HONOR AND GENDER IN THE ANTEBELLUM PLANTATION SOUTH

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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The idea of examining the connection between honor and gender began in a graduate seminar on the Old South. As the class discussed the various aspects of male honor, a curiosity about how the ethic affected southern women arose within my mind. Questions about women's reactions to patriarchy, male self-image, and duels formed and my interest continued to grow. Encouraged by Dr. Jon Wakelyn to find answers to these queries and to develop ideas for a dissertation topic, the project began to take shape. The subsequent research and analysis resulted in the conclusion that honor was just as important for southern women as it was to men. Honor and reputation restricted the women's lives and monitored their conformity to the social principles and gender conventions that were espoused by the South's plantation society.

This study was completed with the help of many people who deserve recognition and my appreciation. The librarians and employees of Kent State University Library and the archives at the Virginia Historical Society, the Virginia State Library, the University of North Carolina, Duke University, the South Caroliniana Library, the Georgia History Society, Louisiana State University, and Tulane University all have my undying thanks. Their hard work and pleasant manner made the long and lonely research process a little easier to accomplish and their extensive knowledge of their collections added to my assortment of resources. Additionally, the members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Leonne Hudson, Dr. Kevin Adams, Dr. Leslie Gordon, Dr. Ray Craig, and Dr. Richard

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My friends and family played a special role in the completion of this project. They tolerated my insecurities, frustration, and irritability and continued to offer their love and encouragement. My parents, siblings, and dear friend Rhonda Williamson have suffered my long absences and inattention without complaint and have continually expressed their satisfaction and pride in my accomplishments. My friends and fellow historians, Leonne Hudson, Kim Carey, Monika Flaschka, Julie Mujic, Nathan Fry, and Kelly Selby have all been my sounding boards and advisors. Without these people, the dissertation process would have been more arduous and challenging. I appreciate them all and credit them with providing me with the emotional and mental strength to complete my dissertation.

INTRODUCTION

Born in 1791, Margaret Mercer grew up as a member of the South's upper class on her father's Cedar Park plantation near Annapolis, Maryland. The daughter of John Francis Mercer, a delegate to the nation's Constitutional Convention in 1787 and Maryland's tenth governor, Margaret enjoyed educational opportunities that were not available to most southern women. After his gubernatorial term, Mercer returned to Cedar Park where he nurtured his land and his children. Employing his excellent education and his life experience, Mercer guided the intellectual instruction of his offspring. His tutorial involvement was so devoted that Margaret remarked that she was "brought up at her father's feet" as her interests in unfeminine subjects such as medicine, agriculture, public health, and theology were shaped by the tutelage of her father. As a young woman, Margaret used her broad-based knowledge to become a dedicated teacher and opened two academies for girls, one at Cedar Park and the other near Baltimore. In 1836, she continued her efforts in female education when she purchased Ludwell Lee's Belmont Plantation near Ashburn, Virginia, and transformed it into a Christian school for women.[1]

In 1841, Margaret Mercer's ideas on female education and southern principles were published in her book, *Popular Lectures on Ethics, or Moral Obligation: For the*

[1]Caspar Morris, M.D., *A Memoir of Miss Margaret Mercer* (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1848), 14-15, 147-155.

Use of Schools. Among its many other topics, the work addressed her views on the ethic of honor. While Mercer recognized the reality of the principle's importance to society's relationships, she also deviated from a commonly held belief that it was a social construction. For her, honor's real significance was the self-esteem that resided within people themselves. Mercer argued that "the principle of true honor [was] a part of the law of nature" and was not "a law made by…'fashionable people'…merely for the regulation of their conduct 'towards each other'" nor was it "intended to be the panoply of social peace." Instead, Mercer asserted that it "was intended by Providence to guard honesty, where human laws cannot operate" and defined it as "the most perfect dignity and elevation of moral principle" which came from "our own consciences." It was "the principle of self-respect" and, accordingly, "honesty was a strict adherence to what is due to others; honor, to what is due to ourselves."[2]

South Carolinian James Henry Hammond agreed with Margaret Mercer's opinion that the ethic of honor was a manifestation of nature. Still, he contended that the importance of self-respect existed only in that it was a necessary path to communal esteem and described honor as "that principle of nature which teaches us to respect ourselves, in order that we may gain the respect of others." Hammond understood that southern society shaped the components of honor to ensure the preservation of the social order. The observance of the standards of honor served to maintain the social divisions

[2]Margaret Mercer, *Popular Lectures on Ethics, or Moral Obligation: For the Use of Schools* (Petersburg, VA: Edmund & Julian C. Ruffin, 1841), 175-176.

of class, gender, and race by bestowing power upon men who were deemed worthy of the community's esteem and who earned a designation as honorable men.[3]

The word honor can be an elusive term with dissimilar definitions for different people. It can refer to personal dignity and integrity, or it can be a source of praise and recognition. The honor of the antebellum United States, in both the North and the South, encompassed all of these attributes. However, for the southern plantation society, the principle held a significance that carried it beyond traits such as dignity, integrity, or recognition. It was a source of social and political power that came from the willingness to adhere to and to protect the South's social order and the system of slavery. This compliance with southern principles produced a good communal image, or a positive reputation. Image came from the character that a person projected to the neighborhood and became the impression that the community held of that person. Hence, it was a person's reputation, or the social estimation of a person's integrity. Within the social structure of the plantation system, image and reputation were the same thing, society's assessment of a person's worthiness. A man who observed and defended the standards set forward by southern society and maintained the practice of slavery held a positive image or a good reputation and was an honorable man.[4]

Analysis of the code of honor has been important to understanding antebellum plantation society, particularly southern culture and values. The examination of the ethic has revealed its considerable importance for the elite South's definition of masculinity

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[3]Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 14.

[4]Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 4, 34; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of the Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1890s* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), xi.

and for the regulation of southern society. However, by largely relating honor to men, scholars have missed its much broader significance. Historian Brenda Stevenson has stated that due to the patriarchal nature of southern society, men believed that women only manifested honor as it related to their chastity or when the male authority conferred it upon them. This notion has kept women largely on the periphery of the discussion and has caused an important aspect of the social hierarchy to be overlooked. The gender conventions that applied to plantation women were also controlled by the ideals of honor. Since a patriarch's community reputation translated into his social status and power and his familial image was reflected in his personal honor, he not only had to guard his own standing, it was also necessary for him to protect the integrity of his family's position in society. To accomplish this goal, the men of the plantation South monitored the movements of their women through a strict set of principles and values that defined what it meant to be an elite female in southern society. Thus, the rules of honor restricted the lives of women as well as men. This study explores this connection between honor and female values and argues that the ethic of honor influenced the manner in which plantation women understood and fulfilled the community's gender standards.[5]

In the past, southern honor was historically viewed as a male concept that was based on men's reputations and their capacity to defend it. Since women, as the weaker sex, did not have the ability to physically confront attacks on their honor they were linked to the code through their male family members and men were given the task of protecting the female reputation. This relationship between male and female images made men's

[5]Brenda E. Stevenson, *Life in Black & White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 152.

honor vulnerable to the actions of women, particularly sexual improprieties. Victoria Bynum asserts that it was a husband's duty to protect his wife from immorality. Southern men, therefore, named chastity as the central element in female honor. Bertram Wyatt-Brown and Catherine Clinton have both addressed this point and have explained that the South's biracial society required the assurance of pure bloodlines within the planter family and caused men to focus on the purity of their women.[6]

In reality, though, reputation and honor resided on the familial unit and were based on the actions of both male and female family members. Instead of simply waiting for men to confer upon them a limited version of honor, southern women expressed their sense of honor through the fulfillment of their social responsibilities as wives, mothers, and plantation mistresses. A complete understanding of planter women requires further investigation of this aspect of female honor. Giselle Roberts has filled part of the intellectual gaps in this subject by examining the influence that age and honor had on the wartime experiences of young Confederate women.[7] This dissertation fills additional gaps by exploring the affect of honor on the way that the plantation society viewed the gender standards in the antebellum South.

Historical works that focus on southern women have not centered on the significance of honor to women. Instead, they have examined the reality of women's lives and the connections between class, gender, and race. In 1970, Anne Firor Scott

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[6]Victoria Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social & Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 69; Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 137-138; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 436.

[7]Giselle Roberts, *The Confederate Belle* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 4-5.

began the research that revealed the truth about the lives of the elite women of the antebellum plantation South. Scott took them off their pedestal and dispelled the myth of the pampered southern belle. She illustrated the trials that planter women faced as they attempted to meet their obligations as daughters, sisters, mothers, and wives and to achieve the prerequisites of the ideal woman. Scott also demonstrated that the characteristics of the ideal woman, piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity, were influenced by the region's racial structure. The necessity to control the South's extensive system of slavery resulted in a mastery that extended over all of the patriarch's dependents, including their wives and children. Hence, female gender conventions were affected by the southern practice of slavery.[8]

In her work on southern women, Marli Weiner addresses the role of the image of the ideal woman in the gender expectations that restricted plantation women. She agrees with Anne Firor Scott that the women used their understanding of accepted social assumptions to strive for their fulfillment of the requirements for true womanhood. Brenda Stevenson also examines the significance that southern society placed on women's responsibilities as wives and mothers. Stevenson asserts that the plantation community placed women's dedication to home and family within the accomplishment of their duty. Thus, southern women always made themselves available and placed the care and comfort of their families before their own.[9]

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[8]Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1970), 23-44.

[9]Marli Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-80* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 2; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 77.

Other historical studies that followed Anne Firor Scott's work recognized the connection between gender and race in southern society and demonstrated its significance in the formation of the social standards. Marli Weiner has indicated that race was a major problem in the South's acceptance of the ideology of domesticity. Due to the belief in the racial inferiority of African Americans, plantation society could not acknowledge the blanket statement that all men were superior to women. An adjustment had to be made to allow for the superiority of white women over black men. In her examination of southern women, Catherine Clinton argues that the South's social standards exposed women to contradictory positions in their community. She asserts that while the norms of race relations socially elevated women and gave them a place superior to African Americans, both free and enslaved, gender customs made them inferior to males and subjugated them to the hierarchical domination of men. The research of Elizabeth Fox-Genovese reinforces this uncertain status of women, but also includes a struggle between classes as an additional source of conflict. The racial and class tensions that Fox-Genovese highlights were contributing factors in the development of communal practices that maintained the social balance and dictated the behaviors and identities of southern women.[10]

Some historians have argued that the South's gender conventions were not as confining as they appeared and that southern women found room to maneuver within the system. Jane Pease and William Pease claim that regardless of the dictates of society,

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[10]Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves,* 53-56; Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982); 3-15; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 1-35.

many women enjoyed the privilege of choice; they could choose not to adhere to the prescribed social standards and had the power to select independence over marriage. Still, the women who made such a decision were confronted with its consequences. Unmarried southern women generally spent their lives within their siblings' homes and were never completely incorporated into their families. The work of Victoria Bynum has asserted that unmarried women posed a danger to the South's social structure because they represented a challenge to the foundations of the southern way of life and the patriarchy upon which it was built. In his study of masculinity, Stephen W. Berry II declares that while southern men wanted their women to outwardly meet the standards of the virtuous, pious, subservient female, they also wanted them to privately be open tempered, articulate, and passionate.[11] Despite Berry's evidence that men wished for intelligent spouses, they still required their wives to be publicly submissive. The failure of their wives to observe the region's gender conventions was a threat to their personal and familial reputation and honor.

The historical debate over the relationship between the Civil War, gender conventions, and the wartime status of women in southern society generally ranges between two extremes. One side of the argument claims that a complete alteration of communal standards is evident. Yet, the other asserts that no discernible changes took place. Drew Gilpin Faust contends that women's opinions concerning their subordinate

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[11] Stephen W. Berry II, *All That Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 85; Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, *Ladies, Women, and Wenches: Choices and Constraint in Antebellum Charleston and Boston* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 1-9; Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 5-7.

social position underwent a total transformation and that the war made it impossible for plantation women to continue to "celebrate helplessness." Given the loss of their male protection, the conflict forced planter women to realize their own strength and abilities and they could no longer pretend that they did not exist. Lee Ann Whites' study of wartime masculinity concurred with the theory of modifications in gender ideals. Whites states that as southern women moved away from their traditional sphere men began to experience a gender crisis and the meaning of manhood underwent an adjustment. The variations to female social standards caused the necessary changes to the male values.[12]

The debate over the influence of the Civil War on gender values also takes into account the idea that pre-war principles were preserved during the conflict. Giselle Roberts maintains that the identity of the South's young women was tied to the state and that their socialization firmly instilled southern gender dictates. Therefore, since the young ladies retained their allegiance to the South, they also preserved their loyalty to pre-war gender standards. At the same time, George C. Rable argues that southern society tolerated only minor wartime infractions to communal standards. For example, the experience of war and membership in aid societies allowed women to take steps outside of the private sphere in order to serve their family members and their nation.[13] However, the dismal situation brought on by the conflict did not remove the need for southern men and women to protect their personal and their family reputation and honor.

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[12]Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 251; Lee Ann Whites, *The Civil War as A Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1890* (Athens & London: The University of Georgia Press, 1995), 3-4, 7.

[13]Giselle Roberts, *The Confederate Belle* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 37-38; George C. Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 136-154.

This study examines the lives of women within the South's plantation society and will span, approximately, the years between 1820 and 1865. It defines the region of the South as the slave states that were located south of the Mason-Dixon Line, the Ohio River, and the Missouri Compromise Line. Despite the differences between the demographics of the Upper and Lower South and the Gulf Coast, the people of these areas read the same publications and were influenced by the same gender, class, and race ideologies. Additionally, as the southern and western sections of the slave states opened up, the regions gained significant populations of people who migrated from the older areas of the South. During the 1820s and 1830s, South Carolina lost over 200,000 people due to the decline in the fertility of its soil. Many of these people moved into the more prosperous parts of the South and took the southern customs and ideologies with which they were familiar with them. Jane Turner Censer's discussion on the migration of planter families supports this notion that traditional southern principles were found in the newer regions of the plantation system. Thus, it seems reasonable to believe that the regions will reveal similar beliefs about honor and female gender values and will all be considered for research purposes.[14] Since the East Coast and the Upper South claimed the first prosperous sections, the original slave states of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia yield more of the relevant sources than the western states. Still, the evidence in this dissertation has not been confined to these four states, any sources that originated in states that embraced plantations and the practice of slavery was included.

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[14]Jane Turner Censer, "Southwestern Migration among North Carolina Planter Families: 'The Disposition to Emigrate.'" *The Journal of Southern History* Vol. 57, No. 3 (August 1991): 407-426.

This project focuses on the women of the South's plantation system. In other words, its subjects are the wives, daughters, sisters, and mothers of the men who owned the land and the slaves that made up the foundation of the region's staple-crop production. Since the planters wielded great economic, social, and political influence, they were instrumental in the application of societal standards and were the ones who sought to maintain power through the preservation of their honor. In addition to planter women, the investigation includes some of the elite women who lived within plantation communities, but were not actually part of planter families. As the term elite refers to society's superior class, these non-planter women were also important to the social power structure and were as concerned about their reputation and honor as those women who lived on plantations. The important characteristic of these women is that they lived within the portion of southern society that controlled the functions of the social order. They were members of the South's prominent class where image and honor were translated into authority. The women did not usually exert influence themselves, but their adherence to social principles was converted into familial power that gave them positive social status.

The elite southern women that are addressed in this dissertation were included because their writings and their lives represent the relationship between the social standards and gender principles of plantation society and the ideals of reputation and honor. While some embraced their communities' values and others did not, their actions and thoughts left evidence of the significance of proper female behavior and communal image to personal and family honor. Jane Gibert, Louise, Adele, and Harriette Petigru

and Ella Clanton Thomas were conventional elite southern women who sought to fulfill their responsibilities as wives and mothers and to adhere to the South's societal standards. The lives of Louisa McCord, Julia Gardiner Tyler, and Sarah Grimke did not fit the stereotypical idea of planter women, yet they all wrote about the essential nature of female duty and women's reputations. Mary Ruffin Smith and Margaret O'Neale Eaton were both women who did not follow southern notions of acceptable female conduct. While Eaton flagrantly flouted southern gender conventions, Smith tried to protect her family's honor as she met the demands of her own conscience. No matter what their lives were like, all of these women, and the many others that are included in this project, illustrated their society's concern over the importance of women's behavior to the preservation of personal and familial reputation and honor.

The sources that make up the evidence of this study include letters, diaries, journals, literature, and publications from, or about, the plantation South. Written by or for southern women, the data demonstrates the requirements of southern gender customs and the importance of personal and family reputation. These materials do not usually use the word "honor," particularly those written by women, but they do connect women's actions to their community image. Since reputation and communal acceptance were the basis of southern honor, this relationship between behavior and image is the important aspect of these sources. The association illustrates the influence that the doctrine of honor had over southern gender standards. By expressing southern concerns about women's behavior and its affect on their perceived character, the sources link the women to the ethic of honor.

As the basic objective of this dissertation is to explore the connection between plantation society's gender conventions for women and the ethic of honor, it is organized to explain the function of honor within the lives of southern women. To accomplish this goal, the study first addresses the position of women in the plantation system by examining the South's ideology of femininity. While men expressed the physiological and psychological inferiority of women and emphasized female submission to patriarchal gender values, southern women stressed the importance of fulfilling their duty to their families and their communities. Their acquiescence to the region's prescribed principles became a point of honor for the elite women. The analysis of the social standards for women and how they were linked to honor is the second topic of this work. By exhibiting the qualities of true womanhood, purity, piety, submissiveness, and domesticity, planter women maintained their personal and family reputation and honor.

The significance of female behavior to a family's social status led to the necessity of structuring an educational system that indoctrinated young ladies in the South's gender expectations and justified the social command for their compliance. The southern structure of female education, both formal and informal, is the next subject of discussion. The plantation community sought to shape the actions of their young women by relating them to reputation and honor. The importance of female conformity to southern principles also led to the censure of women who failed to meet the communal standards. The meaning of gossip, ostracism, and the loss of reputation to plantation society is the fourth subject addressed. Gossip spread the news of misbehavior and resulted in ostracism and the loss of reputation and honor. Lastly, this study examines the

relationship between gender values and honor as it was tested by the dire circumstances of war. Despite the obvious changes that southern women experienced during the Civil War, honor continued to be used as a tool to regulate individuals and society.

The examination of the attitudes and actions of plantation women indicate that they deemed the preservation of their reputation to be of particular significance to them. A favorable community image was important to the social status of themselves, their family, and most prominently their familial patriarch. The behavior of women reflected on the honor of the head of their household and, in return, the women enjoyed the benefits of the respect and power that the community extended to him. Therefore, southern women conducted their lives in a manner that guarded the impression that they, and their families, gave to other members of their communities. They exemplified an identity that was directed by the principles of honor and that, accordingly, guided their behavior and set the standards by which they lived.

Through the examination of the diaries, letters, journals, literature, and publications that were produced and read by women in the antebellum plantation society, the relationship between the female gender conventions and the ethic of honor is apparent. The patriarchal nature of southern society required men to guard their communal status and the power that came with honor. Since any loss of reputation, personal or familial, endangered their social and political position, southern men used the region's gender principles to control the behavior of women.

CHAPTER I

Honor and the Essential Nature of a Woman's Duty

The women and men of the South's plantation society embraced the concept that the female nature was based on a foundation of physical weakness, emotional dispositions, and religious values. Elite southerners used this basis when they defined the elements of women's duty and encouraged women to fulfill their responsibilities within their homes and community. They also identified this female obligation as an essential component in their personal and familial reputation and honor and connected it to social status and power. For women, the association between their actions and their family's societal image linked the principles of duty to the ethic of honor. By fulfilling their duty planter women protected their familial reputation and honor and achieved the characteristic features of the ideal woman. As the daughter of an elite southern family, Laura Wirt Randall learned the importance of female duty as she attempted to resist the forces of the plantation gender standards.

Laura Henrietta Wirt Randall was the granddaughter of immigrant tavern-keepers and the daughter of a United States Attorney-General. Despite his modest beginnings, Laura's father William Wirt turned his family's future into one of promise. Through his work as a lawyer and an author, he earned the wealth and notoriety that placed the Wirts among the upper-class of Richmond, Virginia. Wirt's social status translated into political power and won him a presidential candidacy for the Anti-Masonic Party in 1832.

By the time that his first child, Laura, was born in September 1803, he was able to provide her with a life of privilege. It was also a life that was shaped by the dictates of the gender conventions of southern society. Laura's reputation and honor rested on her acquiescence and conformity to the established ideals of womanhood. Initially hesitant to undertake a predetermined role, Laura attempted to create an identity of her own. However, Wirt's constant reminders that it was a woman's duty to marry and that her actions violated the accepted social values and threatened her family's community image eventually had influence over Laura. Her father's assertions made it apparent that her struggle was in vain and she acknowledged the necessity of her submission to duty. Yielding to her father's direction, Laura entered the world of the proper southern woman.[1]

William Wirt believed in the compatibility of female education and women's duty to marry and that the instruction of girls would simply prepare them for marriage and motherhood. Thus, he began to develop his daughter's course of study at an early age. Impressed by early indications of Laura's intellectual aptitude, Wirt developed the "notion of making [his] daughter a classical scholar" and introduced her to Latin, French, Italian, and Spanish. While providing Laura with educational opportunities that rivaled those of the sons of wealthy southerners, Wirt encouraged his daughter to excel at her studies and to prove herself worthy of her father's love and confidence. By the time that she was seven, Laura's father regularly reminded her that faithfully studying was "the

[1]Anya Jabour, "Laura Wirt Randall: A Woman's Life, 1803-1833," in *The Human Tradition in Antebellum America*, edited by Michael A. Morrison (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2000), 165-172

only way to make [her] parents happy and to make them love [her] dearly." However, while Wirt proudly supervised Laura's academic training, he continued to envision for her a future within the confines of society's gender constraints.[2]

For William Wirt, his daughter's education was not an alternative to the socially mandated duties of marriage and motherhood. He believed that he was simply preparing Laura to be a more competent counselor to her husband and teacher to her sons. Accordingly, he set forth a plan that would put Laura on a path toward the fulfillment of these obligations and sought to end his daughter's formal education at the age of sixteen. At that time, Laura would begin to prepare for her debut in society and her eventual marriage. To make her more attractive to potential suitors, he added the traditionally feminine pursuits of dancing, painting, and piano training. He also began to advise his daughter that "she should avoid unfeminine pride in her intellectual accomplishments."[3] Despite his carefully laid plans, Wirt did not find Laura to be a cooperative participant.

When her formal studies ended, Wirt instructed Laura in the importance of acquiring the skills of a housewife and assured her that expertise in housewifery was necessary for a successful marriage. He also admonished her to attend to her mother's directives because an intelligent woman "may be admired, but she will never be beloved." Despite her father's urgings Laura found her duties in the home to be "disagreeable occupations" and an interference with her intellectual pursuits. Hence, she

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[2]Anya Jabour, "Laura Wirt Randall: A Woman's Life, 1803-1833," 167. The belief in the compatibility of female education and women's duty was fairly common in plantation society. Louisa McCord and Sarah Grimke were two more examples of women who benefited from classical educations. The subject of female education will be explored further in Chapter 3.

[3]Laura Wirt to Louisa Cabell, May 3, 1819, Laura Wirt Randall Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; Anya Jabour, "Laura Wirt Randall," 167.

did not give this part of her education the same effort that she devoted to her classical studies. Laura began to question the place assigned to women by society. She lamented the lack of opportunity to use her education and determined that, rather than entering into a loveless marriage, she would remain single.[4]

As a teenager, Laura Wirt developed a close friendship with her cousin Louisa Elizabeth Cabell, who shared a similar upbringing. The letters that the two young women exchanged between 1819 and 1831 indicate Laura's resistance to marriage. At one point, Laura and Louisa made an agreement not to marry and to "live & die in single blessedness" in an "Old Maid's Hall" with other women who wished to reside within their "charming, happy society." The dream that the friends created for themselves was an appealing alternative to marriage that surrounded them with supportive female friends and allowed them to follow their own interests while they "promote[d] the happiness of those around" them. The alluring, serene existence that Laura and Louisa imagined did not come to pass. In 1820, Louisa Cabell decided to marry Henry Carrington and, at her father's direction, Laura Wirt entered society to begin her search for a husband.[5]

During the six years that followed Laura's introduction into Washington, D.C. society, she continued to be conflicted between her education and the reality of her duty. She tried her hand at writing household guidebooks and took over the responsibilities for the education of her younger sisters. More importantly to her parents, she persisted in her determination not to wed and turned down three marriage proposals. Worried about his

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[4]Anya Jabour, "'Grown Girls, Highly Cultivated': Female Education in an Antebellum Southern Family," *The Journal of Southern History* 64, 1 (February 1998): 34-36.

[5]Laura Wirt to Louisa Cabell, November 4, 1819, Laura Wirt Randall Papers; Anya Jabour, "'It Will Never Do For Me to Be Married": The Life of Laura Wirt Randall, 1803-1833," *The Journal of the Early Republic* 17, 2 (Summer 1997): 207-209.

daughter's future and troubled by her failure to meet her social obligations, William Wirt took steps to win Laura's compliance. He began by sending his younger daughters away to school and then contrived to bring Laura in constant contact with her suitors. Despite Wirt's continual admonishment that she accept her destiny and marry, Laura stood firm for another year.[6]

By 1826, Laura Wirt was regularly corresponding with Thomas Randall, one of her suitors. While she continued to maintain that their courtship would not result in marriage, Laura eventually allowed Randall to call on her almost daily. The improprieties of spending so much time with a man that she was not engaged to placed Laura in a position that threatened her reputation and both her individual and familial honor. Since social conventions defined such close associations that did not produce an engagement as inappropriate, Laura risked social disgrace if she did not break off her connection with Randall. Laura's mother, Elizabeth, cautioned her that her failure to cease the friendship would lead to her obligation to "marry at once and take all the consequences." Still, rumors flowed through the neighborhood and began to claim that a wedding was indeed in Laura's future. Elizabeth expressed her anxiety for her daughter's situation in a letter to her husband, stating "I consider the business as irretrievable [sic] settled. There is no chance for honorable escape."[7] She understood that only Laura's marriage to Randall would save her social image and her honor.

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[6]Jabour, "Laura Wirt Randall," 171-178.

[7]Elizabeth Wirt to William Wirt, June 29, 1826, William Wirt Papers, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, Maryland; Jabour, "'It Will Never Do For Me to Be Married,'" 224-226.

