avoidance is not limited to this social setting, the evasion of racial injustice is particularly problematic in reenacting an era characterized by racial enslavement. Reenactors actively avoid racial issues, as evidenced by lack of representation of slavery at reenactments, a concerted focus on historical accuracy only as it relates to material culture, and tracing the roots of the Civil War to influences other than U.S. dependence on slavery.

Slave portrayals are rarely performed at reenactments. Those blacks who do portray slaves often give solo performances, and are conspicuous among a mostly white group. Dan recalled a slave impression: "Here's something you rarely ever see...The earliest one I ever saw was in 1986...there was a guy that worked with a guy in a mill in Mississippi, and he came as this guy's slave, and actually carried his master's knapsack into battle...it was very neat to watch."

While slavery is rarely reenacted, it is even more rarely discussed in an open manner. Arthur expressed frustration at the lack of attention shivery receives in the reenacting arena. "Some whites don't like talking to blacks about it [slavery] because they know it's a touchy issue...it frustrates me." Lloyd, a 67 year-old white Union reenactor, pointed to the fact that he and other white reenactors consciously avoided the topic of race. If racial injustices were overtly addressed, this could expose certain reenactors' racist viewpoints, thereby inciting racial tensions. "We try not to...get into that kind of a conversation [about slavery] because if you...get a die-hard southern reenactor going, you are just opening the door for trouble."
Racial issues of the past and of the present are also avoided by minimizing the use of period-appropriate, racist terms. Public admission of racist views is widely known to be off limits in post-Civil Rights era society, and reenactors follow suit (Brooks 1974; Hudson 1999). While it is common to hear the word “colored” in reenactment circles, it is used in the context of the USCT, or United States Colored Troops, as black regiments were officially known at the time. Black and white reenactors unanimously saw this usage as acceptable because of its historical accuracy. Beyond this widely accepted term, black participants expressed fears of having other racial epithets directed at them. “Those terms aren’t acceptable now, and weren’t acceptable then…[but] that’s just the kind of thing you put yourself in line for [in reenacting],” Terrence stated. Importantly, despite fears of this happening, none of the black respondents interviewed had ever experienced overt racial insults during events.

However, Lloyd claimed that “If you get a group of Confederates off to themselves and they don’t have to worry about what they say, they’re very outspoken…[Y]ou won’t hear the word ‘nigger,’ but they call them [blacks] ’darkies.’” Lena also discussed the fact that racism was never openly expressed in reenactments she had attended. “I don’t think that they [Confederate reenactors] do it for that reason [racism], because there’s not really any overt — you don’t hear anybody talking about it in a way that you can hear, at least.”

Instead of focusing on the historical accuracy of social relations, reenactors are often particular about details of material culture. Numerous reenactors cited “authenticity” as a major source of controversy in reenacting, but were usually referring to authentic representations in clothing, accoutrements, and the logistics of battle. Albert, a 52 year-old
white Confederate reenactor, stated the controversy over authenticity in material culture "has been continuous over the whole history of reenacting, and I suspect that it's always going to be that way, because we're never going to be perfect, and they are always going to be pushing toward perfection, and they're always going to want to be real." However, the perfection of portrayal as discussed by Albert lies in period-accurate accessories, not a comprehensive portrayal of historical events. Lloyd also talked about the expectations for material and logistical authenticity.

You have to be accurate in your uniforms. You have to be accurate in your weapons. Your campsite has to be accurate. Your personal tent has to be within that period, or whatever outfit you belong to. The battle itself has to be accurate too, if you’re portraying a real battle it has to be accurate to that battle as possible. If you come there with a radio or a TV, and you get caught with it, you’re more than likely gonna be asked to give it up, or you’re gonna be asked to leave. There’s only thing that the organizers will allow more than authenticity and that’s safety.

In reflecting on the past, reenactors often discuss the roots of the Civil War as lying in arguments over state's rights or the "preservation of the southern lifestyle," as A.J. claimed, rather than slavery. Some reenactors felt shortchanged by the fact that slavery was often framed in our society as the main focus of the Civil War, particularly in formal education. Edward, a 45 year-old Confederate reenactor, said, "We need to teach slavery as an evil of the time. It is very politically correct to say that slavery was the cause of the Civil War, rather than just looking at it as one component." Lena, a 43 year-old civilian reenactor, reflected Edward's sentiments, and elaborated by negating U.S. responsibility for slavery.

When I learned about the Civil War in school, it was more about slavery and Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Underground Railroad - the war was in no way all about slavery. It had to do with states' rights, taxation, and representation, as well as slavery. Which, to me, slavery is, there is no way it could ever had survived, it should never have been, but again, the United States did not introduce slavery, it already existed in Africa. They actually enslaved each other. So anyone who points out that the United States is the propagator of slavery, that's not true.
Through various tactics, white reenactors avoided meditating on the significance of slavery and racial injustice. This was seen not only in reenactment, but also in the perception of the war itself. With a very real, yet actively suppressed current of racial tension existing in reenactment, it is no wonder that many blacks would feel deterred from participating in reenactment.