The concern that William and Elizabeth Wirt felt over the circumstances caused by Laura's refusal to marry led them to withdraw their esteem for their daughter. Laura was confronted with the unremitting disapproval of her parents and her community and was constantly pressured to do her duty and marry. Raised in an environment that firmly placed significance on parental approval and social acceptance, it became difficult for Laura to endure the loss of both parental and communal regard and she finally surrendered to her destiny as a wife and mother. On August 21, 1827, Laura Wirt married Thomas Randall. After the wedding, the couple traveled to the Florida Territory, where Randall established a plantation. After spending the next six years fulfilling her domestic role in isolation, Laura Wirt Randall died giving birth to her fourth child in December 1833 at the age of thirty.[8]

The story of Laura Wirt Randall's life brings to light the strength of conviction that was generated by the gender expectations of the South's plantation community and highlights the significance of conformity. From their earliest years, society taught women that only absolute obedience and adherence to their social duties brought them respect and happiness. Aware that his honor, and that of his family, depended on Laura's acquiescence to societal prescriptions, William Wirt continually reminded his daughter that only her submission to his wishes would result in the benefits of parental love and only her marriage would assure her the protection of a place in proper society. Like other women in the antebellum South, Laura's life and reputation were shaped by the predetermined ideals of womanhood, which in turn were sustained by the ethic of honor.

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[8]Jabour, "'It Will Never Do For Me to Be Married,'" 224-226.

Despite history's customary focus on men, women played an important role in the ideology of honor. The dictates of the ethic intricately bound the female character to that of the male. A man's public image and social standing were indivisible from that of his family and southern society did not separate individual behavior from communal reputation. Therefore, one's failure to meet one's societal duty exposed the entire family to censure and the loss of community status. Historian Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has asserted that southern gender conventions created family relationships that were publicly represented by men. Yet, since the behavior of planter women reflected back upon their male relatives, they were also important familial representatives to their community. Just as Laura Wirt's resistance to marry Thomas Randall while seeing him daily threatened her own social disgrace, it also jeopardized her father's honor. The misbehavior of elite planter women challenged the social values of the plantation community and created a perception that unchaste and noncompliant women were "dangerous." Fox-Genovese and Stephen Berry have both argued the point that women who failed to meet the dictates of their prescribed gender roles threatened that strictly stratified society. Southern essayist William Harper expressed the significance of female behavior in planter society when he wrote that "the whole society will be in a tainted and uncertain condition" if the requirements of female virtue expected less than the fulfillment of women's duty.[9]

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[9]Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 53-55; Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 88; Elizabeth-Fox Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 195, 287; William Harper, "Harper's Memoir on Slavery," *The Pro-Slavery Argument; as Maintained by the Most Distinguished Writers of the Southern States, Containing the Several Essays, on the Subject, of Chancellor* New York, Negro Universities Press, 1968), 66.

The imminent peril of disobedient women gave southern patriarchs the obligation and prerogative to maintain control over their households and to defend any attacks made against its honor. Consequently, planter women received male protection and were expected to obey in return. It was this idea that connected honor and the image of the ideal woman and allowed the ethic to serve as a tool to monitor the actions of women as well as men. Thus, the region's gender system formed around both male and female notions of the proper woman and what she meant to family, community, and society. Honor and the fear of its loss controlled the behavior of both men and women in the South's plantation society.[10]

Plantation society embraced an adaptation of the prevalent antebellum gender system of separate spheres for men and women. Scholars of nineteenth-century women have focused the separation of the private and public spheres as a significant element in the ideals of femininity and masculinity. This division of male and female areas of emphasis formed around concerns about the affect of industrialization and urbanization on the morality of the United States. Many nineteenth-century Americans feared that constant exposure to the corruption of the business world would lead men to dangerous temptations and that the desire for wealth and social status would encourage men to engage in unethical behavior. Thus, the republic was threatened by the decline of the high morality of the virtuous Americans. Yet, since social standards did not generally subject women to the hazards of the corporate world, they were safe within the privacy of

[10]Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor,* 53-55; Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 88; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 287; Stephen W. Berry II, *All that Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 20.

their homes, where they were insulated from the immorality that existed outside. This idea became the foundation for the gender standards that dictated women's lives.

According to the ideas of femininity and masculinity, men and women were naturally predisposed to occupy separate spheres. Men dominated the public world of business and politics and women remained in the private world of home and family. This division of responsibilities protected women from the dangers of the public and as long as they maintained their proper place and were not exposed to the vices of men, they were morally superior. Therefore, women created a haven of goodness within the home and provided a safe place where men could escape the temptations of immorality and their children could learn the value of being virtuous. While most Americans believed in these gender standards, there were regional differences in its expression and interpretation.

The South did not share the North's economic growth, thus, the region produced little industry and few urban centers. Yet, southerners shared the northern idea that women were more pious, selfless, and virtuous than men. Historian Marli Weiner argues that the southern adherence to the ideal of separate spheres resulted from the cultural dominance of the Northeast. The region was home to most of the country's influential publishers and writers. Therefore, despite their economic and social differences, southerners were exposed to the same ideas as northerners. However, the practice of racial slavery in the South made regional variations important and necessitated adjustments to the idea that women were generally inferior to men. White southerners could not accept any principles that placed black men above white women. Furthermore, slaveholders believed that black slave women were lascivious and immoral and therefore

unworthy of the same esteem as white women. Hence, southern writers quickly altered the gender rhetoric of separate spheres in a way that helped to confirm the superiority of their economy and the virtues of the racial institutions.

Southern writers used physical, religious, social, and educational influences to explain the differences between the sexes and to advocate the necessity of separate spheres. However, their conclusions placed the ideas of gender within the white segment of their society. They argued that while the disparities between men and women were significant, the distinctions between the races were even more profound. While southerners maintained that white women were physically inferior to white men, they also believed that greater strength did not necessarily lead to social superiority. If they claimed the general supremacy of strength, they implied that black men could be superior to white men and women.[11]

Anne Firor Scott, Catherine Clinton, Brenda Stevenson, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, and Marli Weiner are only a few of the historians who have examined the role of this ideology among the elite planter class. All of these researchers have argued that the female private and male public spheres were fundamental to southern society. Stevenson asserts that southerners believed that the male and female worlds developed through the natural abilities of the genders and linked the disparity to the actions of men and women. Clinton maintains that the formation of the concept resulted through changes in the position of women in American society. Fox-Genovese, however, looks at the principle in relation to class. She argued that it was discriminatory toward the lower classes. Since

[11]Marli Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-80* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 53-58.

women were not to stay outside of the public realm, working class women did not have the ability to adhere to the gender convention. At the same time, the standard was vital to the identity of privileged elite women. Despite the different approaches of these scholars, their arguments all recognize the importance of the ideal of separate gender spheres within the South's plantation society.[12] As an essential attribute of proper female behavior, women's adherence to the ideals of separate spheres became a central part of their social duty and a factor in the preservation of their personal and family honor.

The prevailing thought that women were naturally suited for the private domain of the home and family led southern writers to expound on the female character and to define women's duty based on male ideas of the female nature. In 1835, the popular periodical, the *Southern Literary Messenger,* ran a dissertation written by Thomas R. Dew, one of the antebellum South's most influential intellectuals. The work was entitled, *On the Characteristic Differences between the Sexes, and on the Position and Influence of Woman in Society.* Appearing in three installments of the journal, the piece expressed an opinion that captured the conventional image of southern women and advocated the contemporary concept of separate spheres for each gender. Dew expressed commonly held beliefs about the physical, mental, and emotional make-up of the female and articulated a uniquely southern description of the proper subordinate position of women. While Dew placed the realm of women firmly within the home, he also believed that men retained ultimate power within both the public and private spheres. Sally McMillen

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[12]Brenda Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6, 38-39; Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 7; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 195, 202; Sally G. McMillen, *Southern Women: Black and White in the Old South* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1992), 39.

agrees with this notion and argues that the nature of the plantation system caused the separate male and female spheres to overlap. Since the areas of production and the home were closely linked together, the public and private spheres were never completely separate.[13]

The male ideals of honor and duty influenced the central elements of female morality in plantation society. Thomas R. Dew wrote that "the great point of honor in man, [was] undoubtedly courage; and in woman, chastity and virtue." He suggested that women would name an alternative trait as their point of honor, but he also asserted that since plantation men considered women's chastity a paramount element of southern society they assigned it as the most important characteristic of female honor. Dew's thoughts on female chastity reflected the plantation community's belief that the necessity for white men to retain absolute authority included the regulation of the sexual and reproductive behavior of women. The racial purity of the white ruling class within the biracial South depended on the control of procreation. Thus, the male code of honor assigned the custody and the protection of feminine fidelity to men and led to the designation of chastity as the central feature of female morality and honor. However, the preservation of the white race and its supremacy was only one part of the rationale behind the significance of women's conduct. The representation of a superior social structure was also important.[14]

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[13]Thomas R. Dew, "Dissertation on the Characteristic Differences between the Sexes, and on the Position and Influence of Woman in Society," *Southern Literary Messenger* 1 (9) (May 1835): 497; McMillen, *Southern Women*, 39.

[14]Thomas R. Dew, "Dissertation on the Characteristic Differences," 497; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 253; Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 6, 137-138; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household* 235-236; Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South*

Dew advocated the significance of feminine chastity with his belief that the maintenance of an untarnished image was "infinitely more necessary to woman than to man." This was partly due to the common belief that while the reformed man regained his lost character and honor, a woman was never able to repair her damaged reputation. Women's purity was also important to the continuation of the southern social order. Like the vestal virgins of ancient Rome, the chastity and virtue of white women represented the respectable, moral segment of the slave society. As long as the female social image remained above reproach, southern men could maintain the belief in the superiority of their society. Women were the "keepers of the culture," the nurturers and teachers of future generations, and the hope for an enduring and honorable South. In order to sustain this rhetoric, it was necessary to ideologically elevate the status of white women.[15]

William Harper and Thomas Dew both claimed that a connection existed between the elevated status of white women and the institution of slavery and asserted that the correlation created elements of female duty that were based on the attribute of virtue. According to Harper, God had preordained the proper social position of women and blessed them with the subordinate status of wife and mother. However, society also expected white women to fill a role that emphasized their virtuous purity. Dew supported the "elevation and amelioration of [women's] position" by arguing that the institution of

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(Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 7, 10; Anne Frior Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830 to 1930* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1970.

[15]Dew, "Dissertation on the Characteristic Differences," 498; Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, xv, 88-89; Berry II, *All That Makes a Man*, 112-113, 117-118; Virginia Kent Anderson Leslie, "A Myth of the Southern Lady: Antebellum Proslavery Rhetoric and the Proper Place of Woman," in *Southern Women*, Caroline Matheny Dillman, editor (New York: Hemisphere Publishing Company, 1988), 25. Clinton refers to this aspect of the female southern role as the "conscience" of the South's plantations.

slavery improved the condition of elite white women, automatically raising them to the same status as white men. The men both believed that women were originally relegated to the excessive domestic toil required of their gender, but that slaveholding women were relieved by the introduction of bonded labor. No longer overburdened with physical duties, women had time for reflection and the cultivation of the virtues that they came to exemplify. They became the "cheering and animating centre of the family circle" and their influence upon the destiny of the South was predominant. Since women governed the moral power and the future happiness of mankind, it was essential that they "should be guided by virtue, intelligence, and the purest affection; which [could] only be secured by elevating, honoring, and loving [them]." Harper and Dew failed to consider that most southern women were not part of the master class and gained no benefit from the work of slaves. Still, this omission of lower class women was not a factor in their work. Their description of the perfect southern woman developed within the plantation society and as the elite women of the region, planter women were the exemplars of proper women and were given the duty of preserving the morality of the region.[16]

The ideals of female purity were so important to the structure of southern society that criticism of the northern women's rights advocates formed quickly and centered on the natural functions of masculinity and femininity and the social duty of women. Since they believed that the genders were created to fulfill different roles, detractors of the movement saw the idea that women were universally equal to men as ridiculous. D. R.

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[16]Harper, "Harper's Memoir on Slavery," 52-66; Dew, "Dissertation on the Characteristic Differences," 498; Thomas R. Dew, *Review of the Debate in the Virginia Legislature of 1831 and 1832* (Richmond, VA: T. W. White, 1832; reprinted Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1970), 36, 38.

Hundley declared the "senseless" disputes over the rights of women to be "political twaddle" and stated that any woman who remained within her assigned sphere could always expect to be loved and admired. For Hundley, it was within the family and the home that women wielded their true power and ruled "the destinies of the world." It was also from within the female realm of the private sphere that women were able to protect personal and familial reputation and honor by fulfilling their predetermined duty.[17]

George Fitzhugh was a proslavery advocate who was extremely critical of women's rights and advocated female submission to men as beneficial for women and society alike. In agreement with Hundley, Fitzhugh addressed the innate qualities of the genders and argued that women naturally disliked and avoided the public realm of men. He alleged that southern society recognized this characteristic and supported it by respecting the ideal of separate spheres for the sexes. He further explained that, in opposition to this, the northern practice of employing women in the region's industry placed them outside of their innate character and deprived them of their true strength, their weakness. Fitzhugh believed that women gained esteem by cultivating their inherent weakness and argued that if woman "exhibit[ed] strength and hardihood, man, her master, [would] make her a beast of burden. So long as she [was] nervous, fickle, capricious, delicate, diffident, and dependent, man [would] worship and adore her." In other words, Fitzhugh assumed that men took advantage of female strengths and used

[17]D. R. Hundley, *Social Relations in Our Southern States* (New York: Henry B. Price, Publisher, 1860), 73.; Unsigned, review of *Woman Physiologically Considered as to Mind, Morals, Marriage, Matrimonial Slavery, Infidelity and Divorce* by Alexander Walker, *Southern Quarterly Review* 4 (Oct 1842): 293.

them to their own benefit. Therefore, it was women's duty to display weakness and to submit herself to the patriarchy prescribed by plantation society.[18]

The female acquiescence to male authority led to community acceptance and a suitable personal image. According to Fitzhugh, the declaration of equal rights for women would strip them of the male protection that they enjoyed and place them in danger of abuse. He claimed that a man loved his family because they were dependent upon him. The maturation and eventual independence of his children raised jealousies and hardened sentiments within him. Therefore, his affections were transferred to those who were still inferior to him, perhaps his grandchildren. For Fitzhugh, this attitude was reflected on the idea of female equality. He believed that women and children had but one right, the right to protection. However, male protection required female obedience. As long as women obeyed their men, they would be suitably treated, but if women failed to meet this obligation, man would "loathe and despise her, and end by abusing her."[19] As long as women remained subordinate to men and within their designated sphere, they avoided the possibility of neglect and abuse and were loved, respected, and protected. They also fulfilled their duty as the submissive person in their personal and social relationships and preserved their reputation and honor.

Southern writers frequently cited disproportionate physical strength as a significant gender difference and formed the entire female character and social position around the general weakness of women. Professor Dew argued that a woman's physical

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[18]George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society* (Richmond: A. Morris, Publisher, 1854), 214.

[19]Ibid., 214-215, 246-247.

structure made her "more naturally sedentary and quiet, and perhaps less industrious" than a man. While he stated that this disparity between the genders was evident early in life, he also believed that the development of the female character depended largely on the gender-based instruction of children. This was revealed through the activities of children as society and parents automatically assumed that male children favored vigorous activities such as hunting, fishing, and horseback riding. Meanwhile, they generally supposed that daughters, due to their lesser energy, found enjoyment in dolls and attractive clothing. Dew believed that these childhood inclinations shaped the future attributes of the genders and prepared boys and girls for the sphere that they would occupy as adults. Boys became strong, rugged, and active and girls became "sedentary and quiet." Even young girls who demonstrated tomboy behavior were expected to adhere to society's principles once they reached puberty.[20]

Physical strength determined the social position of the sexes within plantation society. Dew argued that while a man's physical superiority placed him in the foreground of society, the weakness and passive habits of a woman restricted her to the domestic circle. Since women were naturally timid and demure, it was the duty of men to guard and protect them. To defend this belief, southern society considered strong women as anomalies and referred to them in male terms. They did not exhibit the feminine trait of weakness and were therefore man-like. Yet, Dew claimed that women developed their true power from within the private sphere and that through their "grace, modesty, and loveliness," women created "the magic spell that subdue[d] to [them] the more mighty

[20]Dew, "Dissertation on the Characteristic Differences," 495; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 233; Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 65-67.

physical powers by which [they] [were] surrounded." In other words, the use of feminine wiles ensured men's willingness to submit to the wishes of women and provided them with influence. Within their proper sphere, women's opinions and abilities were respected and their morality was passed to their children. Women who suitably fulfilled their roles within their assigned realms were also granted the favorable social reputations that formed personal and family honor.[21]

A review of Alexander Walker's work, *Woman Physiologically Considered as to Mind, Morals, Marriage, Matrimonial Slavery, Infidelity, and Divorce*, which appeared in the *Southern Quarterly Review* in 1842, also professed the importance for the social maintenance of separate spheres for men and women. The journal's editors, Daniel K. Whitaker and George F. Holmes, however, placed their emphasis on the "harmonious arrangement" of the natural order. They claimed that it was a privilege for a woman's identity to be politically linked to that of her husband and that a wife who asserted power independent of her husband produced "misery for herself and injury to the community." The editors saw the family as the ultimate nation and argued that, like all countries, the home could abide only one head of state. Any other situation resulted in anarchy. Whitaker and Holmes therefore asserted that since women did not possess the proper intellect and that they were too consumed with the cares and duties of their domestic

[21]Dew, "Dissertation on the Characteristic Differences," 495-496; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 6, 116; Jane Pease and William Pease, *Ladies, Women, and Wenches: Choice and Constraint in Antebellum Charleston and Boston* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 8.

sphere to be able to "physically…tax their mental organs as severely, and as continuously as men," the head of the family should always be male.[22]

The southern discussion of gender differences within plantation society included the opinion that some of the traits that were assigned to women were socially constructed. Dew disagreed with the assessment of Whitaker and Holmes and maintained that there were no cognitive differences in the intellectual abilities of the genders. He argued that discrepancies between the sexes were derived from the distinction of the education provided to them. This idea illustrated his belief that "women [were] precisely what men [made] them, all over the world" and that the female character was not always naturally occurring. The intellectual differences resulted because boys commonly received classical and scientific instruction that prepared them for college and girls were initiated them their social duty as wife and mother. As young men, sons entered the university to develop the skills needed for their future occupation and enjoyed the support of family and friends. Parents, faculty members, and society in general encouraged them to do well in their studies. However, it was another matter for girls, who received their educational foundations at home. When the family's finance allowed it, young women regularly completed their instruction with two or three years at a finishing school. Dew claimed that the instruction in these schools contributed more to their accomplishment and grace than to the development of their ability to reason. He argued that classical instruction was beneficial for young women and that an improved education would make women

[22]Unsigned, *Woman Physiologically Considered*, 297-298.

better mothers. Yet, he also contended that these deficiencies in the female education made women unsuitable to participate in politics.[23]

Since political participation put women outside of the private sphere, planter society did not include it among the traits that were socially constructed. Dew agreed with Whitaker and Holmes and argued that the political incapacity of women went deeper than the lack of a proper education and claimed that the innate character of women disqualified them for participation in the political arena. Dew stated that a woman's ineffectiveness came from the "very intensity of [the] domestic and social virtues" that made "her less patriotic than man." Dew claimed that the "ardor with which she loves her husband, her children, her intimate friends and associates," made a woman's mind concentrate too intensely on the domestic circle, which precluded her from devoting proper thought to national affairs. In other words, women were too concerned with the welfare of their family and home to be troubled with politics. Women simply loved their husbands and children more than their country and that they were too sympathetic to the wants and needs of their friends to summon the discipline that they needed to place the nation first. Therefore, it followed that the "very virtues" of women led "to injustice."[24]

When confronted with the example of Europe's female monarchs, Dew reiterated his belief that "women make bad politicians, unsafe depositaries of power." While he admitted that there may have been exceptions to the rule, he contended that the weaknesses and inadequacies of queens came from their innate character and that their

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[23]Dew, "Dissertation on the Characteristic Differences," 501; Thomas R. Dew, "Dissertation on the Characteristic Differences between the Sexes and on the Position and Influence of Woman in Society," *Southern Literary Messenger* 1 (12) (August 1835): 676-677.

[24]Dew, "Dissertation of the Characteristic Differences," (May 1835): 497, (August 1835): 679-680.

idiosyncrasies and poor judgments led to the failures of female rulers. Dew also asserted that since the female rulers would feel a need to offset their greater physical weakness would lead to their abuse of power. Thus, women were more inclined toward despotism than men. Whitaker and Holmes also tackled the question of female monarchs in their review of *Woman Physiologically Considered*. They claimed that the actual responsibilities of government were addressed by ministers and councilmen, not women.[25]

The belief that female honor was related to virtue led plantation society to look at the feminine qualities of piety and selflessness as the basis for women's superior morality. Thomas Dew believed that these traits made women more pious than men and pointed at women's education, social position, and natural makeup as the sources of their greater religiosity. He claimed that the scientific education that men received caused them to analyze rationally spiritual doctrine and left them unable to accept readily the principles as a matter of faith. At the same time, the design of female education preserved piety and devotional conviction and its literary foundations encouraged the development of imagination. Dew also asserted that because they were naturally emotional and disposed toward the belief in the unexplainable women were more superstitious than men. Thus, it was easier for them to accept religious dogma. Dew failed to consider that the presence of emotion did not preclude the ability for rational thought. Even without the advanced education offered to men, women had the capacity for conscious reasoning and the ability to make the personal decision to accept piety.

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[25]Dew, "Dissertation on the Characteristic Differences," 681-682; Unsigned, "Woman Physiologically Considered," 293.

Dew believed that the suitability for piety was supported by the isolation of their homes and argued that planter women had time for religious contemplation. He also pointed at a female "spirit of dependence" that was created by the patriarchal society as another cause of women's greater piety. Since women depended on men for protection and subsistence, it was not difficult for them to transfer that same confidence to God. The result was a devout faith that women nurtured and men considered a crucial part of female character.[26]

The writings of men within the South's plantation society created an image of what they considered the ideal woman. She was pious, virtuous, modest, passive, obedient, and, above all chaste. She was also a patient and uncomplaining participant in the role that society designated for her. The characteristics assigned to women by the male essayists made them suitable for the subordination of their gender and for the fulfillment of duties that were socially assigned to planter women. Many elite southern women who recorded their thoughts on gender ideals and the role of women within plantation society agreed with the rhetoric that was advocated by male essayists. However, the female viewpoints came from a different perspective and helped to shape an identity of the proper planter woman. While women valued the importance of chastity, they did not necessarily deem it to be the most significant trait of female honor. For them, the image of an honorable woman revolved around the fulfillment of her duty as a daughter, wife, mother, sister, and a member of plantation society. The performance of these responsibilities provided the women with a good reputation and protected their personal and family honor.

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[26]Thomas R. Dew, "Dissertation on the Characteristic Differences between the Sexes, and on the Position and Influence of Woman in Society," *Southern Literary Messenger* 1, 11 (July 1835): 621-632.

The planter women who took part in the social debate over qualities of the ideal elite southern woman often seemed to be contradictions. Yet, while entering the public sphere through their writing, they supported the gender standards of plantation society. Louisa S. McCord was a prominent South Carolinian and a prolific writer who espoused the fulfillment of women's duty. Born in Charleston on December 3, 1810, McCord was the daughter of Langdon Cheves, the future president of the Bank of the United States. She passionately proclaimed the appropriateness of separate male and female spheres and the necessity of women performing their domestic duties. Yet, her life held paradoxes that made her seem to be in opposition to these hallowed doctrines. As she began her education, her studies were comparable to those of other young ladies, excluding classical and scientific materials. Nonetheless, according to the Cheves family tradition, after being expelled from her brothers' mathematics lessons, McCord was found hiding behind the parlor door taking notes and working problems. The episode prompted her father to education Louisa in the same manner as her brothers.[27]

By the time Louisa McCord was twenty, she was largely responsible for the management of the family's household. The marriage of her older sister and the poor health of her mother left her to fulfill their respective duties. After her mother's death, McCord assumed total control of her plantation, Lang Syne and in 1840, at age thirty, she married David James McCord. Encouraged by her husband, she eventually combined her responsibilities as a planter and mother of three with her writing. Over the next fifteen

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[27]Leigh Fought, *Southern Womanhood & Slavery: A Biography of Louisa S. McCord 1810-1879* (Columbia, MO and London: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 1-13; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 271-272.

years, Louisa McCord became the South's only female essayist. Her publications included works on slavery, women's rights, and political economy as well as poetry and fiction. The very public expression of her political opinions and her ownership and management of Lang Syne placed McCord inside the public realm and outside of the gender conventions that required her submission to the private sphere. However, her writings conveyed the impression of a woman who was absolutely committed to the southern social order and to the duties that it assigned to women. Leigh Fought, a McCord biographer, believes that her decision to marry was significant in her willingness to submit to her social responsibilities. Marriage became McCord's concession to her gender theories and the role of women.[28]

McCord's works expressed her view that it was women's purpose to serve the greater good by meeting the needs of society. Her poem, *Woman's Progress,* illustrated her model of the proper woman and conveyed her belief that women were uniquely designed to achieve their social objective. The work extolled feminine piety, gentleness, and nurturing and established the natural calling of women. The lines explained that God "made a woman-nature holier than the man's" and placed her on "her own nature's lofty pedestal." As long as a woman performed her mission "to labour and to pray; to help, to heal, to soothe, to bear; patient, with smiles, to suffer" she would retain her glorified position. However, if she neglected her duties she became a "fallen woman" who was "viler" than man. McCord urged women not to attempt change, unless it was to "strive to

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[28]Richard C. Lounsbury, ed., *Louisa S. McCord: Poems, Drama, Biography, Letters* (Charlottesville, VA and London: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 1-24; Fought, *Southern Womanhood & Slavery*, 1-13. A discussion of McCord's writing can also be found in Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's *Within the Plantation Household*.

be *more* woman," because "gentle, pure, kind, loving woman never can degrade her own God-given nature." In other words, women could reject their "God-given nature" if they altered their personal characteristics and embraced the male-like traits of the public sphere. It is significant that the poem makes a clear connection between the duty of women and religiosity, or piety, a trait that was an important part of the ideology set down by the literature of the South. The piece also demonstrates the relationship between the fulfillment of duty and reputation and honor. The woman who failed to meet the requirements of duty lost her good reputation and was a "fallen woman."[29]

Maria McIntosh of Georgia and Virginia Cary of Virginia advised planter women that piety and faith in God's plan made their responsibilities easier to accomplish. In her book, *Woman in America: Her Work and Her Reward*, Maria McIntosh explained that God's "*natural* principles" created separate classes of "*moral* and *intellectual* beings" and assigned life's tasks to men and women according to gender and physical strength. Virginia Cary's *Letters on Female Character* found the recognition of this fact necessary and asserted that an acceptance of this basic truth helped women in "fulfilling [their] destiny according to the original design of [their] Maker." Cary also saw a woman's acceptance of religion as solace for her many trials. She believed that "of all the moral monsters which abound[ed] the earth, women without religion [were] the most disgusting and mischievous." After all, the "meliorating power of christianity" provided women

[29]Lounsbury, *Louisa S. McCord*, 150-154; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Within the Plantation Household: Women is a Paternalist System," in *Society and Culture in the Slave South*, William J. Harris, editor (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 58.

with "stability and grace," but impious women were forced to rely on their own strength of character. Piety was also evident in the discussion of the private sphere.[30]

Cary worried about an increasing trend that called for the improvement of education for young ladies and how it would affect the completion of their personal and social duty. She feared that enhanced knowledge would lead to ambition in women and would cause them to neglect their homes and their children. Cary wrote that if woman stayed within her "appointed sphere of duty, she may expect a blessing." However, if she followed a different path, she would be "left to the uncovenanted mercies of her Maker." Cary emphasized that the "moral and religious improvement of mankind" depended on women fulfilling the responsibilities "within their appropriate sphere of action." McIntosh agreed with this stance by asserting that a woman needed to be "true to her own not less important or less sacred mission." It was the feminine hand that guided humanity's youth, nurtured them as infants, became their first teacher, and revealed the truths of life. If women failed in this endeavor, the future of mankind would be threatened. It was this ideal of duty that was at the center of much of Louisa McCord's work.[31]

In her essay, "Woman and Her Needs," McCord argued against the idea of political rights for women and created a description of a woman's proper role and responsibilities. She claimed that "the highest and most intellectual specimens of

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[30]Maria McIntosh, *Woman in America: Her Work and Her Reward* (New York and Philadelphia: George S. Appleton, 1850), 30-31; Virginia Cary, *Letters on Female Character, Addressed to a Young Lady, on the Death of her Mother* (Richmond, VA: A. Works, 1828), v, 20. While McIntosh's work was a northern publication, it is still significant. McIntosh was raised in Georgia, but due to the shortage of publishers in the South, northern companies often produced books by southern writers.

[31]Cary, *Letters on Female Character*, 23-24; McIntosh, *Woman in America*, 25.

womanhood" that she encountered were those who did not disdain "the duty of managing children and servants," those who "took into their hands and hearts the task which nature gave them." She believed that such women met their duty "with the fullest powers of a God-given, soul-beaming intellect." This exemplar of female virtue was a "woman of thought, of mind, of genius, and yet [was] filled with deep-brooding woman-love and woman-nature." She understood that she had a "mission of love and charity to all" and that her "very essence of being [was] to raise and to purify wherever she touche[d]." For McCord, true women followed their calling despite the difficulties that arose from their position of submission and were happy to face the challenges of their sphere. McCord argued that women who neglected their appointed role to "covet man's fame-grasping ambition" were degraded and that contentment within their proper position granted women "quiet, unobtrusive heroism." However, she lost the mark of respect when she debased herself with ambition. By allowing her rightful sense of obligation to be overshadowed by the desire for recognition a woman was corrupted and bereft of good reputation and honor.[32] Therefore, the idea of women's rights could not be acceptable to elite southern women.

McCord also considered the element of power to be crucial in providing political rights to women. For her, the problem was that men had all of the power in the patriarchal South. They were the nation's legislators and had complete control of the laws that restricted women's participation in public life. The only way for women to gain legislative power was for it to be granted by men. In addition, as McCord explained,

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[32]Lounsbury, *Louisa S. McCord*, 131-136, 148-149.

authority women received through toleration was not free and men would still retain hegemony over women. Since men were granted superior strength by God, it was impossible for women to end the domination through force. She believed that gender parity was not possible and that women were unable to fight; therefore, they could not implement significant changes. At the same time, though, McCord argued that each gender was superior to the other within their assigned sphere. The natural inclinations of a woman created a niche in which she held "distinctive powers." As long as she respected her boundaries and attended to her duties as mother, wife, sister or daughter, men could not match her excellence. It was when women attempted to enter the public world of men that society thought of them as inferior.[33]

Julia Gardiner Tyler dealt with the issue of the planter women participating in politics and embraced the expressly southern views of separate spheres and submission to male authority. Born in 1820, Tyler was raised in a family of wealth and status in East Hampton, Long Island. The third of David and Juliana Gardiner's four children, Julia received a respectable education and a place among New York City's upper class. At the age of fifteen, Julia entered Madame N. D. Chagaray's Institute to complete her studies as a boarding student. During her three years at the school, she undertook the typically female subjects of music, French literature, ancient history, arithmetic, and composition. Also that same year, Julia made her debut at her first formal dance, where she began her social training. Eventually, the young woman became adept at flirtation and was sought out by many suitors. Julia was additionally influenced by her opinionated and

[33]Lounsbury, *Louisa S. McCord*, 150-153; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 39, 64.

domineering mother, who attempted to control the lives of her children. While she had less success managing Julia than she did her other offspring, Juliana Gardiner instilled a belief in social superiority within her daughter.[34]

In January 1842, David Gardiner took his two daughters, Julia and Margaret, to Washington, D.C. for the city's winter social season. In the course of a whirl of parties, the Gardiners met Robert Tyler, the son of President John Tyler, and were invited to the White House to meet the president. In December 1842, the Gardiners returned to the capital and developed a close friendship with the newly widowed president, who began to formally court Julia by late January 1843. Despite the fact that she was thirty years his junior, Julia Gardiner married President John Tyler on June 26, 1844, and easily adjusted to the life of a plantation mistress. Upon arriving at Tyler's Virginia properties, she quickly settled into southern society and became a prominent defender of slavery.[35]

The strong pro-slavery opinions that Julia Gardiner Tyler expressed became public in 1853 when the *Southern Literary Messenger* published her response to a petition submitted to the "Women of America" by the British abolitionist, the Duchess of Sutherland.[36] Like McCord's offensive against women's rights, Julia Tyler's defense of slavery characterized the ideal of the proper woman. Beginning with a description of the perfect planter woman, Tyler's essay stated that such a woman "confine[d] herself within that sphere for which the God who created her seem[d] to have designed her," the care of her family and home. Her influence was felt, and respected, through her functions as

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[34]Melba Porter Hay, "Julia Gardiner Tyler, First Lady: 1844-1845," in *American First Ladies: Their Lives and Their Legacy*, edited by Lewis L. Gould (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 71-72.

[35]Hay, "Julia Gardiner Tyler," 72-73; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 42-43.

[36]Evelyn L. Pugh, "Women and Slavery: Julia Gardiner Tyler and the Duchess of Sutherland," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 88(2) (April 1980): 187.

wife, mother, or mistress. Southern women displayed exemplary "Christian deportment and perfect amiability of manners, enough, at once, to inspire …exalted respect and esteem." They were meek and charitable and devoted to the advancement of Christianity. Tyler also believed that the intelligence of plantation women allowed them to acquire political awareness from the male conversations that took place around them. Still, they would never presume to offer their opinions on international affairs as did the British abolitionists.[37]

Most elite southern women at least outwardly agreed with the gender conventions that required their submission to the private sphere, but there were exceptions to this rule. While opposition to the South's social standards was emphatically discouraged and could carry dire consequences, some planter women found their lives too confining and struggled against the daily restraints that were created by the ideal of separate spheres for the genders. Born in 1827, Mary Bayard Clarke was the daughter of one the largest slaveholders in North Carolina and was raised within the strict gender principles of the plantation system. Despite continual familial criticism and admonishments to behave from her older sister Frances Miller, Clarke strove to move beyond the restrictive nature of the private sphere. By the early 1850s, she began to build a career as a published poet and columnist and happily acknowledged the publication of her poetry in *Wood-Notes; or Carolina Carols: A Collection of North Carolina Poetry.* Even with her determination to

[37]Julia Gardiner Tyler, "To the Duchess of Sutherland and Ladies of England," *The Southern Literary Messenger*, 19 (2) (February 1853): 120-126; William Kauffman Scarborough, *Masters of the Big House: Elite Slaveholders in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century South* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 111-112.

make her voice heard, Clarke made concessions to communal values and her family's disapproval by using the pseudonym Tenella during her father's lifetime.[38]

Frances Miller was not only critical of her sister's writing, she also reproached Mary Bayard Clarke for her failure to meet her duty as an elite southern woman. In the summer of 1861, Clarke left her children with family to follow the regiment commanded by her husband William J. Clarke. During this time, the Clarke children were shuttled between several family members and were left under the care of Jane Espy, a free black woman who worked for the Clarkes. However, Clarke's siblings were not pleased with Espy's influence over the children and claimed that because of her treatment of them "Tom is cowed [and] Mary's worst faults [are] the fruits of her mismanagement." Believing that it was her duty, Miller wrote to remind Clarke of her responsibility to her children. She expressed her displeasure with her sister by stating that it was "not respectable…that you should be following your husband to the seeming neglect of your children." Miller asserted that by placing her children in the care of Espy, Clarke was not doing her duty to protect and nurture them and was threatening her personal and family reputation, honor, and status. Clarke returned to her children and arranged a job for Espy as a cook of William Clarke's regiment.[39]

South Carolinian Sarah Grimke also struggled with the prescribed gender values of southern society. Born in Charleston in 1792, Grimke grew up in a patriarchal slaveholding family. Her disenchantment with the South and its slave system began at an

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[38]Terrell Armistead Crow and Mary Moulton Barden, editors, *Live Your Own Life: The Family Papers of Mary Bayard Clarke, 1854-1886* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), xxv, xxx-xxxi.

[39]Ibid., 81-82.

early age when she witnessed the whipping of a slave. Horrified by the scene, Grimke became an opponent of the peculiar institution. Her disappointment with life increased when she realized that her sex would deny her the education and career that she desired. Sarah's father, Judge John Faucheraud Grimke encouraged her initial instruction in classical languages, mathematics, and geography. However, as she grew older, he attempted to shape her into a proper southern lady and confined her to the typical female lessons in French, music, painting, and needlework.[40]

After the completion of her traditional education, Sarah Grimke secretly studied law and received praise for her legal ability from her father. Still, society's gender prescriptions barred Grimke from a career as an attorney. She subsequently submitted herself to the communal standards and became the characteristic southern belle attending parties, balls, and picnics. Grimke denied the aspects of her personality that society considered unacceptable and sought to play the part of the ideal young woman. In spite of her effort to fit into a preordained social mold, her pretense only served to intensify her frustration with the male dominated southern society. She later wrote about this period of her life as the "prostitution of [her] womanhood…the utter perversion of the ends of [her] being."[41]

In 1819, Grimke accompanied her ill father to Philadelphia where she received an introduction to the Society of Friends. Inspired by the Quaker ideas of equality between the sexes, Grimke converted to the religion and remained in the North. During her years

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[40]Sarah Grimke, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and Other Essays*, edited and with an introduction by Elizabeth Ann Bartlett (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 15.

[41]Ibid., 15-16.

in Philadelphia, she became a vocal advocate for abolition and women's rights. One of Grimke's most prominent works was her *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes*. A series of letters addressed to Mary S. Parker, President of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society, the writings revealed Grimke's view of the condition of women around the world. They argued for female equality and blamed the oppression of women on dominant males. Grimke believed that men denied women advanced education and political rights in order to stunt their intellectual growth and independence. In "Letter Ten: Intellect of Woman," Grimke asserted that men, due to their "assumption of superiority," did not want women to be more intellectual than themselves. Grimke argued that men accepted that women were more knowledgeable about the workings of the home, but that they could not consent to the advancement of women in other areas. Their jealousy and pride would not allow the possibility that they may be inferior to a woman, therefore, they placed obstacles in their way. Grimke's anger and frustration with the restrictions that her gender placed on her life are evident in her work; however, she was not alone in her thoughts.[42]

In 1829, the *Ladies' Magazine and Literary Gazette* published an article entitled "Man's Mental Superiority over Woman, Referrible to Physical Causes Only" which addressed the connection between male pride and intellect. The author contended that it was impossible for mental inferiority to exist in women because the mind was intangible. It was of an "immaterial, spiritual, independent nature." Therefore, its ultimate condition was determined by the instruction that it received and there was no reason to believe that

[42]Ibid., 16-26, 65.

a woman's mind was weaker than a man's. Nature designed both genders to grasp the contents of the scripture in the same manner. It was only the "pride, presumption and passions of men" that refused to allow the female mind to advance.[43]

A later article in the *Ladies' Magazine and Literary Gazette*, "Comparative Intellect of the Sexes," confronted the idea of male superiority in a different manner. This author named culture and education as important sources of the mental distinctions between men and women. Since society accepted that the conversation of young women would be frivolous and light, they were unable to cultivate a more intellectual demeanor. Their advancement was also deterred by the domestic duties that kept women busy fulfilling the demands of their family and did not allow them the time to continue their mental development. Also, the fear that men would find intellect unattractive led to social pressures that induced young women to conceal their intelligence and to act the part of the carefree southern belle.[44]

The writers and editors of women's magazines generally recognized that female intellectual and educational capabilities far outweighed the opportunities that existed. Many articles called for improvement in the instruction of girls. However, since the fulfillment of women's duty was essential, it was significant that all of these works also pointed out that elevated feminine minds led to better wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters. Even Sarah Grimke declared that "women should be prepared by education for the performance of their sacred duties as mothers and as sisters." After all, when a

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[43]N. L., "Man's Mental Superiority over Woman, Referrible to Physical Causes Only," *Ladies Magazine and Literary Gazette* 2 (8) (August 1829): 367-371.

[44]L. H. S., "Comparative Intellect of the Sexes," *Ladies' Magazine and Literary Gazette* 3 (6) (June 1830): 241-245.

woman did her "duty thoroughly and *understandingly*, the happiness of the family [was] increased." Louisa McCord agreed that education and duty were intricately connected. This was apparent when she wrote that a "woman's mind is made for improvement, and her duty would lead her to seek that improvement, according to the inclination and capacities of her intellect. But that improvement must be gained and used in a manner consistent and in harmony with her nature."[45]

The female image of the ideal elite southern woman conveyed someone who was pious, virtuous, educated, intellectual, nurturing, and, dutiful. The South's male social theorists who considered the social role of women named chastity as their most significant trait and their path to honor. The existence of female purity and decorum preserved both individual and familial reputation and translated into honor for the family's patriarch. Yet, the elite southern women who examined women's societal responsibilities regarded the fulfillment of their domestic role their most important aspiration and their point of honor. For women, the realization of their duty was the foundation of reputation and they prided themselves in meeting its obligations. They followed the advice of Margaret Mercer when she wrote, "Since true honor is a moral principle which prevents the commission of a base or unworthy action, women are certainly as capable of honor as men, and should as jealously maintain their own claims to it."[46]

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[45]Grimke, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes*, 57-58; Lounsbury, *Louisa S. McCord*, 153.

[46]Margaret Mercer, *Popular Lectures on Ethics, or Moral Obligation: For the Use of Schools* (Petersburg, VA: Edmund & Julian C. Ruffin, 1841), 177.

The dictates of the South's gender traditions and the conditions of women's duty were closely related to community image and honor. Since the preservation of reputation and honor required the cooperation of all family members, female compliance to prescribed communal restraints and patriarchal regulation was paramount. Therefore, obedience and submission were essential elements of planter women's duty. Men controlled their familial community image and status by restraining the actions of their family members. The traits of piety and purity also formed important aspects for women's duty and the structure of southern society. While their adherence to the ideals stressed the morality of women as individuals, it also highlighted the principles of the South's plantation system.

CHAPTER II

Gender as a Foundation for Honor

For elite southern women, the fulfillment of their female duty and the maintenance of their personal and familial reputation and honor were based upon the ideology of the private sphere and the traits of purity, piety, submission, and domesticity. While these female characteristics formed similar foundations for gender standards through the United States, the South's practice of racial slavery required modifications to the value sets. Through these changes plantation women remained superior to black men and subservient to white men. The societal compliance of planter women to their community's gender standards connected their actions to their families' reputation and honor. The elite women who adhered to the communal ideals of proper female behavior helped their families attain status and power. Conversely, women who failed to acquiescence to the predetermined gender doctrine threatened their families' image and honor. This relationship between reputation, honor, and the actions of women was demonstrated by the rise of South Carolina's prominent Petigrus.

The Petigru family began with the 1788 marriage of William Pettigrew and Louise Guy Gibert. William, a Scots-Irish farmer with an undistinguished service in the Revolutionary War, and Louise, the daughter of a Huguenot minister, settled on Pettigrew's seventy-five acre property outside of Abbeville, South Carolina, and eventually welcomed nine children James Louis (1789), John (1791), Jane Gibert (1800),

Mary (1803), Charles (1806), Louise (1809), Adeline Theresa (1811), and Harriette (1813). An uninspired farmer who preferred hunting and fishing to working his land, Pettigrew quickly fell deeply into debt and his prosperity followed a steady decline. In 1800, Pettigrew moved his family to the plantation that was owned by his brother-in-law, Joseph Gibert. Unable, or unwilling, to pull himself out his impoverished state, Pettigrew failed to improved his family's financial situation. In spite of her limited means, however, Louise Gibert Pettigrew found a way to send her oldest son, James Louis, to school, borrowing the money to pay his tuition at South Carolina College.[1]

James Louis Pettigrew graduated from college in 1809 and was admitted to the South Carolina bar in 1812. Shortly after settling into his law career in Charleston, James Louis changed his surname to Petigru and shifted his familial connections away from his unsuccessful father and toward his mother's French Huguenot background. The new spelling of the name was soon accepted by his brothers and sisters and indicated their affiliation with James's aspiration for social status and power. Gaining impetus from the prominent position of his mentor, Daniel Elliott Huger, who was a future state attorney general, Petigru's professional success and communal standing began to grow. James's social rank continued to develop through the advantageous marriages of the Petigru offspring. In 1816, James married Jane Amelia Postell, the daughter of a wealthy local planter, and gained the ability to support his parents and his siblings. His rising status

[1]Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, *A Family of Women: The Carolina Petigrus in Peace and War* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 10-12.

also allowed James to assist his brothers and sisters in forming associations that led to their own beneficial unions.[2]

After the death of Louise Gibert Pettigrew in 1826, James Louis Petigru took on the responsibility for his sisters and his minor brothers. In his role as guardian, James influenced who his sisters married by controlling who they were introduced to and with whom they associated. Ultimately, the young women married men who enhanced the social standing of the Petigru family. Jane Gibert married John Gough North, a successful rice planter and lawyer, Louise wedded Philip Johnston Porcher, a trained physician and planter, and Harriette married Henry Deas Lesesne, a lawyer who eventually became a partner in James Petigru's Charleston law firm. Adeline Theresa, who renamed herself Adele, formed the most dazzling of the unions when she wed Robert Francis Withers Allston. A client of James Petigru, Allston was a wealthy rice planter from Georgetown, South Carolina, a West Point graduate, an official state surveyor, and a member of the state's House of Representatives. Each of them, except Harriette, gave birth within the first year of their marriage and all of them eventually had several children.[3]

The reputation and status that was attained by the Petigrus was fragile and needed to be safeguarded with persistence. The Petigru sisters did their part by adhering to the gender standards of their community. Jane Gibert, Louise, Adele, and Harriette Petigru all remained within the private sphere of women and fulfilled their duty as wives and mothers. Even before marrying, the Petigru sisters illustrated their understanding of the

[2]Ibid., 12.
[3]Ibid., 15-22.

gender values of elite southern society by submitting to their brother's influence. While not forcing marriages upon the women, James Petigru controlled their future unions by directing who they met. After becoming wives their behavior continued to safeguard their family's reputation and honor by meeting the responsibilities of a wife and mother and by sustaining community images as good honorable women.[4]

History's depiction of antebellum planter women as "delicate, submissive, and idle" has undergone a considerable transformation over the last three decades.[5] Beginning with the extensive research of scholars such as Anne Frior Scott, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, and Catherine Clinton the examination of the South's plantation society has achieved tremendous progress. These studies investigated the lives of southern women and confronted the persistent myth of the southern belle that sat upon a pedestal by working through long-neglected materials, shattering the illusion, and developing a rich body of historiography. The study of plantation women uncovered a wealth of sources that included letters, journals, plantations accounts, private and public records, literature, and newspapers. Armed with these new sources historians challenged the myth and depicted a reality that defined the plantation mistress as an educated and hardworking woman who was devoted to her family and home. The studies of the South's gender constraints also revealed the social standards that formed the foundation of a woman's duty and defined submission, piety, and chastity as the core of female honor.

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[4]Ibid.

[5]Sally G. McMillen, *Southern Women: Black and White in the Old South* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc. 1992), 1.

Distinctions between gender, class, and race combined to define a woman's place in southern society. The gender doctrines of the southern plantation society included ideas about the proper woman that did not regard all women as equal. Women of all classes and races were restricted by male dominance, but their experiences under those constraints differed and contributed to their identities. The institution of racial slavery dictated that black women were inferior to white women. However, discrimination also existed within the white community. While all classes embraced society's prescribed gender roles, it was not always easy for lower-class women to conform to the standards. Yet, they continually felt the pressure to adhere to the accepted marital and familial structures and to imitate the behavior of their betters. Despite their ability, or inability, to meet these principles, parents taught their children to respect the South's social customs. The highest achievement for white women was the attainment of the status of a lady. This privileged position was central to a woman's identity. She was still confined by gender expectations; however, society saw her responsibilities in a loftier light and she was generally more respectfully treated under the patriarchal system.[6]

The South's gender principles resulted from a combination of community custom, tradition, and the prerequisites for honor. Dispersed through oral and visual means, gender standards instructed individuals in proper behavior, influenced social relationships, and established reputations. The values became guides that helped men

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[6]Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 43, 202-203. Stephanie McCurry's work, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country*, discusses the similarities between the yeoman class and the plantation class and demonstrates that while they lived different lives, planter and yeoman women shared the important aspects of the South's gender ideology.

and women understand society, their place in it, and the significance of the maintenance of honor. Like those in the North, the southern ideals of manhood and womanhood embraced the contemporary dialogue on companionate marriages, motherhood, and domesticity. Southerners who lived within plantation society believed that the biological differences between the sexes resulted in disparities in mental and emotional character. Therefore, the delicate sensitivity of women made them compatible to the domestic concerns of housewifery and childcare. The general acceptance of this idea limited the life options open to women and created standards that directed every facet of their lives, from the division of labor to fashion. They also created a female image that placed the proper woman in a position where she would not dispute the South's patriarchal system. It was compliance with these gender practices that formed the duty of elite southern women and protected the patriarch's honor.[7]

Since resistance to assigned gender roles threatened the foundations of plantation society and female capitulation to male authority was part of women's perceived social duty, planter women rarely complained openly about their restricted lives. While many of them found their private sphere to be confining, they accepted it as the role allocated to them by God. Rather than contemplating the alteration of their life course, unhappy planter women quietly opposed their position and attributed their discontent to human failings. They continued to believe that women's work was important to society and to aspire to excellence through the completion of their domestic duties. They also helped to

[7]Marli F. Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-1880* (Urbana, IL and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 1-2; Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, *Ladies, Women, and Wenches: Choice and Constraint in Antebellum Charleston and Boston* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 8; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 194-196, 202-203.

preserve these ideals by passing them on to their children. Women taught their sons and daughters that submission to a husband's will was a woman's responsibility and that only her acquiescence to the South's gender principles provided her with protection, respect, and the status of a proper lady.[8]

Despite the adjustments that needed to be made to account for race, the emphasis on the home was a perfect fit for southern social standards. While northern society was moving away from the household economy, the plantation and farm remained the South's foremost units of production and reproduction. The southern household, a well established part of the patriarchal system, reinforced gender constraints and placed women under the male dominion. The authority of men over the plantation meant that the male and female spheres were not completely separate. Women remained within the home, but men had access to both the private and public realms. Natural qualities, however, clearly divided the duties of each sex. Men used their superior strength to protect and to provide for their families while women used their gentle nature to nurture and educate them.[9]

The South's gender conventions divided the attributes of the ideal woman into four qualities, piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity, which sustained the ethic of honor. Female compliance with these traits created a feminine image that was easily controlled by men. Piety espoused religious values that supported worthy female

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[8]Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 46; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 241, 268-269, 287; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 82.

[9]Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Within the Plantation Household: Women in a Paternalist System," in *Society and Culture in the Slave South*, ed. J. William Harris (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 50-51; Barbara Welter, *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1976), 21; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 64.

behavior, purity embraced feminine virtue, submission to male domination allowed for the uncomplicated control of women's behavior, and the principles of domesticity kept women out of the public sphere and away from temptations that might tarnish their reputations. By encouraging women to assume these attributes, men were able to protect their familial reputation and in turn their own honor.[10]

Piety, religious devotion, was at the center of the principles espoused by the plantation society. Next to the family, religion was an important component of honor and aided the maintenance of the social order by encouraging morality and conformity. The region's evangelicals viewed themselves as the sentinels of religious and ethical propriety. Their objective to protect the souls of the southern people was in turn, assisted by the fulfillment of personal moral duty. This was an aspiration that was appropriate for women because participation within the church did not detract from domesticity or submissiveness. Planter women's effort to enhance their families' piousness satisfied a portion of their familial obligation and they remained under the authority of men. Also, since the tenets of gender ideology separated women from the corruption of the public realm, they became paradigms of piety and virtue. As such, the goal was to set the proper example and to bring their husbands and children into the fold of Christianity. Religion was a woman's divine right and a gift from God and nature. It encouraged her to dissuade men from immoral acts and helped her to create a balance between the

[10]Welter, *Dimity Convictions*, 21.

debauchery of men and the goodness of women. Thus, the spirituality of a community was measured by the religiosity of its women.[11]

Piety was also the foundation of a woman's virtue. Social values advised young men looking toward marriage to consider religious women. Contemporary thought claimed that pious women also embodied other valuable traits. Their spiritual conviction guided them to the vital qualities of the ideal woman and prepared them for their responsibilities as a wife and mother. This was important because men saw pure and virtuous wives as the essential heart of a domestic sanctuary. The home was a haven where men found refuge from the evils of the world. As moral exemplars, women created an atmosphere of goodness that shielded the family against the infiltration of immorality. Still, planter women did not necessarily agree with this stance and were generally less philosophical about the ethical training of their children. Personal contact taught them that there were dangers within the home as well as outside of it. They saw sin as the dark, internalized side of human nature. The battle against evil within their offspring, in women's eyes, was a mother's endeavor and one that was necessary to safeguard the family reputation and honor.[12]

Throughout the nineteenth century, southern women were increasingly attracted to and participated in evangelicalism. Studies have shown that women accounted for more than sixty-five percent of the South's church membership. Their association with

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[11]Sally G. McMillen, *Southern Women,* 87-88, 90, 92; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1890s* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 100; Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), ix; Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 90, 95; Welter, *Dimity Convictions*, 21-22.