Renegotiating race?

All of the reenactors interviewed recognized the dearth of black participation and spectatorship in Civil War reenacting. In addition, both white and black respondents expressed the need to increase the representation of the black voice in reenactment. Despite expressed desires to increase participation, however, white reenactors often blamed blacks, black organizations, and lower-class whites who were openly racist for keeping participation rates low. In addition, white reenactors expressed resentment when black participants received grants to increase representation. However, there were several black and white participants who made attempts to integrate the black perspective and its accompanying concerns into the reenactment arena.

Whites commonly expressed regret for the lack of integration in reenactment. Leslie, a 36 year-old Union reenactor, stated:

Many [blacks] do not want to portray being a slave. Many cannot see portraying a soldier because of the white officers appointed into command over them. Some blacks can truly look beyond to see the bigger picture of reenacting their unique part of Civil War history. Most of the rest still think it’s all a ‘white man’s war’ and want nothing do with it. I would certainly love to see more black reenactors reenacting…but the move has to come from black society first.
Several white reenactors indicated failed attempts at recruiting blacks into the reenactment community, and, as reflected in Leslie’s statement above, the onus was often put on blacks to initiate change.

White reenactors offered several explanations as to why black participation was so low. Female respondents tended to offer more empathetic rationales than male participants. Irene, a 36 year-old white, civilian reenactor, paralleled the difficult position of blacks with women in recreating the Civil War time period. “I think it’s a shame that more [blacks] do not participate, but I certainly understand why they do not. I felt reluctant to participate as well...in that I don’t particularly care for the female stereotypes of that era.” Female reenactors also show understanding that blacks would view the reenacting event as an unwelcoming setting, both as participants and as spectators. Lena expressed this sentiment:

I don’t think that it’s something that any of them [blacks] have been in for long [as participants] simply because of the climate. I mean, you know, the political climate...I would feel uncomfortable with all these battle flags around (my husband calls it ‘the K-Mart flag’), and all these yahoos giving the Confederate yell. It makes me uncomfortable for them, when I see that. I was trying to say something, and welcome them, just so they don’t feel so alone.

Interestingly, seven of the white reenactors stressed the fact that they were not bigoted in their views on black participation, differentiating themselves from those who were with pejorative labels. This is seen in Lena’s statement above, and was also seen in the responses of three Union reenactors and one Confederate reenactor. Ted, a 43 year-old white Union reenactor, said that there are “good ol’ boys, rednecks, and racists in every phase of American culture, and we [reenactors] have them in large numbers.” Jacob, a 59-year old white Union reenactor, detailed his experience of trying to recruit reenactors to join his regiment at a local shopping mall. “[H]ow do I say this, uh oh, I’m gonna sound like some
kind of redneck. White people will come up to your [recruitment] table and talk to you. Black people are kind of reticent.” Similarly, Dan, who expressed idyllic views of black servitude, called those reenactors who expressed more overt racism “our less fortunate brethren.”

Five white respondents and the black Confederate respondent also expressed blame towards African American organizations for whites’ lack of effectiveness in recruiting African Americans. “Um, we try…and I just wonder sometimes if it’s not that…propaganda that the NAACP and organizations like that spew out, that maybe that’s the reason…black guys don’t get into reenacting,” stated Jacob. The discourse used to describe racist organizations is also used at reenactments to describe the NAACP. At the battle reenactment I attended in Indiana, a man dressed as a Confederate general used the reenactment setting as a political platform. He gave a speech in which he said, “The NAACP and the KKK are one in the same. The two shall meet in hell for spreading hatred.” Increasingly since the 1980’s, the same anti-discrimination language largely affiliated with Civil Rights groups in the past has been used as rhetorical ammunition by conservative interest groups that are trying to dismantle support for racial equality (Myers 1997:vii; Hudson 1999). The laws put in place to promote racial equality, such as affirmative action mandates, as well as the groups which are advocating like minded causes, such as the NAACP, are maligned by conservative groups as being discriminatory against whites. The fact that this man equated the NAACP to a known white racist group demonstrates this phenomenon.

Despite low numbers, significant efforts are being made to redress the lack of black presence in Civil War reenactment. In contrast to white participants, who often have interest
in representing specific ancestors, black reenactors more often have an investment in educating the public on racial historical roles. Part of the interest comes from black reenactors' feelings that their history was largely kept from them in their own educational experiences. Leo, 70, stated,

We weren't really taught anything about the Civil War [in school]. There was no mention of the contribution of the black soldier. Then, in the 1960's, books started being written about black cowboys and such. The black public started reading things about their own history...For me, learning about these things, was like a rebirth.