[12]Welter, *Dimity Convictions*, 21-22; Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 90.

the church offered women a source of communal support and an acceptable social outlet. Piety acted as a balm to soothe the realities of their position within the patriarchal system. It created a female identity that existed outside of the home and women became more than merely wives and mothers. They were also the indispensable influence behind the impulse of spiritual duty. This new distinction recognized and acknowledged their emotional character, but it also nourished the self-discipline that helped women to fulfill the ideals embraced by gender ideology. Though the church preached the importance of female submission and obedience, it also provided women with an autonomy that was not found anywhere else in southern society. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that church involvement was so appealing to women.[13]

Piety also helped women to endure the daily drudgery and isolation on the plantations and farms. One of their heaviest burdens was the anxiety created by endemic diseases such as malaria. Almost powerless to prevent illness, women tended to sick family members and prayed for them to get well. For most, their religious conviction also assuaged the concerns that accompanied pregnancy and childbirth. The empirical nature of nineteenth-century medicine and persistent disease resulted in a high maternal and infant mortality rate for the entire nation, but the risks were more prevalent in the South. Constant exposure to illness and the lack of effective prenatal care threatened the health of pregnant women and increased the possibility of their death during childbirth. For expectant mothers who were infrequently ill, doctors generally advised bed rest, bleeding, and a supply of tonics and medicines, but women who experienced consistent

[13]McMillen, *Southern Women*, 87-88; Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice*, 29.

pain and debility were prescribed doses of calomel or opiates such as morphine and laudanum. The situation was further exacerbated by the tradition of large families. The South's white birthrate was nearly twenty percent higher than the rest of the nation; therefore, southern women were more frequently exposed to the perils associated with motherhood. Fully aware of their tenuous position, women looked for emotional support from heaven. They shielded themselves in their religious faith and embraced God's mercy. North Carolinian Mary Eliza Carmichael expressed this idea when she wrote that women were "in the hands of [their] *Almighty father*" and that she was sure that "he [would] do all things well to them that love him."[14]

In 1843, Charlotte Beatty espoused the role of piety when she wrote that "It is only when we women give up our hearts to God that we begin to enjoy anything like true peace and happiness in this world." An article in the *Ladies' Magazine* claimed that since women were trusted with "the helplessness of childhood, the trials of sickness, and the infirmities of age" the "cultivation of a pious and devotional spirit" was necessary. Women needed to "feel and appreciate their deep responsibility." In other words, emotional comfort hinged on a woman's acceptance of the ideals of piety, the fulfillment of her duty, and the need to protect their reputation and honor. The article promised that the realization that the refuge found within women's devoutness was "a powerful antidote

[14]Pease and Pease, *Ladies, Women, and Wenches*, 115-116; Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 163; McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 1-2, 27, 44, 141-150; Mary Eliza Carmichael Diary, October 15, 1837, Carmichael Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

to the poison of affliction" and that "the sorrows of this world [were] not to be compared with the glory that [would] be revealed."[15]

In 1839, *The Southern Rose* published an article that addressed the relationship between piety and a woman's duty as a moral exemplar. The author wrote that since it was "*at home* that the *heart* [was] formed" and that religious devotion resided in the heart, "*piety* at home" was the "groundwork of all religious duty." Hence, it was important for a pious woman to create a suitable atmosphere in which her children "form[ed] … *principles*" and "cultivate[d] *conscientiousness*" of responsible behavior. The values that they learned early in life remained the foundation of their integrity and honor. Improper conduct in private was not necessarily a grievous flaw. However, if such actions were not checked, they could spread into the public image. A truly good person behaved piously and appropriately in private as well as in public.[16]

Southern women considered piety a very serious obligation to their family, society, and God. Virginia Cary wrote that impious women were "most disgusting and mischievous." Their failure to accept religion made them "solecism[s] in morals" and "deformit[ies] in social life." The force of such thoughts caused many women to experience frequent doubts about their devoutness and antebellum diaries and letters contain many expressions of their uncertainty. After reading the novel, *Edith's Ministry*, Fannie Page Hume wrote that she could "feel so acutely [her] own unworthiness" and she wished that she could "imitate one half of [the heroine's] lovely Christian graces." Eliza

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[15]Charlotte Beatty Diary, January 13, 1843, Taylor Beatty Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Unsigned, "Female Piety," *Ladies' Magazine* 1(4) (April 1828): 176-179.

[16]W. V. T., "Piety at Home," *The Southern Rose* 7(19) (May 11, 1839): 290-292.

Middleton Fisher echoed these sentiments in a letter to her mother in which she stated that she felt her "unworthiness of the blessings [she] enjoy[ed]." Frances Moore Bumpas prayed that God would "rectify all that [was] wrong in [her] and sanctify [her] heart." Susan Davis Nye Hutchinson worried that she did not properly observe the Sabbath. She aspired to keeping the day "more solemnly to the Lord than any heretofore," but feared "how little [she would] succeed." Elite southern women safeguarded their reputation and honor by publicly embracing piety, even when they had doubts about their devotion. Women were also troubled by the spiritual state of their relatives.[17]

Plantation women accepted the burden for their family's salvation. They often felt that the souls of their loved ones were in their hands because it was their responsibility to guide them in a Christian life. At the same time though, planter women were commonly anxious about their ability to fulfill this sacred obligation and sought to encourage their relations to meet their pious duty. Eleanor Hall Douglas included instructions on Bible reading in a letter to her sister Sarah Hall. She explained that "the Bible [was] stored with useful knowledge" and she hoped that Sarah would not "neglect

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[17]Virginia Cary, *Letters on Female Character Addressed to a Young Lady on the Death of Her Mother* (Richmond: A. Works, 1828), 20-21; Fannie Page Hume Diary, January 16, 1860, Humes Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Eliza Cope Harrison, ed., *Best Companions: Letters of Eliza Middleton Fisher and Her Mother, Mary Hering Middleton, from Charleston, Philadelphia, and Newport, 1839-1846* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 418; Frances Moore Webb Bumpas Diary, April 16 (year unknown), Bumpas Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Susan Davis Nye Hutchinson Diary, December 31, 1826, Susan Davis Nye Hutchison Papers, Southern Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

reading a portion in it everyday." She also believed that such study would "strengthen [her] memory and give [her] a habit of reflecting on what [she] read…."[18]

The desire to protect their family's community image led many elite southern women to worry about the failure of their relatives to accept Christianity. Georgian Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas confided to her diary that she was concerned over her father's soul. During Turner Clanton's final days his daughter feared "that when the hour arrives for his summons from time to eternity, he may not be prepared." She prayed, "Oh God incline his heart to serve thee." Her anxiety increased with Clanton's death and the uncertainty of her father's spiritual state haunted Thomas. Four months after his passing, she wrote, "to you my Journal I must confess to a wild, unsettled, chaotic state of mind….The question of 'where oh where in the great unknown world has my father's spirit gone?' has tortured me as with the whip of Scorpions." Thomas was eventually able to work through her distress over her father's lack of piety; however, she never discounted the influence that the situation had over her life and her efforts to fulfill her pious duty.[19]

Purity, the second quality defined by southern society was an immensely important female trait in the plantation community. It was so significant that Thomas Dew and other male theorists declared chastity the foundation of a woman's reputation and honor. The nature of the South's slave system required the maintenance of untainted racial lines. It was the defining characteristic of the ruling class and the absolute control

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[18]Eleanor Hall Douglas to Sarah Hall, May 1, 1820, Eleanor Hall Douglas Papers, Manuscript Department, William R. Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

[19]Virginia Ingraham Burr, ed., *The Secret Eye: The Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1848-1889*, with introduction by Nell Irvin Painter (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 163, 231.

over female reproduction was vital. The sons of white planter women were the heirs of the patriarchal legacy. They inherited both the wealth and authority of the master class and ensured the continuation of the social order. Thus, the assurance of their white paternity was essential. Scholar Martha Hodes has also argued that the need for control that was demonstrated by southern patriarchs through the practice of slavery extended to their domination over all aspects of plantation society, including sex and reproduction. Gender customs accomplished these objectives by confining the sexual activities of white women to marriage and black women to slavery. Female chastity became an ideological tool that required the uncontested fidelity of women to male domination. Its social purpose was the underpinning of female submission and the persistence of racial integrity.[20]

Elite southern women were more closely tied to the ideal of purity than those of other classes. As the pious and virtuous segment of the community, enforced chastity by imposing it on the principles of proper behavior and it became a central aspect of a woman's social role. They were to act circumspect at all times in order to dispel potential suspicions. The actions of men were also significant. Southerners did not embrace the idea of the passionless woman who was espoused by antebellum Northerners. Instead, they believed that women were sexual beings who might be easily manipulated into moral weakness and therefore needed men to safeguard them against such possibilities. Thus, society expected gentlemen to act respectably in both language

[20]Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 10; Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 6, 137-138; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 227, 234; Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 5, 147.

and behavior because they had the power to corrupt women. This was important because the loss of purity resulted in ruined reputations and damaged female honor. Male protection from moral degeneracy was essential.[21]

Ideological contradictions of purity were intrinsic in the ideal and tested southern gender constraints. Plantation society embraced chastity as a moral obligation and marriage as women's only road to happiness. Yet, marriage was the physical end of innocence. More consequentially, the idea that women required male protection from immorality was at odds with their image as moral exemplars and keepers of the culture. While the ideals of piety defined women's moral superiority to men, the tenets of purity emphasized their emotional vulnerability. Each quality served its own social purpose and was rationalized in its own way. Nonetheless, these divergent ideas both evolved from the same prevalent thoughts about the female character. They resulted from the belief that the sensitive and trusting nature that prepared a woman's heart for the acceptance of religion also made her susceptible to the machinations of dissolute men. Since questioning these inconsistencies was a challenge to the structure of southern society, women were told to simply ignore them. However, they fully understood the opposing ideas and privately questioned the double-standards that they created. The vital nature of female chastity in the preservation of racial purity led to values that condemned women and forgave male indiscretions.

In 1852, Ella Clanton Thomas recorded an incident that revealed her awareness of society's gender-based notions about purity. Thomas's journal entry for July 23 told the

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[21]Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 7-8, 69; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 293, Pease and Pease, *Ladies, Women and Wenches*, 138.

tragic story of Mary Culbreath. While visiting in the home of her friend, Ann Heggie, Culbreath found herself in a compromising situation. After a trip to town, a storm prevented Mrs. Heggie from returning home. This left Culbreath alone for the night with Mr. Heggie, who took "advantage of the circumstance…and effected [Culbreath's] ruin." Eluding capture by Culbreath's brothers, Heggie made his way to Savannah and passage on an outbound ship. However, the story does not end there. On March 30, 1856, Thomas reported that Heggie had been captured and a trial was taking place. She stated that the "testimony [was] conflicting" and that Heggie "was permitted to go free, to desolate the life of some other woman." Finding the verdict unbelievable, Thomas declared that her "opinion [was] in favour of [Culbreath's] innocence *very* decidedly."[22]

Thomas's choice of words in her narrative of the Culbreath tragedy is very telling. They reveal her understanding of southern gender prescriptions and their corresponding consequences for those who failed to meet them. When she referred to Culbreath's rape as her "ruin" and stated that Heggie was free to "desolate" another woman's life, she recognized the penalty for the loss of female chastity. She knew that impure women faced a life of ostracism. After all, she believed that most fallen women came to their situation through the "want of charity among men." For Thomas, "women [were] more sinned against that sinning." While she saw herself "as strong an advocate for purity, perfect purity in women as anyone," she also held that "it [was] time to change some…ways of thinking and acting." She continued to illustrate her awareness of

[22]Burr, *The Secret Eye*, 111, 145.

society's contradictory standards by stating that it was "a shame that what [was] considered a venial thing in man should in a worldly point of view *damn a woman*."[23]

Submissiveness, the female surrender to male domination, was another important aspect of southern gender principles. The southern slave system and its corresponding need for the absolute authority of white men made white women's compliance with plantation gender standards vital to the social order. The influence of planter men over women was almost equal to the power that they exerted over their land and slaves. Because the failure of women to acquiesce could undermine the planters' authority and challenge the network of power relations within southern society, men expected total obedience from their female relatives. Additionally, efforts by women to manipulate men reinforced the legitimacy of male power. The endeavor to use trickery to bend the will of men to female wishes was ultimately a recognition of the male rule. Therefore, men rejected any attempt at active resistance by women. The consequences of failing to submit were social ostracism and coercion by fathers, husbands, and brothers.[24]

Antebellum southern thought defined submissiveness as a natural trait for the passive, female character. As God's appointment for women, surrender to male control became one of their most significant duties. Gender prescriptions placed women's responsibilities well within the confines of self-sacrifice and submission. They were expected to set aside personal considerations and relinquish themselves to the needs of society. Therefore, women's influence remained domestic and subordinate to patriarchal

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[23]Ibid., 152.

[24]Kirsten E. Wood, *Masterful Women: Slaveholding Widows from the American Revolution through the Civil War* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 2; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 30; Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 164.

authority. Interference with this sacred and societal mandate meant tampering with the order of the universe. So, planter women accepted their lot and became accustomed to yielding to the will of men. Abuse of this male prerogative often caused misery and frustration among women, but it did not lead them to rebel.[25]

Southern women were supposed to pretend not to notice their subordination by men. However, they clearly understood their social position and created their own gendered code of survival. Unable to openly voice divergent opinions about society, they confided their complaints to their diaries. An anonymous journal found on a plantation in Selma, Alabama, acknowledged the subordinate female position by stating that the existence of women depended "on beings upon which [they had] no control" and that in the "mockery submission of the hour… [women were] marked out by [their] tyrant for a still deeper slavery." Still, women did not rebel and went on "suffering, and yet smiling, cheering the spirit of the being who doom[ed] [them] to this bondage, and cherishing the hand that plunge[d] [them] in the abyss!" This cheerfulness in oppression was an essential part of the values that planter women endeavored to fulfill.[26]

Planter women developed their own standards of excellence and aspired to the gracious achievement of these responsibilities. The amiable fulfillment of duty became a path to honor. Plantation society taught women that attempts to leave their assigned sphere were dangerous for their sensitive and emotional nature and that the assumption of

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[25]Stephen W. Berry II, *All That Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 38-39; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 30; Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 40; Welter, *Dimity Convictions*, 27-28; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 39.

[26]Michael O'Brien, ed., *An Evening When Alone: Four Journals of Single Women in the South, 1827-67* (Charlottesville, VA and London: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 137.

a public life would mean the ruin of their health and their family's welfare. Such actions would also tarnish the image of the ideal woman. Since this left no room for misgivings, they rationalized social injustices and attributed unhappiness and restlessness to their own human failings. In turn, they sustained the principles of female submission by passing them on to their children.[27]

Domesticity was the fourth and final female trait outlined by the idea of true womanhood. This ideology was another important aspect of southern gender values and encompassed all of the other qualities of the ideal woman. Piety, purity, and submissiveness were virtues that characterized the proper southern woman within the private sphere. The significance placed upon the household and family by plantation society reinforced the tenets of domesticity and defined the social role of women and created a structure for their daily lives as daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers. Their contributions in the realm of the home were the achievement of their societal duties and the center of their personal and familial reputation and honor.[28]

Louisa McCord, like most southerners associated the domestic realm of women with their moral and physical attributes. She contended that God had prepared women for such responsibilities and had granted them talents that were confined within their assigned purpose. Despite the contradictions of her life as a female essayist, McCord's writings always espoused the importance of the domestic sphere and encouraged women to respect the South's gender traditions. Julia Gardiner Tyler gladly expressed her belief

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[27]Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 82; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 241, 268-269, 287; Pease and Pease, *Ladies, Women, and Wenches*, 1-2, 8.

[28]Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 195; Pease and Pease, *Ladies, Women, and Wenches*, 10; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 42-43; Welter, *Dimity Convictions*, 31; Fox-Genovese, *Society and Culture*, J. William, ed., 50-51.

in their compliance when she wrote that the circle of a woman's life was "literally and emphatically, that of her family" and that "she [was] content" that it was so.[29]

Since plantation society entwined the character of a man's family with his communal image, southern children were taught at an early age that their actions reflected on the reputation and honor of the patriarch and that they would be held to a rigorous code of conduct. As adolescence approached, parents placed more emphasis on social expectations and proper behavior. They heightened their children's consciousness of ultimate social values through the use of powerful language that shaped their sense of self, family, and society. Since patterns of manners and politeness in women were supposed to provide a contrast to the actions of men, girls were held to a higher standard than boys. Men were presumably governed by the same rules that the male authority set for women, children, and slaves. However, they were often forgiven for their discreet misconduct.[30]

Popular thoughts about a supposedly passive female nature led to the belief that girls yielded to authority more easily than boys and, therefore, needed less direct supervision. Yet, parents constantly reminded their daughters that only their proper behavior ensured the offer of familial love. An issue of the *Southern Rose Bud* claimed that "a good daughter [was] the steady light of her parent's house" and that her "grace, and vivacity, and tenderness" had a "place in the mighty sway" with which she held her parents' "spirit." Nonetheless, young women, as well as their brothers, resisted parental

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[29]Julia Gardiner Tyler, "To the Duchess of Sutherland and Ladies of England," *The Southern Literary Messenger* 19(2) (February 1853): 120; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 283.

[30]Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 122; Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 88.

authority and found many ways to exert their own personalities. They expressed their individual style in clothing, secretly read forbidden books, determined the course of social and romantic relationships, and spent their money in their own way. Still, there was a major difference between the misbehavior of boys and girls. While young women were usually confined to church, home, or school and did not have the opportunity to display their rebellion for their community, the misconduct of sons often took a public or violent form. Girls confined their actions to the domestic sphere and the management of their parents, thus protecting their personal and family image.[31]

The greatest concern of southern parents was the possibility of sexual misconduct by their daughters. Such female transgressions had overwhelming effects on a family. The indiscretion was destructive to the patriarchal image and threatened the honor of the family. The resulting ostracism jeopardized the political and social connections that served as an economic foundation for most planters. Additionally, the loss of the young woman's purity also resulted in irreversible damage to her reputation and led to an inability to form an acceptable marriage, because it demonstrated her failure to meet the tenets of female honor. By not observing the dictates of proper behavior and failing to fulfill her social duties, she placed herself outside of the image of the ideal woman.[32]

Both fathers and mothers played significant roles in the lives of young women, but as the patriarchs of their families, fathers made the most important decisions for their

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[31]Palfrey, "A Good Daughter," *Southern Rose Bud* 3(3) (October 1834): 19; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 116-117; Stephen Berry's work, *All That Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South*, argues that the idea that southern women should be passive was a socially constructed façade and that men did not really want passive women in their lives. They found them boring and preferred women that were more vivacious and lively.

[32]Ibid., 116.

daughters. Among the most crucial were the determination of the amount and kind of education provided, whom they would be exposed to and interact with, whom and when they should marry, and what disciplinary measures were to be taken for disobedience. During their deliberation on such matters, fathers always considered family honor and the domestic role that their daughters were to perform. The advice found in nineteenth-century publications echoed the consequence of these factors. For example, Caroline Gilman's work, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, labeled female education essential for the future completion of duty. She asserted that "[i]ntellectual women are the most modest inquirers after truth, and accomplished women often the most scrupulous observers of social duty." Because it ultimately resulted in a favorable community image and honor, a father's most vital objective for his daughter was her preparation for the imminent demands of southern society.[33]

Plantation mothers were the emotional support of their daughters' day-to-day lives and guided the proper development of their femininity and womanhood by providing advice on everything from health and fashion to religion and relationships. Aided by female relatives and family friends, mothers structured the socialization of their daughters and drew them into familial, social, and religious networks. At the same time, they groomed their young women for a domestic life by keeping them close to home. While female children did venture outdoors, they spent much of their time playing with dolls and imitating their mother's household work. After the completion of their formal education, family members encouraged young ladies to take up womanly duties in their

[33]Caroline Gilman, *Recollections of a New England Bride and of a Southern Matron* (New York: G. P. Putnam & Co., 1852), 61; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 116

parents' house and leisure was combined with domestic labors such as needlework. When necessary, daughters also became substitutes for their mothers. Ella Clanton Thomas reported that she "occup[ied] the responsible situation of housekeeper" during her mother's confinement in childbirth. Such occurrences were considered good practice for future plantation mistresses. As with fathers, a mother's goal was to raise a daughter who was capable of meeting the dictates of southern gender doctrines.[34]

Southerners wanted their daughters to experience the lighter side of life. Yet, they assumed that too much exposure to society too soon would turn the heads of young women. This was dangerous because such an event would either mature them too quickly or cause them to lose sight of their proper path to honor. Thus, they tried to keep their daughters from rushing into adult situations. At the same time, gender ideology taught women that it was God's purpose for them to become wives and mothers. This meant that they needed a man to propose marriage, which made some exposure to worthy men and the development of social graces necessary. Accordingly, southern custom told young women that they had magical powers to attract men and bend them to their will. These ideas assured them that the use of their manners, charms, accomplishments, and virtues made them appealing as prospective mates. Proper deportment was essential for the completion of the task and the assumptions also advised women to always guard their actions in the company of men. This was important because "the conduct of every female who is of the least consideration, may be expected to exert an influence on the character of every gentlemen with whom she associates; and that influence will be for

[34]Burr, *The Secret Eye*, 102; Stowe, *Intimacy and Power*, 158; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 116, 135-136.

good or evil, as she exhibits or fails to exhibit, a deportment that becomes her." If a young woman demonstrated good behavior, then men would always treat her in a congenial way.[35]

Marriage was the most important relationship in a person's life and southerners saw husbands and wives as loving partners who supported each other while raising a family. However, the choice of a mate was not simply a matter of personal preference and reality did not always meet the ideal. Social and familial obligation restricted one's potential selection and the courtship ritual became an extension of family image and personal honor. While parents usually played a limited direct role in the custom, social conventions helped them to control the range of their offspring's courtship prospects. Family and community set the required standards for possible spouses. Tradition dictated that men propose to their girl first, and then seek the approval of her father. In turn, daughters were supposed to defer to their fathers' wishes. Thus, elopement was a serious violation of family obligation and the courtship ritual. As the failure of the couple to follow the tenets of plantation society threatened the patriarchal order, elopement was also a matter of community honor.[36]

The choice of a husband was the most important decision of a woman's life. Because divorce was virtually impossible in the male dominated antebellum society, good judgment could mean the difference between a life of happiness and one of misery. Yet, southern women understood the requirements of the position that compelled them to

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[35]Unsigned, "Advice to a Daughter," *Godey's Lady's Book* 12 (January 1836): 7; Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 23; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 136

[36]Jane Turner Censer, *North Carolina Planters and their Children 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 72; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 54, 60-61; Stowe, *Intimacy and Power*, 58, 100-101.

choose a partner who satisfied their parents' wishes. Community standards and parental socialization limited their exposure to undesirables, aided in the quest for an acceptable husband, and ensured that the selection was made within society's principles. Since crossing racial, cultural, or ethnic lines threatened the hierarchy of the southern community, compatibility was imperative. Within the strict social order of plantation society, homogeneity was vital. Diversity questioned societal dictates and threatened the structure of the master class. Thus, state laws forbade interracial marriage and society rebuked unions between people from different classes, religions, and ethnicities. Middle- and upper-class parents sought to protect family wealth and power through the appropriate marriages of their children. Some went attempted to safeguard property holdings through the marriage of cousins.[37]

Marriage lay at the heart of the image of the ideal woman and was an essential element in the female identity and a sacred social duty. It was so important that the southern essayist George Fitzhugh placed it with slavery and religion as "pillars of the social fabric." The plantation system and the practice of slavery required the assurance of racial purity to maintain white domination. Since African ancestry marked the inferior status of a slave and southern law declared that the condition of slavery was inherited from the mother, it was necessary to ensure that planter women did not give birth to mixed race children. Such an event was a challenge to the social order and southern society guarded against it. Thus, the institution of marriage became an important mechanism that was used to control female reproduction and to maintain the white race.

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[37]Censer, *North Carolina Planters*, 94; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 54; McMillen, *Southern Women*, 20-21.

The wives of slaveholders were conduits for the continuance of pure family lines for the transference of power and property between generations.[38]

Most southerners took their marital responsibilities very seriously and accepted the rewards and costs of life as a patriarch and mistress. Promised love, honor, and protection, women understood that marriage was the fulfillment of their official roles. While men shouldered financial burdens, women cared for the household. They were also expected to surrender complete obedience to male authority. Bound by law, religion, and tradition they were compelled to trust their lives to men who were also inexperienced at marriage. In 1790, Thomas Jefferson expressed the gravity of such duties in a letter to his newly married daughter Patsy. He explained that her happiness "depend[ed]…on continuing to please a single person. To this all other objects must be secondary; even [her] love for [him], were it possible that it could be an obstacle." Fitzhugh later reiterated the meaning of female submission when he compared planter wives to slaves and stated that both groups were under the power of white men. He wrote that marriage was "too much like slavery not to be involved in its fate; and the obedience of wives which the Bible inculcates, furnishe[d] a new theme" for northern reformers.[39]

The social value of marriage made the institution a popular subject of southern publications. An examination of relevant articles clearly illustrates southern ideology that defined the proper wife. In 1847, the *Southern Quarterly Review* clarified these ideals in their review of Fanny Kemble's work *A Year of Consolation*. While the article

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[38]Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South*, 205-206; Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 2, 64.

[39]Catherine Clinton, *Tara Revisited: Women, War, & the Plantation Legend* (New York, London, and Paris: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1995), 55; Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South*, 205-206; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 67, 73; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 273.

was meant to be a literary analysis of the book, the author used Kemble's failed marriage as an argument for the South's gender ideals and their significance to the southern social order. Kemble, a successful English actress, arrived in the United States in the early 1830s. During a theatrical tour, she met and married Pierce Butler, the heir to the second largest slaveholding dynasty in Georgia. While she retired from the stage to devote herself to her new status as a planter's wife, Kemble refused to follow the principles that would turn her into a proper southern wife and mother and the marriage ended in divorce. The assertions made by her critics revealed that the cause of the breakup was founded in the ideology of the ideal woman and that Kemble lost her position as a wife because she failed to meet the predetermined standards established by southern gender constraints.

Prior to his inheritance in 1836, Pierce Butler spent most of his time at his family's home in Philadelphia. Yet, despite his residence in the North, Butler's ownership of vast acres of plantation land and large numbers of slaves made him part of the South's plantation system and its strict communal customs, including the ethic of honor. As his time in Georgia increased, the importance of Butler's reputation and honor intensified as it became more intricately tied to his social acceptance and economic power. Butler could not allow his wife's lack of submission and obedience to his directives to jeopardize his image within the community. The maintenance of honor required an adherence to southern gender constraints as an indication of a patriarch's control over his wife and daughters. Since a man's reputation was linked to that of his family, he needed this domination to ensure that neither was sullied. Butler's acceptance by the community and his ability to do business in the region depended on his observance

of southern customs and traditions and his ability to gain Kemble's compliance with the social standards. Hence, his wife's challenge of his position as head of the family endangered his social status and his standing as an honorable man.