Arthur expressed a specific wish in increasing the black visibility in reenacting. He wants to show the public how black history is American history. "[M]y ultimate goal would be to abolish black history [as a concept]. The reason we have black history is because black history was never taught, so we had to designate a time where that would be the focus."

Formal historical and government organizations have also invested in this increase in representation. Terrence, Arthur, and Nathan, a 60 year-old black reenactor, are all members of the same reenactment troop, and Ted is their leading officer. Their unit and their needed supplies were originally made possible because of a grant from their local court. Ted, who works at the state historical organization, applied for the grant, in partnership with the state African American heritage group.

The fact that black groups are receiving formal endorsement and assistance angers some white reenactors. Tim, a 23 year-old Union reenactor, discussed a group that had similarly received funding: "I've heard a lot of people talk about resenting them because they got a grant to outfit twenty guys completely because they are black. We can't get a grant like that." In response to resentment, Ted responded that the motivations for putting the group together was educational and an important part of telling the story of a local Civil War black
recruitment camp. "We needed to find a way to entice them [black participants]...Any
government that has a park...needs authentic interpreters, and it does not make sense to
interpret Camp Blake with a bunch of Confederate reenactors, which they've done in the
past." The antipathy for subsidization of black troops is akin to the current climate of white
anger towards affirmative action (Hudson 1999:260). While white reenactors uniformly
express admiration for black reenactors, and publicly lament scant black participation, many
whites see the very systems that can help increase representation as unfair.

Black reenactors also have an interest in using the reenactment setting for gaining a sense
of racial retribution. Arthur discussed the fact that he and his regiment were planning on
performatively harassing actors at a planned minstrel show reenactment. Despite the troop's
intentions, the performance was cancelled, due to planners' fears of offending the attendees.

What we were gonna do, is that some of our friends...from some of the Confederate
units, were actually gonna put on the show. And we were all gonna go sit in the front
row...and pull out our knives, and start tapping them [on the stage]. It wouldn't have
offended us - I mean, we were actually looking forward to seeing what it was like.

While Arthur and his troop's plan carried a potential for offending others, it would have
also been a chance for black performers to gain a sense of agency in answering back to a
form of theatre that has historically stereotyped blacks. Even when planners shun such forms
of racial reprisal, it occurs in more subtle fashions on the battlefield. Martin, a 57 year-old
white Confederate reenactor, recounts viewing one such incident:

The [black] gunner, who was aiming his piece...followed the Confederate units across
the field, and...was really tracking those fellas. He was actually recreating...trying to kill
people...he wasn't just sitting there, shooting the cannon, and I've wondered if, a bigger
investment [in the outcome] might be a way to put it. I thought it was great.
The black position in reenactment also necessitates African Americans to strike a balance between historical accuracy and performing painful historical roles. In trying to achieve this, black reenactors experience tension in negotiating their modern, racially integrated social circles. Terrence discussed the guilt he experienced from having to turn down white co-workers' invitations for joining 'their groups.

I felt bad because my friends here, my co-workers here would say... 'come on and do it [reenact] with us,' and... that's not exactly how it would have been done. If I was actually gonna be in their Civil War unit, I would have to go out and portray... one of their body servants... I wanted to do it where it was a black unit.

The two black female respondents that participated in slave reenactment explained that they understood why black participants could be uncomfortable with portraying a slave, but that they themselves did not feel distress in fulfilling the role. Sixty-year old Sarah performs as a slave woman, and has acted in solo shows that have traced the life of this woman from girlhood up until emancipation. “I am not here to point fingers – history will tell the story,” she states. Sarah said that she helps African Americans “to appreciate what their ancestors had to go through. Slaves had to be smart — they had to look, listen, and pay attention just to stay alive.” In celebrating the bravery of slaves, Sarah said that white audiences show signs of guilt during her performances, by crying and apologizing to her after her act. Black audience members, she said, “will enjoy the spirituals, but will not usually cry... they often know better what happened.” Sarah’s performances also elicit conversations about racial relations, as there is time for audience/member discussions after the presentation regarding slavery and its emotional and historical legacy.

Sarah and Laura, a 28-year-old black female slave reenactor, both stated that black attendance at their historical interpretations was on the rise, improving steadily over the past
few years. However, Laura explained that black attendees at her historical interpretations became angered at times by the notion of slave portrayal, particularly those attendees who came of age during the Civil Rights movement.

We start by talking about material culture—clothing, tools, and so on, and then take it to a deeper level. Sometimes though, questions from the audience regarding slavery are necessary for us to actually address some of the darker issues. One older gentleman who came in had a chip on his shoulder about the portrayal, saying it was too whitewashed. Once we explained it, though, he became okay with it.