The *Southern Quarterly Review* article asserted that the problems within the Kemble-Butler marriage resulted from Kemble's career as an actress. Her time on the stage created an undesirable sense of pride that did not allow her to totally commit to male authority and was detrimental to Kemble's ability to place her husband's pride above her own. He wrote that "nothing more would be necessary than a due regard to the natural and social position of the husband." In addition, she needed to respect him as "her support and protector." After all, Kemble would have proved her "own claim to wisdom in the first appreciation which she exhibit[ed] of that superior intellect which justifie[d] the authority and sway to which she submit[ted]."[40] In other words, Kemble failed to demonstrate the hallowed tenet of submissiveness.

Pierce Butler expressed his agreement with much of the assessment contained in the *Southern Quarterly Review* when, in 1850, he published his reasons for seeking a divorce. The statement confirmed Kemble's failure to become the perfect southern wife and illustrated the importance of male authority in southern society. Kemble's denial of Butler's power over her life was a major issue for him. He wrote that it was his opinion "that without obedience from a wife to her husband, it [was] utterly impossible to live happily together" and since Kemble "refused to acknowledge that obedience was any part

[40]Unsigned, "Fanny Kemble," *Southern Quarterly Review* 12(23) (July 1847): 191-236.

of [her] duty as wife"[41] it was necessary for him to legally dissolve the marriage. After all, Kemble's failure to acquiescence not only disrupted the formation of a harmonious relationship, it also threatened Butler's community image as a strong patriarch.

Pierce Butler demonstrated the significance of the association between honor and southern gender conventions in the statement that he wrote during his divorce proceedings. He wrote that the couple's problems "would not have been so if [Fanny] had rendered [his] fireside cheerful and peaceful" and that it was necessary for him to keep his problems to himself declaring that "[his] domestic troubles, great as they were, had happily never been mentioned to anyone." Finally giving up on changing his wife, Butler accused Kemble of placing other interests above her role as a mother and wife and declared that if his wife found that she "cannot be happy away from them, if a home, a husband and children, are less to her than former friends, and do not compensate for what she was given up, why there is nothing to be done." When Butler did express his feelings to friends Charles and Elizabeth Sedgwick, both urged him to "try to recollect that [her mind] is diseased," and advised Kemble that there was no "more heinous offence against God and right, than to cast of this duty [of motherhood]."[42]

In 1827, the *Southern Literary Messenger* published a father's letter to his daughter and defined the womanly conduct that plantation society considered essential for a happy marriage. The author of the piece assured his only daughter that her future depended on her recognition of the importance of her behavior toward her husband. He

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[41]Pierce Butler, *Mr. Butler's Statement, Originally Prepared in Aid of His Professional Council* (Philadelphia: J. C. Clark, Printer, 1850) 82-83.

[42]Ibid., 27, 31, 37, 39, 42.

asserted that it was imperative that a wife accept an obedient position in the marital relationship and that she was "never to attempt to control [her] husband by opposition, by displeasure, or any other mark of anger." After all, attempts to manipulate her husband would cause her to lose his "respect for her virtues…his love…and with that, all prospect of future happiness." The father also explained that a husband's success depended on his popularity and since "the manners of a wife have no little influence in extending or lessening the respect and esteem of others for her husband," it was important that a wife was "affable and polite to the poorest as well as to the richest." The author promised his reader that when these maxims were observed in combination with the cultivation of mind, the general respect for servants, and the completion of domestic duties a woman enjoyed marital bliss.[43]

Despite the existence of written advice on marriage, it was still a difficult adjustment for many women. It irreversibly changed the world of young brides. Taken from their homes and families, they were no longer carefree school girls or pampered daughters of planter families. The young women were not always prepared when they found themselves on isolated plantations and in charge of their own households and the care of their husbands' slaves. While they were trained in specific skills, they lacked the sense of leadership that was necessary for the management of a household. They were missing the habit of command and the authoritative voice that was required for the

[43]Unsigned, "Advice from a Father to his Only Daughter," *Southern Literary Messenger* 1(5) (January 1835): 187-188; O'Brien, *An Evening When Alone*, 63; Unsigned, "Advice from a Father," 187-188.

supervision of slaves. Their training failed to groom them for the assumption of the identity of a mature woman.[44]

Elizabeth Ruffin of Virginia recorded reading the article in her diary and reported her agreement with the father's advice "with the exception of the part where [the wife was] particularly cautioned against all *endeavors* of getting the upper-hand." She stated that a woman was "perfectly excusable" to do so, if it could be accomplished "creditably." For Ruffin, the word "*hen-pecked* [has] a most *charming sound*" and she wished "no greater evidence of a good, indulgent husband." As a young woman who was approaching the status as a spinster, Ruffin displayed a formidable reluctance to abandon her independence for marriage. She hoped to see proof that it was possible for women to retain some level of self-determination within marriage. Her diary was filled with explanations of her opinions on the matter. She wrote that "the trials of matrimony the married are welcome to for me, take my advice and be content with the negative enjoyment attendant on undisturbed *celibacy*." A few weeks later she reported hearing gossip that linked her name to three different men. She supposed that her community was "trying…to tempt [her] to relinquish [her] notion of *perpetual celibacy*" and were "endeavoring to deter [her] from all the anticipated horrors of *old-maidenhood*." Despite her claim that she was not "so easily frightened," Ruffin eventually married a distant cousin.[45]

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[44]Clinton, *Tara Revisited*, 42-43; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 77; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 110-111; Welter, *Dimity Convictions*, 38.

[45]O'Brien, *An Evening When Alone*, 59, 63, 67.

Further proof of the significance of marriage was the scorn that southern society held for unmarried women. While these women were not rare, there is evidence that their numbers grew during the nineteenth century. However, they still lived outside of the cultural ideals that defined the principles of domesticity. Since a woman's identity resulted from her husband and her family, spinsterhood was a kind of social death. For many, it was better to have an unacceptable husband than no husband at all. At least that way, the wife received the community's pity instead of its disdain. By the age of thirty, society declared an unmarried woman an old maid.[46]

The failure of spinsters to fulfill their duty and marry challenged gender principles and jeopardized their community image and their honor. Unmarried planter women did not fit the standardized model of the ideal woman and were anomalies within plantation society. Generally, unable to support themselves, unmarried planter women usually lived with their parents or siblings. They became a source of labor that was easily exploited for the sake of family and were moved from one household to another to fill the needs of their relatives. Spinsters were supposed to repress their own wishes and devote their time and energy to the care of other women's families. In an attempt to be useful and to meet an altered form of female duty, they assisted in the rearing of their nieces and nephews, tended sick relations, and performed other domestic chores. A few attempted to earn an income by serving as a governess or teacher, but their failure to remain within the domestic sphere was socially ridiculed and their personal and familial honor was threatened. Additionally, since unmarried daughters usually received only a small

[46]O'Brien, *An Evening When Alone*, 1, 3; McMillen, *Southern Women*, 39-40; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 238; Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 44.

portion of their parents' estate, it was difficult for them to sustain their independence and they were forced to depend on the charity of family members. Even if they could support themselves, respectability and the protection of reputation and honor required a family and the fulfillment of feminine duties.[47]

Southern ideas about male authority and female submissiveness left little ideological room for widows. While, they enjoyed more personal autonomy and influence than other women of their region, they stood outside of the norm. They had the same legal property rights as men and needed no protector or sponsor. Furthermore, since the wealth of planter men was tied up in slaves and land, their widows often became the heads of productive households. At the beginning, however, many women were too grief-stricken to think about their increased authority. Some actively denied their power, even as they began to exert it, and claimed that they were simply acting on the wishes of their dead husbands. The habit of submitting to patriarchal authority did not immediately cease with the death of their husbands. While the loss of a spouse alienated plantation women from the ideals that defined female identity, the women sought to find personal connections to the principles. Motherhood acted as an ideological anchor for women who spent large amounts of time dealing with traditionally masculine responsibilities and made childlessness a particular threat for these women. Yet, despite their problems of identity, widows were generally accepted by southern society. After

[47]McMillen, *Southern Women*, 39-40; Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 38-39, 85; Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 35-36.

all, they had proven their willingness to fulfill gender expectations by marrying at least once.[48]

Not all widows followed the mandate of domesticity and remarried. While some did not have the opportunity to form another alliance, others made the conscious decision not to relinquish their independence. Still, many women overcame their reluctance and remarried. Dolly Lunt Burge was one of these women. Her diary contains the accounts of her four marriages and expresses the same concerns that many women experienced with their decision to remarry. In December 1849, Burge recorded her betrothal to her second husband. She also reported her anxiety over her choice when she asked "What have I done…Why these heavy forebodings?" She confided that she had "often joked & laughed about marrying & though when asked [she] always refused… [she was] caught this time." She wondered "Is my heart truly interested? Do I love him to whom I am about to commit my all of earthly happiness. Can I take upon myself the most solemn of all oaths to Love Honour & Obey one to whom I am so utterly a stranger!"[49]

Motherhood was the essence of domesticity and the natural consequence of marriage. Southerners glorified it and prided themselves in their strong sentiments for the institution. They believed that the exaltation of motherhood demonstrated the vigor of the patriarchal system, the importance of family, and the prosperity of the region. Statistically, southern plantation women gave birth at a higher rate than their northern

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[48]McMillen, *Southern Women*, 39-40, 117; Wood, *Masterful Women*, 3-5, 58, 131, 143; Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 170; Kirsten E. Wood, *Masterful Women: Slaveholding Widows from the America Revolution through the Civil War* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 102-103.

[49]Christine Jacobson Carter, ed., *The Diary of Dolly Lunt Burge 1848-1879* (Athens, GA and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1997), 46-47; Wood, *Masterful Women*, 149.

counterparts. Historian Jane Turner Censer has shown that while planter women had an average of seven live children per marriage, national figures indicate that the antebellum birthrate declined from 7.04 in 1800 to 5.4 in 1850. Additionally, the letters and diaries of elite southern women reveal families that included eight, ten, or even twelve children. These large families were significant reflections of masculinity and a means through which political and social connections were created. Through networks of brothers, uncles, and cousins, men enjoyed family ties that were often the basis for significant power and wealth. Thus, the South's patriarchy strongly encouraged and honored the maternal focus. Women also took motherhood seriously. It was their sacred occupation and the creation of the South's future.[50]

Motherhood was not only a significant part of the female identity; it also included the responsibility of providing their husbands with heirs. It increased a woman's influence and made her the central figure in family life. As a child's first teacher, mothers played vital roles in the lives of future generations. Since they were responsible for the physical, emotional, moral, and intellectual development of their children, the prospective prosperity of the family was in their hands. One of their highest priorities was the formation of Christians that were worthy of divine blessings. As the moral guardians of southern society, communities charged women with the proper fulfillment of

[50]Sally G. McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Infant Rearing* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 3, 6, 24, 32-33, 35; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 324.

their duty as mothers. After all, since maternal neglect resulted in delinquency, society considered women's failure to meet their motherly demands as detrimental to the South.[51]

In 1835, the *Southern Literary Messenger* printed a story that demonstrated the importance assigned to the actions of the mother. The article told the tale of Guy Rivers, "a highwayman—a murder—a cold blooded murderer—an outlaw—of most violent, headlong passions." Yet, he was also described as "a man of great shrewdness and of superior natural intellect." Hence, the author wondered what went wrong to cause Rivers to follow such a life. Rivers declared that his devious, criminal nature was the result of overindulgence by his mother. He explained that while his mother taught proper behavior, her example led him to disregard her teachings. His mother told him to listen to his father; however, she frequently deceived him on the account of her son. This trained Rivers "to disobey and deceive" his father. She also bribed her son to "do [his] duty, and hence [his] duty could only be done under the stimulating promise of a reward." Mrs. Rivers attempted to teach her son to follow the laws of God; however, she "hourly violated those laws herself in [his] behalf." Rivers claimed that if his mother had fulfilled her duty properly, he would have grown to be an honorable man. He believed that his criminal life was "all her work" and that his "greatest enemy" in life was his mother.[52]

Despite the burden that motherhood placed on southern women, they found tangible rewards and achieved a sense of self-esteem within their family. They rarely

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[51]Welter, *Dimity Convictions*, 38; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 280-281; Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 8, 48, 50; Stowe, *Intimacy and Power*, 128; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 96; McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 8.

[52]Unsigned, "Effects of Maternal Indulgence," *Southern Literary Messenger* 1(6) (February 1835): 280-281.

questioned publicly their life of perpetual pregnancy and childbirth. Only their private letters and diaries revealed their true feelings about their duty to bear and rear numerous children. Susan Davis Nye Hutchinson confided her apprehension over the onset of labor to her diary. She wrote that she was "taken with the pains indicating the approach of that hour more dreaded than all the others" and with its arrival imminent her "very heart shrank within [her]." Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas indicated her uncertainty when she recorded her pregnancy. She disclosed that she did not "regret" her condition, but that the "knowledge cause[d] no exhilarating feelings." Since she was "suffering almost constantly with [a] sick stomach," she could not yet "view the idea with a great deal of interest or pleasure."[53] Yet, women usually found the hardships of pregnancy and childbirth preferable to barrenness. Childless women were generally blamed for the inability to provide their husbands with heirs and the South with new citizens and were figures of pity and social disdain.

The South prided itself in its strict social regimen and well-defined gender roles. Based on the requirements of racial slavery and the patriarchal system, the ideology of the ideal woman identified piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity as the proper objectives for southern women. These gender prescriptions were the basis of the female reputation and women proudly fulfilled their principles. While women agreed that chastity was an important element, women did not see it in the same light and did not concur with the male viewpoint that placed chastity at the center of feminine honor.

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[53]Susan Davis Nye Hutchinson Diary, May 6, 1827, Susan Davis Nye Hutchinson Papers, Southern Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina; Burr, *The Secret Eye*, 130.

Southern elite women complied with their assigned roles, but did not blindly follow the male dictates. They fully understood their social position and the demands that it placed on them. Even when they felt incapable of meeting society's expectations, women strove to satisfy their requirements and to create a flawless community image. For southern women, the achievement of their gender roles and the fulfillment of their corresponding duties was their point of honor.

The South's gender customs of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity were so significant to its social function that they became central features of the region's system of education. In order to ensure the continuance of the ideals and to protect reputation and honor, the indoctrination of southern youth became a community affair. Relatives, friends, schools, and the press all joined together to provide their younger generations with the knowledge that they needed to maintain social standards and to guard the social order and their personal and family honor.

CHAPTER III

Female Education and the Indoctrination in Honor

The relationship between honor and southern gender standards was so important that the entire plantation community took part in the instruction of the region's young women. Because the actions of planter daughters were directly connected to their families' reputation and honor, their proper instruction in the South's gender principles was vital to the maintenance of the social order. Consequently, family, friends, and neighbors took every opportunity to instill the elements of appropriate behavior and the fulfillment of duty in their neighborhood's young women. This communal function in education was widely accepted and was noted by women such as Ella Clanton Thomas.

Born in 1834, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas was a member of the plantation elite in Augusta, Georgia. Her father, Turner Clanton was one of the wealthiest planters in the state. The public's high regard of Clanton and his standing in southern society was demonstrated when he was elected to two terms in the Georgia state legislature. To sustain the economic and political power that was associated with his social position, it was vital that Clanton and his family observe the tenets of honor by projecting the proper image and reputation. In pursuit of this objective, Ella's life followed the socially accepted female path from girlhood to marriage and motherhood. After graduating from Wesleyan Female College in Macon, Georgia, in 1851, Ella married James Jefferson Thomas, another member of the planter aristocracy. They began their family after only

one year of marriage and produced ten children between 1853 and 1875, fitting themselves neatly into the constraints of southern society.[1] Ella Clanton Thomas began her education with a local tutor before entering the Wesleyan Female College in January 1849. While her education did not include the same superior classical training enjoyed by Laura Wirt Randall and Louisa McCord, it was more advanced than that offered at most antebellum colleges. Yet, it still met the customary goals for the indoctrination of southern girls. Thomas's schooling reaffirmed the social order and her place within it. It was meant to help her develop a sense of female honor and duty and to grow into the ideal southern woman.[2]

On April 8, 1851, Thomas recorded the completion of a school assignment in her diary; an essay entitled "The Pulpit, the Press, and the Schoolroom, Efficient Agents for the Morals of the People."[3] The composition's title reveals prevalent thoughts about education and reflects the significance attributed to the indoctrination of the South's young people. Just as the region's slave economy depended on the maintenance of the social order through conformity to communal standards, a man's honor relied on familial image and reputation. Thus, the inculcation of southern children in the dictates of gender and duty was essential. The task was so important that it became a community project. In the plantation system, education was both informal and formal and was conducted by

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[1]Virginia Ingraham Burr, ed., *The Secret Eye: The Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas 1848-1889*, with an introduction by Nell Irvin Painter (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 3-5.

[2]Burr, *Secret Eye*, 3-4; Jane Turner Censer, *North Carolina Planters and their Children 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 46-47; Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore and London: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 136-137.

[3]Burr, *Secret* Eye, 86.

families, friends, churches, schools, and the press. The public immediately seized every opportunity to espouse and bestow the ideals of southern society upon their younger generations. Planter society's participation in this indoctrination of their children was evident in the advice and instructions that fill the many letters and diaries of southern women.

Friends and relatives often encouraged young women to meet the responsibilities that accompanied education by working hard and obtaining the skills and knowledge that would later help them to meet the requirements of duty. While away at school, South Carolinian Fannie Holmes received a letter from her godmother, Mrs. Baron. The missive revealed the author's belief that Fannie's commitment to education was her path to proper southern womanhood. Mrs. Baron encouraged her goddaughter to meet the obligation by studying hard and acting properly. She wrote that she was glad that Fannie's teacher was "kind and attentive" and was devoted to helping her charge to rise above her "childish faults" to become "an educated young lady, a fit companion for [her] Mother & Father." The letter also addressed Fannie's duty to her family and their honor. It stated that since "all your time is valuable to you now… you must try & use it to the best possible advantage," and in doing so, "remember you are the eldest child, and as such must be an example, to your Brothers & Sisters; & [that] you will also be able to help Mother with the younger ones."[4]

The relationship between the gender values of plantation society and the preservation of reputation and honor led the planter community to criticize young women

[4]S. G. Baron to Fannie Holmes, May 31, 1865, Holmes Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

who did not apply themselves to their education. Southerners feared that if the girls did not receive adequate instruction in their future social roles they could not meet the demands of duty and were a threat to their families' societal position. Eleanor Hall Douglas of North Carolina feared that her sister Sarah's lack of interest and idleness would jeopardize her education and expressed her concern in her letters to Sarah. Her letters to Sarah instructed her to use her leisure time in a useful manner. In May 1820, Eleanor advised Sarah to spend more time with the Bible. She wrote that as "reasonable creatures…trifling things should not employ all [their] leisure hours." The time should be spent "in reading and striving to improve [themselves]." Since "the Bible is stored with useful knowledge," Eleanor encouraged Sarah to each day "commit to memory a verse." This was important because doing so would "strengthen [her] memory and give [her] a habit of reflecting on what [she] read…"[5] Sarah would thereby develop the mental ability that tutoring required.

Eleanor Douglas's advice to Sarah continued in letters that followed. In a letter to her mother Mary Hall, she encouraged Sarah to improve herself by working diligently on her education "every spare hour that [she was] not assisting Mother." Eleanor "earnestly beseech[ed]" Sarah to "beware of vain jesting light laughing and talking and in short all frivolous conversation [for] it would draw [her] attention from study poison [her] mind beside disgusting, maybe every, gentile [*sic*] person [she met] with."[6] She feared that Sarah's lack of intellect would be obvious to others and would endanger her place in

[5]Eleanor Hall Douglas to Sarah Hall, May 1, 1820, Eleanor (Hall) Douglas Papers, Manuscript Department, William R. Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

[6]Eleanor Hall Douglas to Mrs. Mary Hall, August 1821, Eleanor (Hall) Douglas Papers, Manuscript Department, William R. Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

society. Not all of the advice received by young ladies dealt with issues of formal education, though. Counsel over matters of daily relevance such as propriety, reputation, and duty was also common.

Mrs. Singleton of South Carolina worried about the behavior and reputation of her daughters Marion and Angelica, who were away at school in Philadelphia. In a January 1823 letter to her elder daughter Marion, Mrs. Singleton expressed concern that she had not been apprised of Angelica's actions and charged Marion with the responsibility of protecting her sister's character. Worried about her daughter's reputation, Singleton wrote that she was "very apprehensive" that her daughter was "not conducting her self, with as much propriety as she ought." She then told Marion "not [to] hesitate a moment…if there [was] any thing wrong, to acquaint [her]" of the matter. In the same missive, Angelica was instructed to be careful to "not be tempted to go astray, or even to look astray" but to "remember how far [she was] removed from [her] Parents, to whom [her] good name [was] more precious than even life itself." The honor of the Singletons depended on the community's continued respect for the family and their daughters' presentation of the proper image. Thus, their mother reminded Marion and Angelica that propriety and virtue were not only paramount; but were "more precious than even life itself." [7]

Like Marion and Angelica Singleton, Nannie Barksdale also received instructions about social decorum from a family member. On March 16, 1851, Charlotte Hannah of Charleston, South Carolina, wrote to her sister Nannie. The purpose of the

[7]R. T. Singleton to Marion and Angelica Singleton, January 2, 1823, Singleton-Deveaux Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

letter was to convey Charlotte's advice about an invitation for a trip to Richmond that was received by her sister. The guidance that she provided also carried instructions for the proper behavior of southern women. Charlotte expressed the necessity of engaging an appropriate chaperone to protect Nannie's honor. She thought that the acceptance of the invitation was only possible if Nannie was accompanied by their cousin Mary Jane or "some married lady of the connection." Of course, it was also essential that the two ladies conduct themselves "with all <u>becoming propriety</u>."[8] By doing so, they guarded themselves against the loss of a good reputation.

Southerners not only instructed young women in the maintenance of honor and reputation, but also in the manner of persisting in the face of occasional minor transgressions. In March 1846, Mrs. Joseph A. Huger was preparing to move to a new home with her husband. To mark the occasion, her mother-in-law wrote to advise her on the importance of maintaining her ethical discretions once she was beyond the reach of her family. The elder Mrs. Huger wrote, "there are <u>moral</u> indispositions & casualties which will as certainly befall us," afflictions such as "colds, headaches, a mote in the eye, or a splinter in the finger," or resentments caused because "our wants, wishes, feelings & opinions…clash occasionally with those with whom we have intimate and frequent intercourse." In these cases, "it is the social duty of every one who has judgement, to anticipate them, & to endeavour to avoid them, or ward them off with dexterity, to heal them with skill or bear them with good humoured assignation…such evils are least

[8]Charlotte Hannah to Nannie E. Barksdale, March 16, 1851, Hannah-Barksdale Family Papers, Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA.

painfully met, & most happily escaped or quietly endured."[9] In other words, the stigma of improprieties required the appearance of dignity.

Mrs. L. M. W. Gibbs wrote to her cousin Charlotte Porcher to explain the responsibilities of marriage. She stated that her own wedding ceremony brought the notion that she was "no longer a light & thoughtless girl!" She realized then that "the happiness of another became from that moment [hers]" and she believed that Charlotte would feel the same weight on her wedding day. Mrs. Gibbs also advised her cousin that once a girl married, "she must be more self relying, for one looks up to her, heretofore it has been her sweet privilege like the tendril to clasp her parent vine, and rely more upon it than upon herself."[10] But, now she had to cut the parental tie and to meet her duty as a wife. She had to commit all of her mental and physical energy to the contentment of her husband and the maintenance of his honor. The informality of advice given by family and friends was complimented by the formal education provided by academies, seminaries, and colleges.

In 1861, Ella Clanton Thomas wrote that a "*thorough education*" was the "*greatest* of *temporal blessings*." Like Louisa McCord, Sarah Grimke, and Laura Wirt Randall, Thomas treasured her education. Yet, when she wrote these words, she was focused on the instruction of the South's future generations, both sons and daughters. The December 13 diary entry recorded her thoughts on the possible creation of a new university, where young men "might attain a much higher order of intellect than [they]

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[9]Mrs. K. Huger to Mrs. Joseph A. Huger, March 12, 1846, Huger Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

[10]L. M. W. Gibbs to Charlotte Porcher, October 8, 1853, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC.

could obtain in [an] ordinary college course." The idea of her sons attending such a university was pleasing to Thomas and her reflection on the education of her sons led to thoughts of her daughters' future. In Thomas's opinion, the type of education that southern society provided for its young ladies was insufficient. For most, their school years lasted only into the middle teens. Society considered girls' formal training to be complete between the ages of fifteen and eighteen. Thomas saw such an education as "too superficial" and she believed that "young girls [left] school *too soon*." She also deemed the mind as something that needed to "be trained, disciplined for after all [school] is only laying the foundation." Thomas accepted the role that the community played in the education of the South's young people; the entire plantation society aided in the development of individuals who conformed to the proper societal structure. For elite southern women, education was the starting point on the course to duty.[11]

The idea that women had a significant impact on the development of future generations made female education necessary. This was an opinion that originally came out of the concept of "republican motherhood." During the years after the American Revolution, concern that the republic's size precluded its ability to survive led to the origin of the ideal of "republican virtue." The principle asserted that only a citizenry of virtuous men who put the good of the nation before their own interests would ensure the continued health of the republic. As the first teachers of American children, mothers carried the responsibility of launching the republican education. By the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the principles of gender made women the moral exemplars of the

[11]Burr, *The Secret Eye*, 197-198; Censer, *North Carolina Planters*, 46.

family. These important social and familial roles made the proper female influence essential. Thus, it was a necessity that the education of women compliment their duty within the ethics of true womanhood.[12]

The education of the daughters of the planter aristocracy in the post-revolutionary era was largely a family matter. Mothers, often busy with their daily tasks as the plantation's mistress, commonly turned to other relatives to meet the obligations of instructing their girls. Parents often recruited older siblings and unmarried sisters or aunts as teachers. Home education usually concentrated on reading and geography. Wealthier planters hired tutors or governesses to work with their daughters and, in some cases, communities pooled their resources to provide their town or village with teachers for young women. Eventually, the creation of private seminaries and academies for girls assisted southern neighborhoods in their pursuit of female education.[13]

By the second decade of the nineteenth century, regional academies played a central role in the education of young southern women. These institutions, largely boarding schools, were often founded by teachers who worked with rooming houses to create a place of learning. Others were established by churches or by communities. Their origins notwithstanding, the schools were centers that were meant to indoctrinate young women in propriety, piety, and duty. It was in these academies that girls learned the principles of southern society and their place within it. In order to do this, the academies expanded their curricula from the basic reading, writing, and arithmetic to

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[12]Christie Anne Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1994), 15-16; Catherine Clinton, "Equally Their Due: The Education of the Planter Daughter in the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 2, (April 1982): 40.

[13]Clinton, "Equally Their Due," 44.

offering courses such as grammar, languages, history, and natural history. In some schools an extra fee allowed for instruction in penmanship, epistolary composition, Bible study, music, dance, or painting. While this expansion increased educational opportunity for women, it still did not reach the level that male institutions offered to young men.[14] The connection between social expectations and education was evident in the didactic writings of the period.

The connection between formal education and the social indoctrination of planters' daughters was revealed in the lessons that they received in school. James Garnett's *Lectures on Female Education* is a publication of lectures that were given to his wife's students at their school in Elmwood, Virginia. Printed for the edification of young women that were not able to attend the institution, the book consisted of lessons on important gender-related topics that were significant to the maintenance of honor and to the ideals of true womanhood. Subjects such as duty, reputation, piety, marriage, submission, deportment, and moral behavior were addressed and developed as principles that were embraced by plantation society.

One of the Garnett lectures promised the young students happiness through the execution of duty, which required that they "always endeavour to promote the good of others…the fulfillment of [their] moral and religious obligations." It was through this action that the young women would find themselves "objects of love, admiration, and esteem to the wise and the good throughout the whole circle of [their] acquaintance."

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[14]Clinton, "Equally Their Due," 47-49; Steven M. Stowe, "The Not-so-Cloistered Academy: Elite Women's Education and Family Feeling in the Old South," in *The Web of Southern Social Relations: Women, Family, and Education*, edited by Walter J. Fraser, Jr., R. Frank Saunders, Jr., and Jon L. Wakelyn (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1985), 92.

Garnett also warned that the failure to follow the "path of duty" was a "most criminal rebellion against the adorable giver of the benefaction." Since duty was both a "moral and religious obligation," adherence to these ideas was also the embodiment of piety. [15]

Garnett's lesson on marriage revealed the double-standard of the antebellum period. The lecture made clear his conviction that wives enter into marriage with a factual picture of the relationship. Qualities like good temper, good morals, and cheerfulness were "pre-requisites of no small importance" in a wife. Without these traits, matrimony was "a wearisome pilgrimage…with no refuge for the wretched wearer, but in death." Garnett also stated that it was necessary for brides to enter the relationship with a true picture of their husband's character and should not expect to find a hero from a novel. After all, "man at best, is but a very imperfect animal" and needed "greater allowances…for his defects, his frailties, and his vices." Garnett went on to explain that wives should not quarrel with their husbands. For if "the wife gets the better, she fails to elevate herself in the opinion either of her own sex, or [her husband's]; at the same time that she degrades her husband in the eyes of all," and in turn, threatened his honor. Wives were to be content "to let the chief control of family concerns remain where the laws both of God and man have placed it."[16] So, while the young wife was to put forward only her best qualities, she was to forgive her husband's failure to do the same.

Reputation, which was the foundation of honor, was another important topic of Garnett's speeches. On the subject of relationships with men, he advised his students not

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[15]James Garnett, *Lectures on Female Education, Comprising the First and Second Series of a Course Delivered to Mrs. Garnett's Pupils, at Elm-wood, Essex County, Virginia to which is Annexed The Gossip's Manual* (Richmond, VA: Thomas W. White, 1825), 62, 73-74, 230.

[16]Ibid., 213-214, 219-221.

to become too entwined. Even a platonic association between an unmarried girl and an unrelated man brought the "world's constant suspicion of her character" and caused her to be "shunned and despised by all the respectable part of society." Moreover, the lack of proper manners brought "neglect, and degradation, and scorn, and avoidance." Yet, the young women need not worry about meeting society's expectations, for they would "never be at a loss how to act, if [they] fulfil [their] obligations wisely and faithfully in these great domestick relations." Women were to look for "the continuance of domestick purity, for the revival of domestick religion, for the increase of our charities, and the support of what remains of religion in [the] private habits and publick institutions."[17] While Garnett's lectures fit perfectly into the educational ideals of the day, many southerners called for improvements in schools for girls.

Wesleyan Female College was established in 1839 in Macon. Originally known as the Georgia Female College, the school was one of the nation's first colleges for women. Despite the conventional thought that the South restricted the education of its women, one historian has noted that from 1850 to 1859 most of the nation's female colleges, thirty-two of thirty-nine were located in the South. There was a reason for this disparity. Unlike northerners, southerners did not see the establishment of colleges for women as a threat to the social order. In the North, it was feared that the higher education of both sexes would create a basis for the mingling of the public and private spheres. The section was, therefore, chiefly hesitant to launch a practice that its population considered dangerous to their society. In the South, however, the strong

[17]Ibid., 197, 241, 344, 347-348.

patriarchal foundation of the plantation system and the general adherence to gender structures gave the schools a social purpose. They were institutions that were to protect the status quo and to indoctrinate young ladies in the southern social order, not prepare them for careers. They reinforced the class, gender, and race distinctions of the South and made education a matter of reputation and honor.[18]

For the South's elite, a college education was a mark of refinement and social status for both the family and the individual. The planters also largely believed that it increased the pool of eligible marriage partners. Thus, it became both a financial and a social matter and offended the prospect of enhancing a family's economic potential and community standing. Many fathers hoped that a good education would make their daughters more attractive to men and would overcome any fiscal deficiencies. It was so important that fathers continued to pay their daughters' tuition, even during hard times. For this reason, many southerners considered the state of female education a vital issue. Thus, the belief that southern women had been "over-looked or forgotten" led to the call for the active reversal of the shortage of advanced education for young women. After all, with "woman's varied relations, her influence, her capabilities, her power to mould characters," it was necessary that she was prepared for the role that she was to play in the community.[19]

In a speech that appeared in southern journals in 1840, George F. Pierce, the first president of Wesleyan College denied that the new institution intended to advance any

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[18]Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle*, 2, 18.

[19]Clinton, "Equally Their Due," 39-60; Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle*, 3, 28, 31; George F. Pierce, "The Georgia Female College—Its Origin, Plan, and Prospects," *The Wesleyan Quarterly Review* Vol. 1 #2 (May 1964): 93.

arguments concerning "the equality of the male and female mind." He considered the question to be insignificant. The real issue of importance was that "girls *can* learn, and they *deserve* to be taught." Additionally, he asserted that there were benefits for both the individual and southern society in general. Pierce expressed his ideas about the equality between men and women and the advantages to be acquired through female education by stating,

> It is an unimportant inquiry (equality), the resolution of which is not material to the true interests of either sex….It is with society as with individuals, that what would be of itself convenient, and in respect of suitableness, would greatly inlarge the sphere of personal comfort, and contribute largely to utility, may yet be dispensed with, until the absence of it, as something important, shall cease to be marked.

In other words, once men and women stopped debating the superiority of one gender over the other, the realization that the education of young ladies was beneficial to both the individual and to the plantation system was certain to follow. For Pierce, the improvement of female education simply produced elite young women who were better prepared to meet their responsibilities to the planter community. In so doing, the advanced instruction would also enhance the young women's understanding of the relationship between their actions and the social position and honor of their families.[20]

George Pierce's belief in the necessity of a female liberal education was echoed by numerous articles and editorials in southern journals and magazines. In February 1840, an essay entitled "Thoughts on Female Education" appeared in the *Southern Ladies' Book*. The piece argued that the underestimation of the intellectual ability of the female mind led to deficiencies in the edification of women. Yet, the author believed that

[20]Pierce, "The Georgia Female College," 94.

reasonable and rational people were beginning to see their error and to appreciate that "man must feel woman's worth, both intellectual and moral—must feel how inseparably her high responsibilities are interwoven with the very framework of his truer and better interests, and how strongly her influence will tell upon his own, and his children's, happiness and well-being." Therefore, since women held a significant position in society, it was important that "female education should embrace such studies as are solid and useful, calculated to invigorate and expand the mind."[21]

A letter to the editor of *The Orion*, entitled "Female Education" and written by a South Carolinian also advocated the expansion of schooling for girls. Like Ella Clanton Thomas, the author believed that the education of women was "deficient and imperfect" because "school is so early left, and study so soon abandoned." The inadequacy was amplified by "the over estimate which [was] placed on the ornamental branches." The skills to play music or to paint meant nothing without the ability "to read and write correctly," for "there is neither taste nor judgement in condemning such a young lady." The author reinforced her view by stating, "I have seen a mother leave her tender babe, through a long night, while she trod the mazy dance. I have seen the lover of fiction, peevish and abstracted, poring from morn till eve over the pages of a novel; but a well educated woman, neglecting her own peculiar duties, and wandering from her sphere, I have never seen."[22] The woman who neglected her baby and spend her time reading failed to observe the gender principles and the tenets of female duty that were embraced

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[21]E. W. H., "Thoughts on Female Education," *Southern Ladies' Book: a Magazine of Literature, Science and Arts* Vol. 1 #2 (February 1840): 96.

[22]A Lady of South Carolina, "Female Education," *The Orion, a Monthly Magazine of Literature and Art (1842-1844)* Vol. 3 #2 (October 1843): 61-66.

by plantation society. While such inattention to family and duty was behavior that spoiled reputations and stained honor, the proper instruction prepared young women for the execution of their duty and the defense of their honor.

In January 1847, an address on female education by William Johnson appeared in *The Literary Emporium*. The lecture called for both the advances in the education and happiness of young women. It stated that a "woman's chief ambition is gratified by a single conquest; the scope of her happiness and usefulness is circumscribed by the domestic and social circle." Therefore, since "the *educated* woman forms the nucleus of society at home" and "her husband loves her because she is good, and venerates her because she is wise," the proper female education was important to domestic happiness. However, "woman should not be educated with reference to her individual happiness alone; she is a social being, and as such, is destined to have her influence on all around her; and you cannot educate one, without to a certain extent educating every other in the neighborhood."[23] The influence of informed women benefited the community through the distribution of female knowledge. For the advocates of female education, it instilled the South's social ideals, but it also created a population of women who were intellectually appealing and prepared to assist in their children's education. This advantage was enhanced through publications. The press was another significant element in the social indoctrination of southern women.

One of the most popular journals among antebellum southern women was *Godey's Lady's Book*. Published in Boston, the periodical advocated a regional version

[23]William Johnson, "Female Education," *The Literary Emporium; a Compendium of Religious, Literary, and Philosophical Knowledge* Vol. 5 #7 (January 1847): 14-23.

of nineteenth-century gender ideals. Local characteristics required the North and South to develop particular distinctions in gender standards and each region espoused their own concept of domesticity and the separation of the public and the private spheres. Prompted by the problems of increasing industrialization and urbanization, the northern ideology did not fit with the southern experience. The South lacked the same type of growth and commanded gendered values that suited its unique way of life and the ethic of honor.

Sarah Hale, a New Hampshire widow, became an important editor at *Godey's Lady's Book* when, in 1837, Louis Godey purchased Hale's failing periodical, *The Ladies Magazine*. She worked to maintain a didactic and intellectual directive in her new position. Yet, the publication eventually became primarily a fashion magazine, which made it acceptable in the South. The comments that Hale did make promoted gendered ideals that encompassed a rising feminine standing. Hale argued that as men increasingly entered the workplace, women experienced an increasing sense of influence within the private sphere and gained authority and status within her realm. The patriarchal nature of the plantation system, however, did not allow for a female domain. Men did not always leave home to work and maintained authority over the house, as well as the fields. Southern social foundations were created by men and were sustained through honor and could not be permitted to change. Since the social order of the plantation community was based on the power of men who dominated the southern society, the wearing away of

male authority threatened the preservation of slavery. Therefore, it was necessary that southern publications adhere to this regional adaptation of gender values.[24]

Journals, magazines, short stories, and novels were filled with depictions of the proper plantation woman. They were instruments of advice that targeted young women and sought to disseminate the principles and ideals of the society. They coached women on how to be the proper daughter, wife, mother, and home manager, perpetuating the region's fragile social order. Widely written by women, the articles were directed toward young ladies and covered everything from deportment to the connection between reputation and love.

Virginia Clay-Clopton illustrated the importance of the press in the indoctrination of young women in her memoir, *A Belle of the Fifties: Memoirs of Mrs. Clay of Alabama*. The wife of Senator Clement Claiborne Clay, Virginia had the opportunity to observe the social politics of Washington, D.C. Thus, her writings included her impressions of the people and the societal circles in which they moved. She wrote that she was at a disadvantage when she arrived in Washington because she "knew little of politics," a topic that society considered inappropriate for young ladies and was not included in their instruction. Yet, she remembered that from her "earliest girlhood" there were three lessons that she was faithfully taught. Virginia was constantly encouraged to "be proud alike of [her] name and blood and section, to read [her] Bible, and, last, to know [the]

[24]Nancy Woloch, *Women and the American Experience* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 100-111, 145; Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle*, 14.

Richmond Enquirer."[25] As a young girl Clay-Clopton was instructed to open her mind to the ideas expressed in the popular media and to observe the ethics honor and reputation.

The significance of female behavior to the southern social order was an important topic for publishers of plantation society. The article "The Influence of Manners," which appeared in the *Ladies' Magazine and Literary Gazette* in May 1834, used the example of the historical Roman matron to express the consequence of women's actions. It began with the statement that the consideration of manners should be "an indispensable study in…female schools." This was important because "the manners of women were, probably, to decide the destiny of our Republic." The author used the example of the Roman matron to emphasize the point. The elevation of the Roman character seemed appropriate because one of the most important elements in its formation was the "influence of female manners." To the writer, the Roman matron was due "esteem" and "respect" because she was "taught to place her glory in the faithful discharge of the domestic and maternal duties." The same "spirit of patriotism which impelled [her husband] to exert his valor in the field, and his wisdom in the senate, animated her mind in the instruction of her children, and the regulation of her family." Roman women were "remarkable for their modesty and decorum" and their "wisdom to know their proper sphere, and were not impelled by vanity to quit it."[26] Obtaining the image of the Roman matron became a life goal for many plantation women.

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[25]Virginia Clay-Clopton, *Belle of the Fifties: Memoirs of Mrs. Clay of Alabama*, Narrative by Ada Sterling, Introduction, Annotations, and Index by Leah Rawls Atkins, Joseph H. Harrison Jr., and Sara A. Hudson (New York: Doubleday, Page, and Company, 1905, reprint, Tuscaloosa and London: The Alabama University Press, 1999), 26.

[26]"The Influence of Manners," *Ladies' Magazine and Literary Gazette*, Vol. 7 #5, (May 1834): 216-217.

An October 1834 issue of the *Southern Rose Bud* carried an article entitled "A Good Daughter." The piece addressed the love of a father for his daughter and placed the "Good Daughter" squarely in the domestic sphere. It claimed that,

> a good daughter [was] the steady light of her parent's house. Her idea [was] indissolubly connected with that of his happy fireside. She [was] his morning sunlight, and his evening star. The grace, and vivacity, and tenderness of her sex have their place in the mighty sway which she holds over his spirit…She [was] the pride and ornament of his hospitality, and the gentle nurse of his sickness, and the constant agent in those numberless, nameless acts of kindness, which one chiefly cares to have rendered, because they are unpretending, but all-expressive proofs of love. And then what a cheerful sharer is she, and what an able lightener of a mother's cares![27]

By fulfilling such a persona, a good daughter readied herself for the role that she played as a wife and a mother. Her conduct as a young woman was a type of on-the-job training for the life that she led as an adult.

Another popular theme for southern journals was the significance of marriage and the manners adopted by proper wives. In January 1835, the *Southern Literary Messenger* ran "Advice from a Father to his Only Daughter: Written Immediately After Her Marriage." The piece was in the form of a letter which was meant to provide guidance to a new bride. The father asserted that the state of his daughter's marriage, whether it was happy or miserable, resulted from her actions. He stated that it "depend[ed] upon that prudent, amiable, uniform conduct, which wisdom and virtue so strongly recommend, on the one hand, or on that imprudence which a want of reflection or passion may prompt, on the other." There were three main issues that the father addressed. First, a wife should not give into any display of temper. She should "never to attempt to control your

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[27]Palfrey, "A Good Daughter," *Southern Rose Bud*, Vol. 3 #3, (October 1834): 19.

husband by opposition, by displeasure, or any other mark of anger." This was important because a woman's anger gained her nothing, but cost her everything. It caused the loss of "her husband's respect for her virtues…his love, and with that, all prospect of future happiness…the love of a husband can be retained only by the high opinion which he entertains of his wife."[28]

Another major theme included in "Advice from a Father to His Only Daughter" was that the wife needed to keep in mind that her husband's success was influenced by her manners, her reputation, and her honor. Therefore, it was necessary that she "take care to be affable and polite to the poorest as well as to the richest." After all, "a reserved haughtiness [was] a sure indication of a weak mind and an unfeeling heart." She was to respect her servants and to teach them to respect her. A good wife also cultivated her mind "by the perusal of those books which instruct while they amuse" and did "not devote much of [her] time to novels." She should also remember that "mutual politeness between the most intimate friends, is essential to that harmony, which should never be once broken or interrupted." Finally, a good wife also involved herself in "the management of…domestic concerns." She "let prudence and wise economy prevail" while "neatness, order and judgment" were found "in all your different departments" and created a reputation that enhanced her husband's honor.[29]

Another 1835 article that explained the aspects of a proper wife focused on six essential characteristics. Reverend Dr. Bishop stated in his sermon, "A Good Wife," that

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[28]"Advice from a Father to his Only Daughter: Written Immediately After Her Marriage," *Southern Literary Messenger*, Vol. 1 #5, (January 1835): 187-188.

[29]Ibid.

common sense was among the most essential features of a wife. Without common sense, "every attainment she may have acquired, [was] of little use either to herself, or to her family." She also had to "be distinguished for self-command." Since she had influence over her family, she needed to have control over herself at all times. Next, the good wife embraced industry and economy. She should efficiently use all of her time and resources. Bishop claimed that it was in the best interest of the nation that every mother and daughter in the United States learn this lesson. The fourth aspect outlined by Reverend Bishop was that a wife should be affectionate. Additionally, a good wife had a "domestic disposition," a natural inclination toward family and home that allowed them to dominate her thoughts and her attention. Finally, "all these and similar qualifications in the good wife must be associated with the possession and the exercise of genuine and ardent piety."[30]

Motherhood was a common theme covered by advice columns. The *Ladies' Magazine* included a regular feature called "Letters from a Mother." The item regularly discussed valuable maternal merits. The April 1828 issue argued that an appropriate mother maintained a keen observation while rearing her children. She was constantly aware of and understood how events effected "the character of those whom nature and custom consign[ed] expressly to her care." The author stated that education above all else, was "essential to ultimate success." The May 1828 issue called attention to the fundamental nature of a mother's influence on her children. It explained that the manner in which a mother addressed concepts gained by her children helped them to determine

[30]Rev. Dr. Bishop, "A Good Wife," *Ladies' Magazine and Literary Gazette*, Vol. 8 #4 (April 1835): 228-229.

whether they saw the ideas as good or evil. Therefore, it was important that mothers always tempered their responses to their children. This thought strengthened the belief that the proper education of younger generations was essential for the maintenance of the South's social order. As long as mothers connected the qualities of good and evil in the correct manner, the values of the southern society prevailed and their image and honor were preserved.[31]

Nineteenth-century periodicals reiterated the same subject matter promoted by advice articles through poetry and short stories. As a young lady, Annie Jeter Carmouche of Louisiana kept a scrapbook that included clippings of poetry. The poems carried titles such as "A Woman's Question," "A Young Lady's Solilquy," "Female Delicacy," and "The Wife." All four of these works centered on the character of women and the social path that they were to take. "Female Delicacy" declared that, for women, "delicacy [stood] foremost within the province of good taste." The author of "A Young Lady's Solilquy" gently questioned the constraints placed on women and carried a tone of opposition. Nonetheless, the poem clearly outlined the proper life goal for young women in plantation society, their ultimate marriage. The work exemplified the accepted social viewpoint in its opening line by declaring "Uselessly, aimlessly drifting through life, what was I born for? 'For Somebody's wife,' I am told by my mother."[32]

Even the critical reviews included in periodicals were often used as pedagogical tools. In a July 1846 article, "The Condition of Woman," the *Southern Quarterly Review*

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[31]"Letters From A Mother," *Ladies' Magazine*, Vol. 1 #4 (April, 1828): 166-167; "Letters From A Mother," *Ladies' Magazine*, Vol. 1 #5 (May 1828): 221

[32]Annie Jeter Carmouche Scrapbook, Annie Jeter Carmouche Collection, Manuscripts Department, Special Collections, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

analyzed and censured the book, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, by Margaret Fuller of Massachusetts. The piece was a challenge to Fuller's advocacy for the equality of women and her idea of the highest form of marriage. Fuller argued that a true union between a man and a woman required the removal of the dominating male influence to enable the woman to become an individual and self-dependent unit. She believed that only such an occurrence allowed the union to develop into one of mutual dependence, admiration, and respect where the man and woman were equals. Since Fuller's book supported views that were contrary to southern gender conventions and, therefore, endangered the social order, the editors of *Southern Quarterly Review* deemed it vital to confront Fuller's work.

The author of "The Condition of Woman" chose to dispute the merits of Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* with regional differences rather than on the basis of ideology. He argued that the requirements of plantation society were different from those found in the North and that this disparity demanded a distinctive foundation for gender restraints. The work used "matters of history" to state that women were "subjected to the influence of certain external causes" and asserted that the "different state of society" necessarily shaped the "peculiarity of manners and customs," which influenced the "character and position of the female." Consequently, through the "reflective operation of moral causes," woman affected "the state of the society in which she exists."[33] Thus, it was imperative that the social position of women did not change

[33]A.G.M., "The Condition of Woman," *Southern Quarterly Review* Vol. 10 #19 (July 1846):149.

and that the South's young women were not exposed to works such as Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*.

Of course, not all critical reviews were full-length articles. Many of the written assessments were shorter references that varied from a few sentences to a few paragraphs. Still, they usually managed to compare the literary work in question to southern values. In January 1836, the *Southern Literary Messenger* recommended *The Young Wife's Book; A Manual of Moral, Religious, and Domestic Duties* for newly-married young women. The editors reported that they could "conscientiously recommend [the] little book." They believed that it was particularly well-done because it "mingled amusement and instruction." It did not impart new information and direction; there were other works that covered the same material, but the volume did it in a way that made it pleasurable to read. The editors affirmed this as beneficial because even a book that conveyed the proper conduct and values of young wives was of no use to society if no one read it.[34]

In July 1852, the *Southern Quarterly Review* managed to reinforce the education of the South's young people in a one-sentence review of Caroline Gilman's *The Recollections of a Southern Matron*. In the preface to this fictional story, Gilman explained that she produced the work "as exact a picture as possible of local habits and manners." The journal's review reported that the author accomplished her purpose. It described the book as "a series of agreeable Southern pictures from the life—truthful, pleasant, moral; a volume of genial fireside reading, which may safely be commended to the pure heart and gentle spirit." By reading this work, women were given an illustration

[34]"Young Wife's Book," *Southern Literary Messenger* Vol. 2 #2 (January 1836): 127.

of the perfect plantation lifestyle, one that met all of the requirements of southern ideology.[35]

The domestic novels that were written by women during the antebellum era were popular among elite southern women. By the 1850s, the works accounted for the majority of the period's best-selling fiction and were a matter of an ongoing debate. The acceptability of fiction reading among plantation women was widely questioned in the pre-Civil War South. Many planter women outwardly claimed to be against novel reading, but from all indications the habit was extensive. While Caroline Hentz sold 93,000 copies of her works in three years and Augusta Evans sold more than 425,000 copies over the life of her career, Emma Dorothy Eliza Neville Southworth claimed a yearly salary of $10,000 from her writing. Yet, critics considered novel writing and reading unfeminine and harmful to the minds of the weaker sex. Most of them believed that it was important that fiction be replaced with more serious reading material. Elizabeth Ruffin displayed the general censure of the practice when her diary revealed that she "took a small peep in *Tom Jones*" and apologized for causing "shock [to] any one of [her reader's] senses by such an *unladylike* and ungenteel confession."[36]

The domestic novels that were produced in the South differed from northern ones and sought to advance the values of plantation society. Northern antebellum literature

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[35]Caroline Gilman, *Recollections of a New England Bride and of a Southern Matron* (New York: G. P. Putnam & Co., 1852), iiv; "Critical Notices: Series of Popular Southern Books," *Southern Quarterly Review* Vol. 6 #11 (July 1852): 268.

[36]Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 131, 173-174; Catherine Clinton, *The Other Civil War: American Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1984; reprint, 1999), 48; Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 134; Elizabeth Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South: Defenders of Southern Culture* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 3; Michael O' Brien, ed., *An Evening When Alone*, 60.

generally contained the theme that American society was in danger and the corresponding plots included efforts toward social reform. Southern fiction depicted the plantation community as socially superior to northern industrial society and centered on the ethics of honor and duty. The works advocated the societal principles of the South and portrayed characters that formed examples of the ideal elite southern woman. While some were critical of women reading novels, the books played a significant role in the education of planter women and served as instruments of instruction for proper female behavior.[37]

The compositions created by female authors and read widely by women were judged by male standards. Men saw them as unworthy because they presented the impractical exposure of social problems and were saccharine and not necessarily realistic. They also accused the works of giving their readers false expectations of what men were like and what to hope for in married life. Hence, the perception of the proper southern male and female became distorted. This meant that fiction was dangerous for young women. The "tales of fancy…set forth to imagination a *Beau ideal* of perfection" and "represented as objects of love and of attainment, creatures of more than human, nay, more than angelic accomplishments," causing women to "look around with a jaundiced eye for the original of the picture." In addition, it was thought that sentimental prose did not "appeal…to the national character or training" of Americans. Their nature was

[37]Elizabeth Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South,* 18-21.