Laura went on to explain that younger black attendees did not seem to mind the same slave portrayals. The fact that overt segregation is in the living memories of older black individuals may make it more painful to witness the tale of slavery retold.

GENDER
Idealizing the past
"Show me one...reenactor who has not seen and liked 'Gone With the Wind.'"

-Hannah, 48 year-old white civilian reenactor

Unlike race, the gender roles of the Civil War era were openly idealized, both in interviews and at reenactments. White reenactors often expressed admiration for the traditional gendered behavior associated with the time period, and assumed that 19th century women accepted the ideology of subjugation more readily than 21st century women. In addition, reenactments were a site for iterations of enduring gender stereotypes.

White male and female reenactors that were interviewed had a chivalrous ideal of the antebellum period and its accompanying gender roles. Tim stated that he admired the period because "there were taboos then, there were rules to dating and marriage." In the same vein, Lloyd indicated that reenactments recaptured the behavior of a more gracious era. "[Y]ou
find yourself being very polite and courteous and tipping your hat...and...when you do the dances, you’re not hanging all over each other...it’s a lot better.” Despite not having an ideal view of that era, Arthur indicated that “[In] the glory of the antebellum south...the white females were put on a pedestal – those are the images that people would rather see.”

The climate of politeness and material culture of the era were idealized by all of the civilian female reenactors as well, and were indicated as a motivating factor for their participation. Mary, a 39 year old white civilian reenactor, said there were “beautiful dresses, large houses - men were gentlemen.” Lena claimed, “Why I like doing Civil War reenacting is the clothing. I wouldn’t do a reenactment from a period when the clothes were... ugly.” However, Lena also mentioned the fact that, as a woman, it sometimes felt restrictive to do historically based scenarios. “Some of the historically accurate ones can be pretty dry, because they didn’t get as fired up as we do now when we discuss things... Women wouldn’t have confronted a man. It wasn’t seemly.”

Despite Lena’s statement, individuals indeed did get fired up about social matters in the Civil War era. While there were idealized manners in the Civil War period, the social turmoil of the war created a time where women “fought over the limits to their sphere,” (Sizer 2000:84). Reenactors who are idealizing the gentility of the Civil War are denying the historical occurrences of female political protest and negotiation of traditional roles. Civil War-era women, both out of necessity and desire, assumed a variety of jobs, risking “public censure for doing men’s work,” (Sizer 2000:79).

While women did have interest in serving “the cause” during wartime, some reenactors rationalize why women would have participated in fighting or working near or on the
battlefield. Lloyd discussed female soldiers who fought in the war, explaining “A lot of them [women] who did that went with their husbands, and a lot of them just didn’t have anything...to do, so they went and joined the army.” In stating this, Lloyd is indicating that the existence of women in the war was hinged completely upon their husbands, belying the fact that many women had to take on tasks at home that were necessary to keep their families alive.

Reflective of their ritual nature, scenarios presented at reenactments can serve to reinforce gender stereotypes that have been socially sustained throughout history. Lena recounted two particular reenactments which illustrate this point.

We do a scenario where the soldiers come in, and they’re harassing the women, and we go report it to the commanding officer, and he of course goes down and threatens the soldiers that were guilty of it. In the most recent one, they did ones that were a little more comedic, that weren’t actually based on any events. They had a little tableau between the mayor of the town and one of the ladies of the evening. Of course his wife got involved, and he was ran out of the town for his behavior.

In this case, Lena described the “damsel in distress,” the whore, and the harpy wife all being played out in the public performance, with none of the performances grounded in historical events. The performance of women seeking out a male officer to protect them reinforces male superiority and the need for a man to rectify the situation. De Beauvoir ([1949] 1997) discusses these stereotyped roles. “Man-the-sovereign will provide women-the-liege with material protection and will undertake the moral justification of her existence,” (p. 16). While these words were written over half a century ago, such stereotypes are still being sanctified in modern interpretations. Lena confirmed that the crowds present at these scenarios “loved it,” and that they were some of the most warmly received performances of the reenactment events.
Reenacting sexism?

Women expressed difficulty in dealing with discriminatory behavior at reenactments, yet often rationalized such treatment. Unlike slavery, the roles of women are commonly depicted at reenactments. The depictions of women from the Civil War era often emphasized traditional gender roles, and were thereby deemed "irrelevant" to much of the male reenactment community. In addition, female reenactors experienced open discrimination, as opposed to the covert nature of racial prejudice in the reenactment arena. When women did assume the diverse roles women took on during the war, such as soldiers who disguised themselves as men, both men and women held these reenactors to incredibly strict standards of authenticity.