"eminently [more] practical." Fiction was not sensible, therefore, it was not worthy for Americans to read.[38]

The other side of the argument supported the ability of fiction written by women to be worthy. To be creditable, though, the female authors had to meet certain qualifications. Their content had to encompass the social and gender conventions of the South, which made these "judicious female writers indispensable to the community." After all, since women were naturally "more patient and confiding, and continue[d] to trust and hope" the female mind was more pure and offered "a transparent purity of thought, a fervent sanctity of sentiment…which [could not] fail to make her writings potent instrumentalities for the quieting of passion and the disarming of vice." This made women "eminently the author[s] of piety and faith." Provided the works of female authors followed the proper vein, they were permissible reading material.[39]

The importance of fictional subject matter was reinforced for E. D.E. N. Southworth when she was twice admonished by her publisher. On two separate occasions, Henry Peterson's *Saturday Evening Post* refused to publish portions of her writing because he did not deem them as proper. The first letter, referred to Southworth's addition of a chapter as a "capital literary error." The new material was a criticism of the southern custom which encouraged girls to marry at a young age. Thus, it carried a plotline in which an older man coerced a young girl into marriage. Peterson believed that readers would discard "the tale in disgust." They would have "resented…a character who

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[38]Clinton, *The Other Civil War*, 48-49; U. R., "The Dangers that Beset the Female Sex," *Ladies Magazine and Literary Gazette* Vol. 2 #6 (June 1829): 279-281; "Sentimental Prose Fiction," *Southern Quarterly Review* New Series Vol. 1 #2 (July 1850): 355-369.

[39]L., "Female Prose Writers of America," *Southern Quarterly Review* New Series Vol.5 #9 (January 1852): 114-121.

could force a young girl into a marriage against her tears and protestations."[40] The story, thereby, was unacceptable to Peterson. Works within the popular religious genre, conversely, did not encounter similar problems.

Many plantation women read religious literature as a benchmark for proper behavior, reputation, and honor. The merit of such works was measured by the quality of the characters and their ability to solve problems and to meet social expectations. They also had to represent the appropriate feminine identity. Fannie Page Hume recorded her impressions of the book *Edith's Ministry* in her diary. She noted "Oh, that I could imitate one half of her lovely Christian graces." Fannie said that "such books always depress me" and that they made her "feel so acutely [her] own unworthiness."[41] Hume took the example presented in spiritual novels to heart and tried to form her personal qualities in a corresponding manner. In a way, the respective writers of the works became her tutors.

Novel writing and reading was publicly condemned by men and women of the plantation society. At the same, though, the letters and diaries of antebellum planter women indicate that novel reading was a popular pastime. Historians Steven Stowe, Nina Baym, Catherine Clinton, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, and Elizabeth Moss all indicate that the fiction written by women for women played an important in the creation and preservation of the identity of elite southern women. Stowe asserts that by defining female responsibilities and expectations the novels assisted in the socialization of women.

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[40]Henry Peterson to E.D.E.N. Southworth, September 10, 1849, E.D.E.N. Southworth Papers, Manuscript Department, William R. Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

[41]Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black & White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 270-271; Fannie Page Hume Diary, January 16, 1860, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Fox-Genovese argues that the novels' characters became models of behavioral excellence and taught the reader that female identity could not be separated from duty. Clinton and Baym largely agree with these ideas, but also address the criticism that was found in plantation society. Clinton believes that the disapproval regarded the material harmful for the young impressionable mind and that those who were critical of the fiction advocated more serious reading material. Baym, however, asserts that the condemnation came from the fear that social principles were breaking down. The women's novels indicated the self-representation and individuality of women in a society that deemed female weakness beneficial for the community. The observation of domesticity and the ideals of the private sphere represented social stability and by stepping away from the standards women threatened society.[42]

The South created and produced women's novels that were different from those of the North, in both plot and character. Elizabeth Moss has illustrated that northern stories indicated a willingness to change society through reform, but southern books were concerned with social stability. The northern and southern heroines were also dissimilar. In the North, the female protagonist was usually an orphan, traveled from place to place while searching for self-knowledge, and never strayed from socially accepted behavior. The southern heroine usually had at least one live parent, stay within the plantation community, and experienced problems as she wandered away from society's standards. By allowing the main character to move away from communal values, southern authors

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[42]Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 45, 242, 247; Clinton, *The Other Civil War*, 48-49; Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South*, 67- 68; Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), 97-98.

demonstrated to their readers the dire consequences related to the failure of women to accomplish their duty and to adhere to southern gender principles. Stowe argues that northern and southern readers also interpreted the novels through the lens of their own social ideals. He names changing attitudes about marriage as an example of the different understanding of the readers in the two regions. While plantation marriages continued to be used to strengthen family and fortune among the southern aristocracy, the northern elite were moving toward companionate marriages. Whether a disparity of understanding existed or not, planter women recognized the depiction of duty, reputation, and honor within southern fiction.[43]

The South's plantation society generally believed that female fiction authors were unfeminine and harmful to their women readers. Southern diarists Catherine Devereux Edmondston and Carey North expressed their disapproval of novel reading in their journals. Edmondston declared that "women have no business to rush into print; so wide an arena does not become them" and that women who published forgot that "a woman's first ornament [was] modesty." Carey North indicated the manly nature of the publishing world when she recorded meeting Louisa McCord in her diary and noted that she found McCord to be "a masculine clever person, with the most mannish attitudes & gestures, but interesting & very entertaining." Mary Bayard Clarke, who was Edmondston's older sister and a published author, attempted to deflect this idea and to preserve her image as a southern lady by using a pseudonym. Additionally, Clarke illustrated her respect for the

[43]Elizabeth Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South: Defenders of Southern Culture* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 13-14; Stowe, *Intimacy and Power*, 67-68, 105-106.

female sphere in her communication with George Bagby, who was the editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger*. In a letter that discussed her possible employment with the journal, Clarke stated that she trusted that she would "never appear in the *Messenger* except under [her] nom de plume" and told the editor that he could "say what [he] like about Tenella, but nothing at all about Mrs. Clarke." She also informed Bagby that she "never [saw her] name in print even though coupled with a compliment without feeling that [her] private rights have been invaded."[44]

Louisa McCord, Mary Bayard Clarke and their contemporaries braved social criticism and wrote of what they knew. While they wrote to sell books, they also wrote to reach the women of the plantation society by tackling the problems that women faced and by attempting to create characters with which their readers could identify. While the home was the primary concern and the household was the main setting for the story, the vulnerability of women outside of the home was also a common theme. The goal was the creation of a connection between tradition and reality. The broad dissemination of this fiction provided a message to the young women of the South and explained the consequences of misbehavior and the loss of reputation and honor. However, the plot was not meant to be taken literally, it was simply a guide to acceptable behavior. Like other forms of publications, fiction offered a model of the ideal and antebellum women novelists were conduits to the maintenance of the social order.[45]

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[44]Catherine Devereux Edmondston, *Journal of a Secesh Lady*, 282; O'Brien, *An Evening Alone*, 174; Terrell Armistead Crow and Mary Moulton Barden, *Live Your Own Life: The Family Papers of Mary Bayard Clarke, 1854-1886* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 57, 66.

[45]Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 45, 247; Clinton, *The Other Civil War*, 48-49; Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South*, 68; O'Brien, *An Evening When Alone*, 174; Kirsten E. Wood, *Masterful Women: Slaveholding Widows from the American Revolution through the Civil War* (Chapel Hill

One popular southern author was Susan Petigru King. Born in 1824, the South Carolina native, attended female academies in Charleston and Philadelphia. She received a traditional education that instilled the social expectations that women were to meet. Her writing reflected the values that were folded into her instruction. In the short story, *Old Maidism vs. Marriage*, King endorsed the social requirement that all women marry.[46]

The story opened with a discussion about marriage between seven single friends. The conversation led the girls to make a pact to return to the subject in ten years' time. Those who were still unmarried at the end to the specified period were to meet to discuss the matter of matrimony. Those who were married were to send a letter that described their life as a wife. When the designated date arrived, there was only one girl, Caroline Bloomfield, who was unmarried. The letters from her six friends did not help to assuage Caroline's doubts over the condition of marriage. Instead of reassurance, they were filled with tales of submission, domination, sick children, isolation, and sacrifice.

Prior to the arrival of the letters, Caroline Bloomfield was being courted by Edward Allingham. When Edward asked Caroline to marry, she replied that he would have to wait for an answer. She did not want to commit herself until she read the expected letters. After listening to an explanation of the agreement, Edward was convinced that the missives would only support his case and that of matrimony. He agreed to wait. However, the letters had the opposite effect. After reading them, Caroline was more convinced than ever that marriage was not for her.

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and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 93-94; Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers* 97-98.

[46]Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, *A Family of Women: The Carolina Petigrus in Peace and War* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 15, 43-44.

As Caroline opened the first epistle she learned that her friend Laura Stanley Leslie, lived a life of isolation and sacrifice. The mother of two sons and a daughter, Laura spent her days caring for her children and working in her household. Her husband spent his days working in the fields. Laura never visited the city and never saw any of her friends. Her husband was kind and indulgent, but he did not believe that she should spend time reading, which had always been her passion because he preferred to see her "occupied in domestic concerns." Additionally, since her husband did not like music and she was subjected to his wishes, her harp was stored away and she had no time for drawing and painting. At the same time, Laura stated that she was "quite satisfied and contented" with her life. She had simply shown the "sharpest edges and truest colors, so as to write with the candor that [they] promised each other."[47]

The other five letters were similar to Laura's. Due to financial difficulties, the husband of another friend moved his family to Texas, where she found "everything very dismal and wretched." She lived with a husband who was "dreadfully stubborn" and "horribly afraid of being ruled by his wife." He was always "kicking against imaginary obstacles, held up to his wrath by possible antagonists." A third friend was then a penniless widow with two children. She was left in this state by a husband who was "a gay spendthrift" and "took to 'evil courses.'" Still, she was careful to state that she was not against marriage. She simply advised that it be entered into with more caution than

[47]Susan Petigru King, *Old Maidism vs. Marriage*, in *Old Maids: Short Stories by Nineteenth Century U. S. Women Writers*, compiled and with an introduction by Susan Koppelman (Boston, London, Melbourne, and Henley: Pandora Press, 1984), 75.

she showed. A fourth letter assured Caroline that despite all of the pitfalls involved, "a woman's surest happiness is found in marriage."[48]

Confused over Edward's proposal, Caroline sought the advice of Dora, her sister-in-law. The counsel began with Dora's explanation of what Caroline's life would be like as an unmarried woman. As she grew older, she would be alone. At the end of the day, her friends would return to their homes and families and she would be "alone and shut out from many privileges" on the outside of society. She would have no one closely connected to her. While her family would always care for her, Caroline would always feel secondary to nieces and nephews. Dora pointed out that while,

> you may do a deal of good; your life may be very useful, very cheerful, very full of pleasant duties; but still a mother will always rank you in actual necessity to those around her. Your nephews and nieces will love you dearly, but not with that clinging tenderness that belongs to a child's love, that heart-to-heart affection…on earth there cannot be greater contentment than in a family where a man and wife truly love, and worthily endeavor to make each other's happiness.[49]

Dora's advice helped Caroline to triumph over her doubts and to acknowledge that marriage was the better course for her. King finished the story with Caroline's acceptance of Edward's proposal, demonstrating to all of her readers that the best life was found within the social order.

The stories of E. D. E. N. Southworth were contradictions that belied the reality of her life. While Southworth's life revealed her failure to be the social standards of the private sphere, her works embraced the plantation gender values and demonstrated the significance of the fulfillment of women's duty. A resident of Virginia during most of

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[48]Ibid., 77-80.
[49]Ibid., 83-84.

her life, the author taught school until she married Frederick H. Southworth in 1840. The unhappy marriage led her back into the schoolroom until she eventually supported herself by writing fiction for periodicals. Despite the unconventional aspects of her life, Southworth conformed her stories to the southern pattern and encouraged her readers to follow the societal notions of the proper woman.[50]

In her short story, *The Wife's Victory*, E.D.E.N Southworth told a tale of a marriage that encompassed love, respect, and the proper wifely behavior. Perhaps, it was the union that Southworth wished that she was able to achieve. The narrative highlighted the marital duties of compliance and submission and contended that the qualities brought true happiness to a marriage. The wife's sacrifice of obedience won her husband's love and esteem and created the perfect relationship. The work is the story of Mary and Catherine (Kate) Gleason. During their infancy, the two girls lost both of their parents and were taken in by their grandfather, Captain Gleason. At the time that the sisters arrived at his home, the captain was mourning a son who was lost at sea and he named them his heirs.

By the time the captain died, Mary was widowed and remarried. Her second husband, Mr. Leslie, agreed to place the inheritance into a trust for Mary's daughter, Sylvia. However, the plan to use the money to provide for Sylvia's future went awry when the captain's lost son suddenly returned home. With the belief that the captain would have left the money to his son if he knew that he was still alive, Mr. Leslie gave Mary's portion of the inheritance to Gleason. This decision was followed by the arrival

[50]Lucian Lamar Knight, compiler, *Biographical Dictionary of Southern Authors* (Atlanta: The Martin & Hoyt Company, 1929, reprinted, Detroit: Gale Research Company, Book Tower, 1978), 411.

of a letter from Sylvia's grandmother Madame D'Arblay. The letter explained that the elder woman was alone and that she hoped that the Leslies would allow Sylvia to live with her and to become her heir. Due to financial reversals and his inability to provide for her in the same way, Mr. Leslie decided to send Sylvia to her grandmother.

Mary Leslie was crushed by her husband's decision to send her daughter away but despite her intense sorrow, she did not argue against his resolution. Madame D'Arblay arrived at the Leslie home to prepare Sylvia for their life together. Overcome with grief on the night before the planned departure, Mary sank to her knees and began to pray. She asked for the "strength and resignation to bear [the separation] carefully." Mr. Leslie was so moved by his wife's earnest praying that he could not bring himself to send Sylvia away and exclaimed to Mary, "You have won my deepest love, my highest esteem…won it by your self-control. You have established yourself firmly and permanently in your husband's respect and affection."[51] Their story ended happily with Madame D'Arblay living out the rest of her life with the Leslies. By following society's gender conventions and adhering to her husband's wishes Mary found contentment within her marriage.

Southworth told the story of Kate Gleason in a sequel entitled *The Married Shrew*. The author continued the themes of submission and obedience. However, this time she used a noncompliant wife to illustrate her argument. Approximately one month after Mary Leslie's crisis was settled, her sister Kate married a naval captain, Lemeul Dunn. Kate entered into the marriage determined that her husband would submit to her wishes, instead of controlling her with his. Since her life with her grandfather, then with

[51]E.D.E.N. Southworth, "The Wife's Victory," in *The Wife's Victory; and Other Nouvellettes* (Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson and Brothers: 1875), 53-54.

sister, was very domestic, Kate was eager to use her status as a married woman to enter society. She attended balls and parties, flirting shamelessly with all the men. Her husband, however, she ignored. Kate also refused her husband's wish to ask his mother to live with them. Kate thought that he wanted her mother-in-law to watch over her. Dunn eventually began to drink to excess and during an argument, he slapped Kate.

When Dunn received orders to report to his ship for sea duty, he hoped to first spend some time with Kate. Unable to forgive her husband, Kate went out for the night and Dunn returned home to find their infant son alone with the servants. Forced by his wife's negligence, he made the decision to take his son to his mother. Leaving the boy under the care of his grandmother, Dunn reported for duty. When Kate arrived at home to find only a note from her husband awaiting her, she went into hysterics, convulsed, broke a blood vessel, and hemorrhaged. She nearly died, but eventually recovered. When she awoke, she found a strange woman caring for her. After they formed a bond, the woman told Kate that she was her mother-in-law and they sent for Kate's son. It was another three years before Dunn returned.

During the years that Dunn was gone, Kate grieved his loss and she became convinced that her actions drove him away and that she would never see him again. Then, Kate had a dream that Dunn was dead, which drove her to admit to herself that the manner that she conducted herself as a wife was wrong. It was after she finally saw the

errors of her ways that Dunn returned. Kate begged for her husband's forgiveness and was taken back into his trust.[52]

Southworth's stories were meant to be pedagogical as well as entertaining. The young ladies who read the stories saw a woman who met the social expectations of a southern wife and found happiness in her marriage. On the other hand, the wife that did not follow the prescribed marital conventions lost everything that was important. She regained her husband and her marriage only after she saw the light and vowed that in the future she would be the perfect obedient and submissive wife.

A native of Lancaster, Massachusetts, Caroline Lee Hentz moved to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, soon after her marriage to N. M. Hentz. After several years in North Carolina the couple moved to Kentucky, Ohio, Alabama, and finally to Georgia.[53] Although Hentz was originally from a northern state, she assumed the social values of her adopted home and wrote fictional literature that embraced those principles and expressed the significance of family honor. Her stories encouraged the young women who read them to conform their behavior to accepted conventions, and, thereby, to protect their personal and familial reputations.

Caroline Lee Hentz dealt with the importance of young women marrying in her work, *Eoline; or, Magnolia Vale*. As the novel began, Eoline Glenmore learned that her father had chosen a husband for her, Horace Cleveland and she was surprised and angered over his decision. Eoline did not like Cleveland and believed that he did not like

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[52]E.D.E.N. Southworth, "The Married Shrew: A Sequel to The Wife's Victory," in *The Wife's Victory; and Other Nouvellettes* (Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson and Brothers, 1875) 57-83.

[53]Mary Forrest, *Women of the South Distinguished in Literature* (New York: Charles B. Richardson, 1866), 265-271.

her. She, therefore, refused to agree to the marriage. The challenge to his honor and his authority as family patriarch angered her father. He told his daughter, "This is the alternative—choose this moment. On one side, wealth, talents, influence, friends, and favor—on the other, poverty, disgrace, and banishment."[54] Eoline took the second option and left her father's home.

To support herself, Eoline Glenmore took a position as a music teacher at Magnolia Vale, an academy for young ladies. She settled easily into her new occupation, but could not forget that her father stated that her disobedience brought him "disgrace." Eoline, therefore, wrote to ask Glenmore to forgive her "neglect of duty." His pride and his need to retrieve his honor and his authority would not allow a reunion with his daughter under her conditions. He believed that "In a struggle for power, for a father to yield to a child was monstrous, unnatural; it was an outrage upon social regulations, an infringement of the Divine law."[55]

Horace Cleveland eventually arrived at Magnolia Vale to take Eoline home. He told her that he was responsible for her exile and that he was going away so that she could return home without the issue of a marriage between them. Eoline assured him that it was not his fault and that she could not go home until her father relented. They parted as friends, after honestly admitting that it was their parents' attempt to force them together that caused their resistance. Though Cleveland returned home, he and Eoline remained in touch and he periodically looked in on her.

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[54]Caroline Lee Hentz, *Eoline or Magnolia Vale: A Novel* (Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson and Brothers, 1852; reprint, Freeport and New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 11.

[55]Ibid., 22, 24, 32.

During Eoline's time at Magnolia Vale, a new teacher joined the staff. Like Eoline, Mr. St. Leon was a music enthusiast and was immediately drawn to her. She rejected his attention, asking for time to analyze her feelings and his character. Eoline began to compare St. Leon to Horace Cleveland, to the latter's benefit. Despite her original opinion of Cleveland as "cold, distant, reserved, and haughty,"[56] Eoline began to see him as a man of honor. At the same time, she found St. Leon to be weak of character. Nonetheless, she eventually committed herself to marry St. Leon. During a serious illness from which Eoline did not believe he would recover, she accepted his proposal of marriage. When he improved, she felt that she had to stand by her word, despite her growing love for Cleveland. Still, the engagement was ultimately dissolved.

Eoline's relationship with her father remained unresolved through most of the novel. After Cleveland's first visit to Magnolia Vale, he spoke to Glenmore about allowing Eoline to return home. Over time, his entreaty was joined by Glenmore's family, friends, and servants. As a result, he relented and wrote a letter of reconciliation to his daughter. The letter was lost and did not reach Eoline for many months. Once it was received, Eoline returned home. After her reunion with her father, she told him that she now wanted to marry Horace Cleveland. They married and entered into a happy union.

Through the story of Eoline's resistance to convention, Hentz was able to demonstrate the wisdom of following the social requirements of duty and honor. Eoline's refusal to accept her father's authority forced her to leave her home and family. She also

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[56]Ibid., 8.

lost social status through her subsequent teaching position. However, when she admitted to her father that she had "neglected her duty" and recognized his influence as the head of the family, Eoline began to regain what she lost and to restore her family's honor. The lesson within the work is clear. When young women followed the rules in the patriarchal South, they found love, respect, and happiness. When they did not adhere to the preordained expectations, they faced the loss of status and reputation and unhappiness.

Augusta Jane Evans was born in 1835 in Columbus, Georgia. In an attempt to recover from economic difficulties, the Evans family moved to Texas in 1845. Augusta returned to the Southeast when she moved to Mobile, Alabama, in 1849, spending much of her life in that city. Forced to withdraw from school due to ill health, she was educated by her mother, who helped her daughter develop a love for scholarly pursuits. Having served as a nurse during the Civil War, Evans married Lorenzo Madison Wilson in 1868. She continued writing after her marriage and produced a novel nearly every decade until her death in 1909. Her works revealed her passion for religion, politics, the mind, and the South. Evans's books defended southern society and its related doctrines and sought to persuade the reader to adhere to traditional gender roles.[57]

The themes found in Augusta Jane Evans's work, *Beulah* were typical of the southern sentimental novel. The book forced the reader to confront the consequences of nonconformity and the contentment of conventionality. The narrative is the story of Beulah Benton. Orphaned as a young girl, Beulah's tragic childhood, combined with a crisis of faith, established her determination to thwart social conventions and to become

[57]Augusta Jane Evans, *Beulah*, edited, with an introduction, by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), ix-x.

an independent woman. It was only after her achievement of a self-sufficient life, however, that Beulah learned that only her adherence to social standards maintained her reputation and honor and brought her true happiness.

A resident of the Orphan Asylum, Beulah met Dr. Guy Hartwell at the death of her younger sister Lily. Devastated by her loss, Beulah was inconsolable and she fell into a deep depression. The acquaintance between Beulah and the doctor was strengthened by a serious illness. When Beulah fell ill, Hartwell tended her. By the time Beulah recovered, he was attached to her. He took the young girl to his home and appointed himself her guardian. This was the beginning of a complex relationship that was one of the central themes of the novel.

As the Hartwell ward, Beulah received an education and was free to frequent the social circles that were closed to her as an orphan. It was during her school years that she began to formulate the ideas that were contrary to societal expectations. Her new views about female independence placed her on a life path that led to loneliness and discontent. Beulah's problem with society was centered on a divergent definition of duty. She came to believe that independence was the most important component of duty. To meet her obligations she needed to support herself and ultimately accomplished the goal as a teacher and a writer. However, her determination to be self-reliant placed her at odds with Hartwell and others in her life, causing her to enter a period of loneliness and social ostracism.

Even as Beulah prepared for a career as a teacher, her associates constantly admonished her that her thinking was flawed and that she was going to ruin her life. Her

friend Clara explained that a woman was not meant to work outside of the home and that one that did enter the public sphere damaged her own reputation and honor. She told Beulah that a "woman was intended as a pet plant, to be guarded and cherished; isolated and uncared for, she droops, languishes and dies." Ever determined, Beulah replied, "I can stand up…straight and high. Stand by myself: battle with wind and rain, and tempest roar; be swayed and bent, perhaps, in the storm, but stand unaided, nevertheless."[58]

Upon her graduation, Dr. Hartwell asked Beulah to stay with him as his daughter and to allow him to introduce her into society. Her rejection prompted him to reply by assuring her that her "pride will wreck you; wreck your happiness, your peace of mind." Hartwell's sentiments were reiterated by Beulah's long-time friend, Eugene. Upon finding that Beulah moved out of the Hartwell house, he attempted to discuss the consequences of her actions. When Beulah asked why he objected to her determination to support herself, he cited her violation of the customary values of gender by replying, "because you are unnecessarily lowering yourself in the estimation of the community." Yet, despite the harm that she was doing to her honor, she continued to believe that "there is nothing a woman cannot do, provided she puts on the armour of duty, and unsheathes the sword of a strong, unbending will."[59]

A major theme of the novel is Beulah's loss of religious faith. Mrs. Williams, matron at the orphanage, discovered Beulah's diminished devotion and exclaimed that "a Godless woman is a horror above all things…you have forsaken the 'ways of

[58]Ibid., 116.
[59]Ibid., 144, 185, 190.

pleasantness, and the paths of peace.'"[60] In an attempt to find some belief system to fill the void left by her lack of religious beliefs; Beulah began to read widely and to study philosophy. The more she read, the more confused she became. Until, one night Beulah's uncertainty reached a peak and she broke down. She eventually recognized her failure and surrendered her will to God, accepting the feminine instinct for piety. Once she began to allow her pride and will to be bent to social expectations her life began to turn around.

Shortly after she moved out of the Hartwell house, Guy proposed marriage and was rejected by Beulah. Not wishing to watch her destroy herself, Hartwell decided to take an extended trip abroad and spent several years traveling around the world. Just as Beulah began to realize all of her errors and that she truly loved her absent guardian, Hartwell returned. Beulah and Hartwell married and she found the happiness that had long eluded her because she failed to adhere to society's gender conventions. Her new found contentment reinforced the social ideals of the South and illustrated that women who led the proper life protected their reputations and honor and were happy, while those who did not were miserable.

King, Southworth, Hentz, and Evans all produced literary works that advocated women's adherence to the South's customary social expectations and encouraged their readers to embrace the traditional directives of marriage and motherhood. Along with the entire plantation community, women's literature sought to instill the ethics of reputation and duty in elite young women. Through this very specific indoctrination the southern

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[60]Ibid., 314.

gentry reinforced a female identity that supported the ideals of honor. Since a man's honor and social and political power depended on his family's obedience to precise behavior, it was vital that he champion the introduction of the essentials of proper conduct. Thus, family members, friends, schools, and the press all worked together to persuade the region's daughters that the way to be loved was to follow societal dictates. Conversely, they promised those who failed, like Kate Dunn, Beulah Benton, and Eoline Glenmore, rejection, ostracism, and abhorrence. Yet, despite the plantation society's efforts to inculcate acceptable behavior doctrine, lapses in women's observance of the principles existed. The importance of female compliance to gender restraints was so important to continued honor that these breakdowns in submission led to the need for a method of chastisement. Just as men used the practice of dueling as an element of control and a tool for the recovery of honor, southern society used the threat of ostracism and a future outside the circle of their community as a way to restrain female behavior.

CHAPTER IV

Honor and the Power of Gossip

Plantation society used gossip and ostracism as essential tools to make sure that women complied with the ideals of proper behavior. The connection between the actions of women and familial image, honor, and social status created the necessity for a form of penalty for misbehavior. As deterrents, gossip and ostracism served to maintain the gender values of the southern community. Elite southern women knew that their failure to adhere to the standards was quickly known by their neighbors and led to their isolation from society. The application of gossip and ostracism became the foundation of the scandal and communal condemnation of Peggy Eaton.