It was clear from the interviews of most of the female reenactors that the unequal treatment they experienced occurred in the discriminatory logistics of the reenactment, as well as in the antiquated roles of reenacting itself. Three white and both black female reenactors found inequality more tolerable when coupled with fact that they were representing a transitioning time in women's history. Irene said, "I only became more interested [in reenacting] when I learned that this was the beginning of the women's suffrage movement that eventually gave women the right to vote, and even to serve for the military in WWI...and WWII." A number of white female reenactors indicated anger or frustration with the restriction of roles and second class treatment, yet there was an indication that to expect equality would be imposing "modern values" on an unequal past.

People do not take a woman as seriously as a man in history, and I think that also translates into reenacting...On the other hand, that's because of my 21st century values being imposed on a 19th century society...When I put on the clothes, I try and put on that mindset too, and that mindset has to be one where women occupy different
realms... When I put on that corset, the corset to me is just a symbol...of where women were in society – that restraint, that control, the inability to do certain things for yourself. (Hannah)

Hannah, who has been reenacting since the 1980’s, readily made her anger about unfair treatment known during the course of her interview. Nonetheless, Hannah and other female reenactors associated poorer treatment with the similar inequality of the Civil War era. In addition, it was clear from the majority of white male reenactors’ responses that the anger of female reenactors was not readily heard. Women are often expected to self-process their anger about gender discrimination in a way that will not offend or upset others. If women do not engage in this process voluntarily, then their coworkers, spouses, friends, and other social contacts will highlight their deviant behavior and remind them to amend their feelings in a socially appropriate manner (Hercus 1997:53).

The words of Hannah and similar sentiments of white female reenactors are reflected in the opinions of black female reenactors, but with an important distinction. Both Sarah and Laura indicated that they were fully aware of their historically subjugated positions as black females, thus they did not feel discomfort in honoring the past by portraying subordinated roles. In understanding the subjugation, Sarah and Laura indicated that they were there to highlight the innovative survival skills of slaves, and felt respected for doing so. White females, on the other hand, affiliated good treatment with idealized white female roles, yet beyond exaggerated conventions of “period appropriate” manners, they did not receive equal treatment.

Women usually hold a sequestered place at reenactments. At a standard reenactment, a battle will occupy much of the male efforts, while female reenactors will often attend ladies’
teas. Men and women will often reconvene in formal dress at the “evening ball.” Despite the guise of gentility associated with their activities, women reenactors recounted events where their treatment was substandard.

It is a sexist thing; to me everything is more geared towards the men. And we’re trying to change it, but they should do a little more for women, as far as, if nothing else, a place out of the sun, if possible, and with a decent view of the battle, that would be nice. But they don’t, and I’ve never seen a single one that did. Some of it you kind of have to learn to overlook. And you go and manage to get your token ladies’ tea, which to me, most of them are kind of dull and boring. And I don’t even go to too many of them. (Lena)

In contrast, Albert stated that female reenactors who decried second-class treatment did so “in a way that I think is just too intrusive, and I resent it.” Albert’s words mirrored the attitudes of several of the white male reenactors, who regarded women in reenacting as interlopers. Tim, a former member of the military, saw the female presence as being disruptive to the backstage male behavior that occurs at reenactments (Goffman 1959).

There is a fine line between the military camp and what takes place at reenactments. Guys sit around and do guy things— they talk about women, they talk about boozing. We do our best to be gentlemen, but we’re also boys. It is difficult to relax when women are there.

Typically, women will take on the civilian roles that are affiliated with their gender— nurses, laundresses, cooks, and vivandières, or officers’ wives. Interestingly, though, the gendered positions that female reenactors assume can often be occupations that society currently deems as feminine. This is exemplified in the case of the nursing reenactors. In the Civil War era, women were often shunned if they tried to do nursing on the battlefield, while in our modern society nursing is seen as a largely female profession. Thus, nursing is a popular and socially acceptable role for female reenactors to hold. All of the female reenactors interviewed indicated that there was a certain amount of social pressure put on
them to assume these gendered roles. Irene stated that “many groups will not support a woman in their group as anything other than a traditional role.”

Despite being sequestered at the reenactment event, women often serve as the planners of the events themselves. As planners and as civilian reenactors, however, women sometimes are not seen as legitimate members of the reenactment community. Mary said, “I do not participate in the military aspect. Therefore, many male reenactors do not consider females as reenactors... We are labeled civilians, not reenactors. I think they are wrong. We do provide a piece of Civil War history.” Two of the white male reenactors revealed that female civilian reenactors were not even allowed to vote in their group elections. Yet, by doing said “civilian” work, women are permitted to attend reenactments with minimal male protest.

Male reenactors appreciate the domestic tasks that women take on at the reenactments. Acting like “den mothers,” female civilian and slave reenactors will often organize the events and keep them going by doing tasks such as cooking and childcare. Theresa, a 29 year-old white female soldier reenactor, defined women's expected roles to be “the typical cook and take care of the guys type of thing.” By assuming these responsibilities, women are thought to be showing an accurate portrayal of what women did in that time period. Lloyd said, “The women cook...doing period food, and it's just out of this world...The women have their own little things. They have their sewing match and...you know, it was pretty segregated back then...The young kids of the family get to see how life was back then.” Thus, women's domestic behaviors at these events serve to reinforce an image of “real life” during the 1860's, simultaneously iterating and normalizing sex-segregated roles for the youngest generation.

31
Ironically, women in reenacting are socially rewarded the most under diametric circumstances; when they hyperfeminize themselves through the gendered activities, behavior, and material culture of civilian reenacting, or when they erase all aspects of femininity to “pass” as male soldiers.

I sincerely hope, I’d like to think that I have, from time to time, marched right beside a female reenactor portraying an infantryman and I never knew it. I sincerely hope that’s happened. I hope there are women out there doing that. Ah, but, there are a whole flock of women out there who are failing miserably at it, and they are…just another anachronism, as far as I’m concerned (Albert).

The question of whether or not women should dress as soldiers is an ongoing controversy within reenacting. During the real war, it is estimated that between 250-1000 women fought as soldiers. The women who did so were disguised as men, facing dire consequences if their gender was discovered (Barthel 1996:95; King 1992; Blanton 1993). All of the reenactors interviewed were aware of the fact that there were women in the ranks during the Civil War. Only two of the men interviewed, both being white, indicated that they were squarely against women in the ranks. The other 27 respondents claimed that they condoned female soldier reenacting on some level. With probing, however, it was clear that the expectations for “authenticity” in female reenacting were quite stringent.

Interviewees conveyed that female soldiers were acceptable when they did not display any markers of femininity and were making their best efforts to look like a man. Eighteen interviewees found gender ambiguity to be a highly anachronistic and disruptive aspect of female reenacting. It is important to note that female reenactors expressed almost as much ambivalence as male reenactors about female portrayals of men. Hannah said that if a
woman is obvious in her gender as a male soldier, “it should happen to her what happened to
women then – [she should be] sent home.”

There is a serious investment as a female soldier reenactor to have fellow female soldiers
portray males convincingly. If women are not to be discredited in the reenacting community,
which happens frequently, they must all make their best efforts to legitimize themselves as
reenactors. While women often enter the activity due to participation of a male partner, there
are gendered peer networks within reenacting. Said networks have helped women share
advice on improving their impression within the larger reenactment community. Often
members of mostly male troops, female participants can be isolated from other women in the
activity, but have more successfully communicated with one another since the advent of the
internet. Hannah stated, “The internet has been great – we can put together an impression
through email and through listservs and show up at an event together, and go back on our
separate ways.” She traced these networks to “at least a couple core groups of women [in the
1980’s], who were reenacting independently of men.” With scant female representation in
the reenactment during this earlier period, women “started finding each other, and mentoring
each other.”

To circumvent poor characterization of women in reenacting, Leslie and Dana, a 43-year-
old white, female, civilian reenactor, have both served as mentors to other women on how to
pass as men on the field. Such mentoring is not just spurred on by female reenactors; indeed,
male reenactors encourage female soldiers to help modify open, contradictory expressions of
gender within their own sex. In Leslie’s case, male leaders have asked her to “police” fellow
women who had cultural markers of femininity in their long hair and make-up, and were thus
deemed as doing inadequate male portrayals. She stated, “I have been asked to counsel other
female reenactors who were falling short by officers in charge of both Union and
Confederate sides.”

Female reenactors also live with the understanding that they have to endure misogynistic
humor to be accepted as a soldier. In contrast to black participants, female participants
indicated that they have had openly derogatory comments directed at them. Dana said, “If a
female reenacting as a soldier shows that she...can tolerate ‘male humor,’ then she has far
better chance of being accepted...Being in the ranks of guys and on the battlefield is no place
for political correctness.”

Female and male reenactors both indicated that women who willfully portray men
without disguising all aspects of womanhood are heavily ostracized. Not only do they incur
lectures on improving their performances, but they will also receive the silent treatment from
other reenactors. Leslie stated, “I have seen such persons wind up being ‘shunned’ by all but
their unit mates. No outside reenactors will approach, talk or even acknowledge the woman’s
existence if the case is there.”

While none of the black reenactors have ever had anyone tell them they could not
participate in an event, four of the female reenactors (two civilian and two military) had
experienced being told directly that they could not take part in a reenactment. Theresa, who
has an androgynous, slightly built appearance that allows her to convincingly portray a man,
detailed her experiences.

I’m lucky to be able to pull the soldier thing off well, so I have a lot of support, but there
are a handful of people out there who don’t care what I look like, how I hold myself, how
authentic I may be. I’m a woman, and so they will openly say ‘No, you can’t participate
in this reenactment I’m running.’
Theresa comes very close to meeting the stern standards that skeptical reenactors identify regarding a convincing, masculine portrayal of female soldiers. Even with her persuasive performance, however, there are still reenactors who will not accept Theresa’s presence in reenactment.

Renegotiating gender?

Despite serious adversity, female reenactors pursue military reenactment because they feel it is a much more dynamic part of the reenacting experience, and there are women within those ranks who do not feel it necessary to hide their gender. Civilian and military female reenactors are currently engaged in subverting traditional gender roles. Reenacting women enter gender-defying roles within reenactment, both privately and publicly. There are women and men within reenactment that support an active negotiation of prescribed gender roles, as well as insist that women have a place in reenacting.

Often expected to stay in the camp or observe battle from a distance with the rest of the spectators, civilian reenacting women rarely are involved in the direct action of battle. Irene described a furtive experience where she did not stay in camp as expected. While Irene is predominately a civilian in her reenacting, she has done military reenacting.

Harper Creek was the first time I rejected my role..."watching camp" during the battle...[I] went out and hid in the woods behind the cannons and watched the action. It was really exciting to be so close, and that is when I started to appreciate what the boys got out of it. At Kenton Run, they needed additional help on the cannon...I was recruited...It was the first time I dressed as a boy.

Irene’s curiosity led her to find out more about the traditionally masculine experience of reenacting, but what is interesting is that she considered her activity worth hiding, for fear of getting "in trouble" for deviating from her prescribed duties, and endangering herself by
being near the combat. It is not uncommon for people of either sex to engage in gender-
transgressing behaviors in secrecy, for fear of public reprisal. For Irene, her transgression
was a first step towards participation in the activity when the opportunity arose in a socially
condoned way.

While Irene’s rebellion was secret, other women are unapologetic about participating in
battle and showing signs of their traditionally assigned gender traits. As expected, these
women are still policed by others for their behavior, but remain obstinate to critiques. Lena
described her efforts to discourage a soldier-reenacting friend, Donna, from displaying
gendered behaviors while in battle, and explained that Donna refused to behave differently
than she normally would just because she was in uniform.

All she does is smile when she’s out there, waacking away [with her sword]. You can
tell she’s a woman, because of her smile. And she’s just having a good time, but she has
this smile like a beauty queen. And I tell her, ‘Donna, quit smiling out there!’ because
she looks more like a guy if she looks stern and has her hair hanging down. And
sometimes she puts her hair up and goes off, smiling away.

Observation and desiring of traditionally male roles within reenactment has led other
female reenactors to seek out female-accepting troops within the reenactment community,
where they can participate without fear of rejection. Leslie described how she found a
known, accepting group, and that she has seen attitudes towards female participation improve
slightly over her six years of participation.

After…noting how the men seemed to have much more ‘fun’ than the ladies, I asked a
man about units that would be accepting of a female portraying a male in uniform. I was
informed of one artillery unit in Capital City that was accepting of such a role. I have
seen a subtle shift towards acceptance of those uniformed women who honestly try and
blend in with their counterparts. There is still much animosity by some segments of
reenactors out here but it is not as virulent as in years past.
Despite the predominate cynicism towards female reenactors within the community, two white male reenactors, two female civilian reenactors, one female soldier reenactor, and most notably, all of the black reenactors except for A.J., supported women portraying soldiers without having to completely conceal their gender. Jacob’s troop has male and female soldiers, and generally advocates female reenacting as long as women are making their best attempts to look male. However, there is an understanding within his troop that there is gendered hypocrisy regarding historical accuracy within reenactment. Jacob framed the “inaccuracy” of the female portrayal being gendered as analogous to middle-aged men re-fighting a young man’s war. “Guys will say, ‘well, you know, they’ve got big butts and you can tell that they’re women’...Well, look at you guys, you’ve got your big old belly hanging out. You don’t look like a Civil War soldier.”

Several reenactors detailed how some women will reenact with their husbands and unconventionally use familial relationships to negotiate gender roles, touting themselves as either “brothers,” or as “father” and “son,” in their portrayals. This is seen in the technique of one particular soldier named Gina, who participated with her husband. The couple billed themselves as brothers. While members of Jacob’s troop showed initial discomfort with the elastic use of familial terminology to transcend gender questioning, they learned to judge Gina on her own merits as a reenactor. With admiration, Jacob described her. “She was good at what she did. She knew the drill.”

Contrary to prior findings (Stanton and Belyea 2001) that identified black males as being aligned with white males in keeping women out of military reenacting, the attitude of most black respondents I interviewed appeared to be coalitional in nature. Black
respondents often described the importance of female military reenacting as being concomitant with the need to reinsert the underrepresented voice in the telling of history.

Personally, I am all for it. I found a book that details some of the experiences of both white and black women who served in the army. I do believe that many male reenactors frown upon women doing it, but it happened, so I would be happy to see women portraying soldiers (Terrence).

Arthur noted the importance of seeing how historical events deemed as belonging to a certain group must be recognized for their importance to all groups in similarly oppressive situations.

You know, we talk about Martin Luther King Day being a black holiday. I mean, he fought for Civil Rights, whether it be for the poor white farmer in Georgia or the poor black farmer in Georgia. Civil rights for women, for blacks, for the handicapped, for anyone.

Leo, the eldest interviewee in this research, was perhaps one of the most advocating of female participation in military reenactment. "I cannot see drawing a line between male and female participation," he stated. Because Leo does educational presentations at local schools on the role of blacks in the Civil War, he had a business card made for his volunteering. On the card is a picture of a black woman and a white man in uniform, standing next to one another. An inscription on the card reads, "Civil War soldiers included African Americans and women."
CONCLUSION

Blacks and women occupy stratified social positions, with paralleling forms of discrimination existing in various settings. Yet, the history of negotiating race in our society differs greatly from that of negotiating gender. There is little question that slavery and the Jim Crow Laws of this country systematically oppressed black men and women, but discrimination against white women has often been cloaked in the chivalrous discourse of protecting "the fairer sex." The legislative successes of the Civil Rights movement were made possible by solidarity and sacrifice on the part of blacks and their supporters, with the understanding that institutional inequality created abject conditions for blacks. In contrast, the Equal Rights Amendment, which called for the equal treatment of men and women by public agencies, was successfully eliminated due in part to public fears of losing benefits that already existed for white women.

[Opponents of the Amendment] raised issues surrounding the ERA's purpose. Would women be subject to the draft? Would they lose child care or alimony support upon divorce? Would husbands no longer be required to support their families? Leaders of NOW and other pro-ERA organizations were too loosely organized to respond effectively to these fears (Sklar 1998:177).

In comparatively considering race and gender, my interviewees detailed very different social experiences based on their racial and gender attributes. Black participants were treated with appreciation and awe, whereas women were told to their faces they could not participate. With the backstage expressions of racism that took place during interviews,
however, one wonders why interactional treatment of blacks was so welcoming. The answer most likely lies in the benefits black participation would bring to the reenactment community. For many black reenactors, as well as those white reenactors who have more egalitarian views on race, there is an investment in celebrating an underrepresented history and increasing the public’s awareness of the many roles blacks took on during the war. For those white, and even black, participants who have racist views towards blacks, increased black participation would serve as tangible evidence that Civil War reenacting is egalitarian, thereby allowing them to shirk off prior accusations of racism. Also, for the racist participants, the “threat” of black participation is relatively minor, since relatively few blacks are presently reenacting. If numbers increase, as several of the people I interviewed would like to see occur, perhaps the sentiments of welcoming blacks would change.

As for female participants, the numbers are larger, and the discrimination more public. The “threat” of female participation is more real at present, which may be one reason why women are more openly denigrated. The most viable way for women to reenact successfully is to be supported and legitimized by male participation, whether it be by their husbands or supportive male troop leaders. In addition, many female reenactors have endured poor treatment through rationalizations and minimal public protest. For white and black women, there is a desire to represent the unequal treatment that existed for women in the past. However, the disparate treatment is occurring today in reenactment.

For some white women, poor treatment is more tolerable due to their sanctification of southern chivalry. Another reason why women may put up with discrimination is the lack of solidarity among women in reenacting, and society in general. Just as women’s
organizations were too loosely organized to respond to attacks on the ERA, women within
reenacting often have stronger connections with the males of the pursuit and little sustained
connection to other women. Thus, even though they are angered by discrimination,
affiliations to male participants can outweigh the desire to stir up protest. There is also in-
fighting among women regarding discrimination in reenacting, whereas black culture
displays higher levels of solidarity against discrimination. For blacks, this is seen in the
shunning of A.J. by his black acquaintances for displaying racist views. In contrast, female
reenactors are often unsupportive of fellow female military reenactors for stepping outside
the bounds of gender continuity.

The most encouraging finding within this research was the empathetic and coalition-
oriented behavior seen between women and blacks. As members of two oppressed groups,
white women displayed empathy towards black reenactors entering a hostile environment.
Black reenactors iterated the importance of considering women in history as well,
understanding that the voices of both blacks and women had been silenced for too long. As
numbers of black participants and spectators increase in reenactment, there is hope for
coalitions between these two historically oppressed groups.
REFERENCES