On January 1, 1829, Margaret O'Neale Timberlake married John Henry Eaton of Tennessee. While the couple exchanged their wedding vows in the office of the Senate's chaplain, virulent gossip about the bride's promiscuity spread through the highest echelons of Washington, D.C. society. The daughter of a well-known hotel and tavern owner and the widow of a United States naval officer, Margaret began her marriage to Eaton with full knowledge of the assault on her reputation. As the wife of Andrew Jackson's future secretary of war, she should have been widely accepted in the city's most prestigious homes. Yet, Margaret Eaton quickly found that she was largely unwelcome by society's ladies. Since the young woman's life did not always fit the ideal

of proper feminine behavior, speculation of infidelity and disrepute ran rampant. Suspicions and rumors claimed her conduct caused her first husband to drink himself to death. Despite the notorious nature of the circumstances, no one predicted that the scandal that spread throughout the nation's capital and entangled itself within the Jackson administration would eventually become one of American history's most famous cases of ostracism.[1]

Margaret Eaton's story is also a valuable illustration of what happened to elite southern women who deviated from gender standards.[2] Washington D.C. was not strictly a southern city but as the center of the national government it was an area that hosted both northerners and southerners and their ideals. Additionally, many of Margaret's detractors were from the South. First Lady Elizabeth Monroe, a long-time critic of Margaret, was from Virginia, and Floride Calhoun, the wife of Vice-President John C. Calhoun and the one who led the cabinet wives in their assault on Margaret's reputation, was from South Carolina. Both women expected Margaret Eaton to behave in a manner that complied with the social conventions that they were familiar with, which were those of the southern plantation system. Monroe and Calhoun lived in a world where a woman's worthiness was gauged by her community image. In their minds, Margaret displayed none of the qualities of a proper southern lady; she was not chaste, pious, or submissive. Her failure to exhibit these essential characteristics obviated social

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[1]Margaret Eaton, *The Autobiography of Peggy Eaton*, with a preface by Charles F. Deems (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), 48-49, 74, 81; John F. Marszalek, *The Petticoat Affair: Manners, Mutiny, and Sex in Andrew Jackson's White House* (New York and London: The Free Press, Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc, 1997), vi; Leon Phillips, *That Eaton Woman: In Defense of Peggy O'Neale Eaton* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1974), 3, 55.

[2] Eaton, *Autobiography*, 32. According to the Eaton autobiography Margaret was never personally called Peggy. While her mother occasionally called her "Madge," all others used her given name.

respectability and damaged her value as a woman within plantation society. Severely judged by southern women for her perceived disregard of acceptable gender conventions, Margaret Eaton was a threat to the communal image of anyone who associated with her. Thus, in order to protect their reputations, social obligations forced the women of Washington to shun her.[3]

In her autobiography, Margaret Eaton recognized some of the personal flaws that led to her downfall; nonetheless she also presented an ulterior motive for the attack on her honor. She wrote "I do not pretend to be a saint, and do not think I ever was very much stocked with sense, and lay no claim to be a model woman in any way." Yet, she ultimately blamed her social circumstances on the capricious nature of politics. Margaret claimed that she was a "victim of political rancor" and that her community image was slain by political intrigue. She believed that in the world of government and power, when "it was necessary to oppose a certain man … a ready way was to attack his wife." Since a man's status was inseparably linked to his family's conduct, her reputation became a sacrificial lamb to her husband's opponents. By ruining Margaret's standing in the city, Eaton's enemies also damaged his effectiveness within the national government. Vice President John C. Calhoun answered this claim by remarking that Washington's women closed their doors to Margaret as a result of "censorship which the sex exercises over itself on which, all must acknowledge, the purity and dignity of the female character

[3]Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 45; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 238; Brenda E. Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 5.

mainly depend." The political nature of the Eaton scandal cannot be ignored; after all, it caused significant schism within the Jackson administration. Catherine Allgor asserts that Jackson's support of Margaret joined with political partisanship to promote the development of the governmental rift and the expanding gossip. Those people who opposed Jackson's politics or who depended on social approval to further their families' interest also rejected Margaret. Still the social aspects of the scandal are important as well, for it was those facets that revealed the gravity of feminine honor. The loss of Margaret's reputation through her refusal to adhere to the gender principles of her day eventually reached John Eaton and affected his career, his reputation, and his honor.[4]

Margaret O'Neale's early years were spent in her father's hotel and tavern where she took delight in her family and their position in the community. Born in 1799, the "witty, pretty, saucy, active" girl was the first of William and Rhoda O'Neale's six children. Whereas descriptions of Margaret vary, she was generally described as a striking woman with dark curly hair and dark eyes. She was "of medium height, straight, and delicate, [in] perfect proportion" and had a "broad, expressive, forehead," and a "perfect nose of almost Grecian proportions, and finely curved mouth, with a firm, round chin." Familial pride led Margaret to ultimately shape a viewpoint that stationed her family and herself in a place of distinction and gave them what she saw as an

[4]Eaton, *Autobiography*, 34-35; Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000, Reprinted 2001), 204, 209.

"appointment with destiny." Margaret alleged that the O'Neales would make a mark on American history.[5]

While many members of the upper class saw tavern-keepers as occupants of a lower rung on the social ladder than themselves, Margaret always believed that the family's political connections placed them on par with the elite. O'Neale's Franklin House was a fashionable public residence that attracted distinguished government officials and served many congressmen as their homes away from home. Due to the hotel's prominence, the O'Neales formed acquaintances with some of Washington's most powerful men, which supported young Margaret's satisfaction in her family's status. Despite the criticism that she later faced, Eaton's autobiography recorded that she was never "ashamed to say that [she] was born in the Franklin House and that [her] father was a tavern-keeper." Yet, she also claimed that she did not live in the hotel "strictly speaking," but lived in a house that was located on the "opposite side of the street."[6]

Many of the distinguished men who stayed at the Franklin aided in the development of Margaret O'Neale's view of her place in the world by showering her with praise and attention. Margaret and her sisters, Mary and Georgianna, became surrogate daughters for the lonely men who missed their families and their homes. Acting as "uncles" to the young girls, many of the hotel residents spent time reading to, playing with, and generally fussing over the O'Neale daughters. Margaret later recalled that she "was always a pet." This constant attention from her father's customers made Margaret

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[5]Eaton, *Autobiography*, 2-5, 32; Marszalek, *The Petticoat Affair*, vii, 25-27; Phillips, *That Eaton Woman*, 5-7, 21; Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 198.

[6]Eaton, *Autobiography*, 2-5, 32; Marszalek, *The Petticoat Affair*, vii, 25-27; Phillips, *That Eaton Woman*, 5-7, 21; Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 198.

comfortable with men and helped her to grow into a flirtatious coquette. More importantly, it also made her child's mind believe that there was an important role for her to play in the nation's capital. She once wrote that she "was a lively girl and had many things about [her] to increase [her] vanity and help spoil" her. By the time that Margaret reached her teens, many of Washington's matrons already disapproved of her. Elizabeth Monroe, the wife of President James Monroe and neighbor to the O'Neales, believed that Margaret's upbringing made her too wise and too forward for her age. Furthermore, she was critical of Margaret for flouting gender prescriptions by spending too much time with grown men instead of her own peers.[7]

William O'Neale began to agree with some of Elizabeth Monroe's assessment when he was forced to deal with a failed elopement by his fifteen-year-old daughter. Infatuated with Major Belton, an aide to General Winfield Scott, Margaret agreed to an elopement and went so far as to arrange for friends to accompany the couple and to serve as witnesses to the wedding. However, as Margaret climbed out of her bedroom window to meet Belton, she knocked over a flowerpot and awakened her father, who immediately put a stop to the couple's plans. Determined that it was time for Margaret to be removed from her present influences, O'Neale planned a journey to the North. The next day, Margaret and her father left for New York City, where O'Neale deposited his daughter in the care of Governor De Witt Clinton and registered her at Madam Nau's French finishing school on Dey Street. Yet, it was not long before Margaret formed an attachment with a Captain Root and created a design for another runaway wedding. This

[7]Eaton, *Autobiography,* 5, 11; Phillips, *That Eaton Woman*, 5-7, 13, 21.

time, however, the prospective bride changed her mind about her beau before the plans were enacted.[8]

After obtaining a promise of proper behavior, William O'Neale allowed Margaret to return home in June 1816; she was not quite seventeen years old. At the time of her return to Washington, the city was growing rapidly and despite management problems, the tavern at the Franklin House was tremendously prosperous. After hiring and firing two tavern managers, O'Neale placed the responsibility in the hands of his eldest daughter, which left Margaret open to further social criticism. In her new position as a tavern manager, she worked as a barmaid, waitress, cashier, and supervisor of the facility. While she enjoyed her new role and was very successful at it, Margaret's vocation placed her in a public area from which social constraints normally barred women. Even when financial necessity forced working class women to take jobs outside of the home they were judged by the prevailing principles of separate spheres for the genders. In fact, the idea was so prevalent that women who did not meet its requirements often hoped to one day gain the economic stability that would allow them to remain within the private sphere. Margaret's employment gave Washington's elite women another reason to openly express their opinions of her behavior. One matron found her actions "shocking," Lucretia Clay, the wife of statesman Henry Clay, thought that William O'Neale should be "horsewhipped," and others appealed for Rhoda O'Neale to reign in her daughter's behavior and to insist that she withdraw from the tavern.[9]

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[8]Eaton, *Autobiography,* 14-18; Marszalek, *The Petticoat Affair*, 33.
[9]Marszalek, *The Petticoat Affair*, 35; Phillips, *That Eaton Woman*, 20-21.

While working as her father's tavern manager, Margaret met two men who played significant roles in her life, John B. Timberlake and John H. Eaton. Timberlake was a purser in the United States Navy, who in the spring of 1817 arrived in Washington on naval business. Margaret first saw Timberlake, a "handsome fellow, of a good Virginia family," as she looked out of the family's parlor window. She told her mother "Come here, mother. Here is my husband riding on horseback." The two young people met later the same day and were engaged to be married within a few months. Washington's *National Intelligencer* recorded the wedding on June 15, 1817. Due to her age, Margaret's parents had reservation about the marriage, but thought that their daughter's "vivacity might have a salutary restraint under the responsibilities of married life" and allowed the wedding to take place. William and Rhoda O'Neale hoped that marriage would protect their daughter from the criticism that circulated among the circles of the upper class.[10]

After the wedding the couple moved into a suite in the Franklin House and within a few months, Margaret was pregnant. Deciding to look for a way to stay close to his bride, Timberlake elected not to return to the sea. As a ship's purser, the lieutenant filled the role of a storekeeper, providing necessities to the ship's crew. In such a position, the purser had the opportunity to supplement his income through his own enterprise. By purchasing additional merchandise at his own expense and then selling it to his shipmates, he could earn up to $20,000 per year, a very good living in the early nineteenth century. In order for this to work, he had to stay at sea, thus if he wanted to

[10]Eaton, *Autobiography*, 20, 22, 33; Marszalek, *The Petticoat Affair*, 35-36; Phillips, *That Eaton Woman*, 23.

stay with his bride, he needed a new vocation. With the help of William O'Neale, Timberlake opened a dry goods store in Washington, though within six months, the business failed. Margaret attributed the loss to Timberlake's trusting nature stating that her husband "was not fit for merchandising" because "he trusted everybody." At the time of the store's closing, the records indicated open accounts worth $15,000.[11]

During the period in which the Timberlakes met, married, and open their business John H. Eaton of Tennessee arrived in Washington, D.C. Elected to serve his home state as a United States senator, Eaton joined his fellow congressmen at the Franklin House. Timberlake and Eaton became increasingly familiar and eventually developed a close companionship that ultimately extended to Margaret. It was this friendship and the events that occurred after the business failure that marked the beginning of the proceedings that eventually led to the ostracism of Margaret Eaton. After closing his store, Timberlake decided to return to sea and sought help from John Eaton who promised to introduce a private bill in the Senate to restore Timberlake to active duty.[12]

Prior to his arrival in Washington, D.C. John Timberlake held a post on a frigate that was captured by the British during the War of 1812. Of course, all of his merchandise and his investment were lost with the ship. John Eaton's senatorial bill called for the reimbursement of John Timberlake for his loss and would give him the capital that he needed to replenish his stores. Serious opposition to the arrangements that enabled pursers to profit from their naval service caused two Eaton bills to fail in the

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[11]Eaton, *Autobiography*, 25; Marszalek, *The Petticoat Affair*, 37-39; Phillips, *That Eaton Woman*, 23.

[12]Marszalek, *The Petticoat Affair,* 38-39; Phillips, *That Eaton Woman*, 25; Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 199.

Senate. Driven by Timberlake's disappointment and his need to support his growing family, John Eaton approached the secretary of the navy and successfully gained recompense for his friend. Consequently, Timberlake returned to the sea in early 1821. Eaton's act of kindness made him fodder for gossip and placed him at the center of the criticism that surrounded Margaret Timberlake. Rumors quickly spread and claimed that Eaton aided Timberlake's return to active duty so that he could have Margaret to himself. The close relationship that developed between John Eaton and Margaret Timberlake during her husband's absence increased the gossip and formed a foundation for the ostracism that eliminated Margaret from Washington, D.C. society.[13]

In the eyes of the city's elite matrons Margaret Timberlake's behavior continued to justify their disapproval. For one woman, Mrs. Smith, the combination of Margaret returning to her position as tavern manager in her father's establishment and her association with John Eaton, a man who was not her husband, proved that Margaret was a "disgrace to her sex." As a long-time resident of Franklin House, Eaton was a close friend of the O'Neales and spent many evenings sitting with them in their parlor. This relationship extended to Margaret and while Timberlake was away Eaton attempted to make up for his absence by escorting Margaret to various social events. Eaton and Margaret were also commonly seen deep in conversation on the O'Neale front porch. Whether the rumors of infidelity were true or not, this was not considered the conduct of an honorable woman. Margaret Timberlake should have remained home with her family while her husband was away serving his country instead of attending parties with another

[13]Marszalek, *The Petticoat Affair*, 38-41; Phillips, *That Eaton Woman*, 23, 31-33.

man. Accordingly, in the spring of 1821, Margaret Timberlake received a letter from Elizabeth Monroe who refused her association and announced that Margaret was no longer welcomed at the White House. Margaret read the message without emotion, tore it into pieces, and threw them into the fire. Despite her cavalier reaction to the statement, this denunciation by the First Lady led Washington's other elite women to close their doors to Margaret, which began her complete ostracism.[14]

The image of Margaret Timberlake as a disreputable woman became more ingrained among Washington's elite after the death of her first husband and the marriage to her second. In the spring of 1828 Purser John B. Timberlake died in his bunk aboard the *USS Constitution* as it sailed from Greece to Spain. Margaret received the notification of her husband's death as she and her children were preparing to join Timberlake in Spain. The news of the death quickly spread throughout Washington and set off additional rumors about Margaret and her relationship with Eaton. While the official cause of death was pulmonary disease, the gossip claimed that Timberlake was so upset over his wife's infidelity that he drank himself to death, or that he committed suicide by jumping overboard. However, Lieutenant La Valette, who was with Timberlake when he died, claimed the rumors were not true and that he "very frequently heard Mr. Timberlake speak of his wife and children, and always in the strongest terms of affection." Yet, the talk continued through Margaret's period of mourning and became even more virulent at its end when she began to occasionally appear in public with Eaton and again in January 1829 when the couple married. By the time that the Eatons returned

[14]Marszalek, *The Petticoat Affair*, 40-41; Phillips, *That Eaton Woman*, 33-34; Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 199.

from their wedding trip to Philadelphia and New York, Margaret found that her ostracism was complete and that she was being snubbed by Washington's preeminent ladies, including the wives of President Jackson's cabinet members.[15]

The cabinet wives led by Floride Calhoun refused to associate with Margaret Eaton. Shortly after their marriage, the Eatons called at the Calhoun residence and were politely received by Floride. According to social rules, Floride Calhoun should have returned the courtesy by calling on the Eatons. But, Calhoun refused to repay the visit because the act would open social interaction between the Eatons and the Calhouns. The other ladies of Washington followed Calhoun's example and shunned Margaret Eaton. They did not receive her in their homes, repay obligatory visits or acknowledge her in public. This "Ladies' War" added to tensions that already existed in President Andrew Jackson's newly formed cabinet and aided its eventual breakup. While most of the cabinet members concurred with their wives' assessment of Margaret Eaton, the president became one of her foremost champions and declared her as "chaste as a virgin." As a former resident of the Franklin House, Jackson was fond of Margaret and was moved by circumstances that reminded him of the mistreatment of his beloved wife Rachel by his political enemies.[16]

The scandals that caused Rachel Jackson's social difficulties began with a failed marriage and a premature second wedding. Andrew Jackson met Rachel Donelson Robards while he was a boarder in the Donelson household of Nashville, Tennessee.

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[15]Eaton, *Autobiography*, 51-74; Marszalek, *The Petticoat Affair*, 42-44; Phillips, *That Eaton Woman*, 52-57, 61.

[16]Phillips, *That Eaton Woman*, 61, 82; Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 202-203; Robert V. Remini, *The Life of Andrew Jackson* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001), 192.

Rachel returned to the family home upon separating from her husband Lewis Robards. Jackson was immediately taken with his hostess's daughter and the two became fast friends. After a tumultuous attempt at reconciliation, Robards sought a permanent division of the marriage and in December 1790 received a legislatorial resolution that gave him the authority to file for divorce in the courts. However, he procrastinated and the divorce was not officially finalized until 1793. By this time, Jackson and Rachel had been married for nearly two years. The couple remarried, but that did not stop the onset of scandal. Gossip already began to mark Rachel as an immoral sinner who lived with a man without the benefit of marriage. Jackson was profoundly affected by the isolation and heartache that this dishonor caused Rachel. Thus, his sympathy for Margaret's plight was overpowering and it led Jackson to attempt to force his sentiments upon his administration, which caused divisions that brought about the breakup of the cabinet.[17]

By the time that the Jackson administration fell apart in 1831, John Eaton was continually fending off both professional and personal attacks against himself and his wife. Many of the assaults were made very publicly in the pages of the newspapers and required Eaton to defend his honor, as well as Margaret's. One of the more serious confrontations occurred between Eaton and Samuel Ingham, John Berrien, and John Branch after the men lost their cabinet positions. The tension between the four originated when Ingham, Berrien, and Branch expressed criticism of Margaret and was exacerbated by the publication of the conflict in the newspapers. With political careers that were cut short, Ingham, Berrien, and Branch used the press to justify their positions and

[17]Marszalek, *The Petticoat Affair*, 7-8; Remini, *The Life of Andrew Jackson*, 18, 24-25.

announced that they were not dismissed for official reasons, but for their rejection of Margaret Eaton. Duff Green, the editor of the *United States Telegraph* followed with a column that disparaged Margaret Eaton and claimed that "It is proved that the Secretaries of the Treasury [Ingham], and of the Navy [Branch], and the Attorney-General [Berrien] refused to associate with her."[18]

The very public criticism of Margaret Eaton that was fomented by Samuel Ingham, John Berrien, and John Branch and John Eaton's defense of his wife illustrated the important connection between a woman's reputation and the honor of your spouse. Eaton began his defense of his personal and familial honor with letters to both Ingham and Berrien; Branch no longer lived in Washington D.C. The missive to Samuel Ingham set off a terse correspondence that led to demands for satisfaction and came close to resulting in a duel. Eaton first asked Ingham for the truth about his opinion on the assertions made by Duff Green. He stated that he desired "to know of [Ingham], whether or not [he] sanction[ed] or will disavow" the statement of his rejection of Margaret Eaton. In response, Ingham wrote that Eaton "must be a little deranged, to imagine that any blustering of [his] could induce [him] to disavow what all the inhabitants of [the] city know, and perhaps half the people of the United States believe to be true." In return, Eaton wrote that he required "*satisfaction* for the wrong & injury" that Ingham had done to him.[19]

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[18]Eaton, *Autobiography*, 153-154; Marszalek, *The Petticoat Affair*, 167-169; Phillips, *That Eaton Woman*, 117-118.

[19]Eaton, *Autobiography*, 153-155; Marszalek, *The Petticoat Affair*, 170-172; Phillips, *That Eaton Woman*, 118-119.

The duel between John Eaton and Samuel Ingham did not take place as Ingham left town under the protection of an armed guard. Yet, the possibility of a duel between Eaton and Ingham was an important facet in the exclusion of Margaret Eaton from Washington D.C. society and demonstrated the significance of a woman's reputation and honor to that of her husband. Dueling was a fundamental part of southern society. It was the protector of personal honor and a way of guarding the moral image and defending the reputation against damaging slurs. Additionally, it could serve as a deterrent to undesirable social behavior and conduct that did not fit with communal standards. Duels helped to restore to their principals the social parity that was disturbed by an insult. Since the prosperity of those in public life was tied to their honor, the ritual provided the leveling that was necessary for society and allowed for recompense "in cases where the laws of the country [gave] no redress for injuries received, where public opinion not only authorizes but enjoins resistance."[20]

John Eaton's relationship with Margaret, a woman who was socially marked as immoral and lacking in piety and virtue, threatened his standing as an honorable man. Therefore, the threat of social disgrace compelled him to illustrate his honor and courage by confronting the person who denied their existence. Ideally, by challenging Ingham to a duel Eaton reinforced his worthiness to the community and signified that the censure of his wife was not valid, thereby, regaining his lost social status. Margaret's image, however, never recovered from the scandal. While men were able to mend their broken

[20]Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 350-351; John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South 1800-1861* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 48; Jack K. Williams, *Dueling in the Old South: Vignettes of Social History* (College Station, TX and London: A & M University Press, 1980) 13; Greenberg, *Honor & Slavery*, 58; John Lyde Wilson, *The Code of Honor; or Rules for the Government of Principals and Seconds in Duelling* (Charleston, SC: Thomas J. Eccles, 1838), 4.

honor, women were never able to repair damaged reputations. Consequently, Margaret Eaton's failure to fulfill the attributes of the proper woman and the gossip that it created followed her into history. The southern plantation society adopted tools that controlled the actions of its members, for men it was duels and for women it was gossip. While participation threatened possible death for men, the menace of gossip meant possible ostracism for women.

Despite the significance of dueling and gossiping to the maintenance of the societal structure of the South's plantation system, both practices were criticized as detrimental to individuals and to the community. Even John Lyde Wilson, the author of a guide to the rules of dueling, recognized the harmful affects of the custom and asserted that society could eliminate duels by teaching young men that "nothing was more derogatory to the honor of a gentleman than to wound the feelings of any one, however humble." Similarly, printed materials intended for young women commonly disparaged gossiping. In 1843, one journal editor reported receiving letters that declared that gossip indicated a "weakness of character" in those who engaged in the habit. In her work, *Letters on Female Character,* Virginia Cary avowed that "female gossip is the source of one half the mischief that is done in society" and instructed young ladies to "go into company prepared to aid the common cause of morality and religion" instead of causing harm to others.[21] Some teachers considered the recognition of the injurious nature of rumors to be so important that they included lessons that denounced gossiping as an

[21]Wilson, *The Code of Honor*, 5; A Lady of South Carolina, "Female Education: A Letter to the Editor," *The Orion, a Monthly Magazine of Literature and Art (1842-1844)* 3, 2 (October 1843): 62; Virginia Cary, *Letters on Female Character, Addressed to a Young Lady, on the Death of her Mother* (Richmond, VA: A. Works, 1828), 160.

integral part of female education. Yet, the same teachers taught their students about the dangers of social exile, which only came from gossip.

Published as an appendix to James M. Garnett's *Lectures on Female Education*, *The Gossip's Manual* used humor and levity to satirically demonstrate the unseemly character of gossipmongers. The work was based on the author's "thirty or forty years [of] close and delighted attention to the practice of some of the greatest masters and mistresses of the gossiping art" and described the habit as a "most natural and delectable mental exercise." The collection of maxims provided instructions for the development of efficient gossips and was meant to "confer a publick benefit." Yet, it also depicted those who engaged in the practice as meddlesome, indiscreet, untrustworthy, and insensitive toward others. For a young lady to gain such proficiency, it was necessary for her to ignore the good qualities of others and to make it "a cardinal point, always to make [her] neighbor's failings or vices the topick [*sic*] of conversation."[22]

The first feat that the talented gossip had to master was the art of exciting conversation. Since good qualities were too "limited, tame, and sleepy" for this purpose, the topic of faults should "neither give, nor follow any lead, but such as may excite all tongues to let loose upon it at once." It was crucial that one speak loudly and rapidly and arouse the curiosity of others "by obscure innuendoes, pride of opinion, uniting with love of what moralists call defamation." The best execution of this task gave the listener the satisfaction of "guessing even worse, than the reality," still it was necessary that there

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[22]James M. Garner, *Lectures on Female Education, Comprising the First and Second Series of a Course Delivered to Mrs. Garnett's Pupils, at Elm-wood, Essex County, Virginia, By James M. Garnett, To Which is Annexed, The Gossip's Manual* (Richmond, VA: Thomas W. White, 1825), 357-358, 362-363.

was "at least some colour of truth" in the statements. Since friendship was most valuable in its ability to cure faults, "exposing…the faults of those persons in particular, for whom [one] profess[ed] to entertain [a friendly] sentiment" was particularly critical. Despite the transgressions that it required, a good gossip should never allow a "good tale of scandal to die in [her] hands"[23]

The satire also referred to the revealing of secrets as a moral duty. It explained that upon witnessing "any unpleasant or painful occurrence" the capable gossip "hasten[ed], as if…running from the pestilence, to relate it to the first friend" she encountered. If she failed to add her own personal observations to the information imparted, the gossip "evince[d] a deficiency in moral duty, as much as the refusal to contribute to an object of great publick utility, would show a want of patriotism." After all, "to relate all…is an essential part of the true illustration, and development of the social compact." Therefore, it was vital that secrets never be left undiscovered and that the guilty always "be spoken of with unqualified abhorrence, and clamorous detestation."[24]

The reality of the social significance of gossip was belied by the critical writings that denounced the habit. Gossip was a useful social tool in the protection of reputation and honor and the attempts to eliminate it from plantation life disguised its essential function to southern society. Public scrutiny and the circulation of its conclusions aided the communal preservation of the societal standards that maintained the plantation way of life, thereby binding the community together. The importance of antebellum gossip was

[23]Ibid., 361, 363-367.
[24]Ibid., 372-374, 382-384.

evident in the frequency with which it appeared in writings such as letters, diaries, journals, newspapers, and travel logs. Northerner Lucius V. Bierce confirmed this in the travel journal that he kept during his 1822 journey through the South. The document indicated that he covered more ground than most visitors to the region and recorded his views of the southern customs. He addressed gossiping by stating, "Tattling is far more common here than in those places at the North where I have lived. Although all countries are in a greater or less degree productive of those pests of society which raise their own character by the fall of others, yet a Southern clime appears to be as particularly favorable to the production of these as to that of other reptiles." This sentiment was sustained in a letter that Charlotte Porcher received from her cousin, who wrote, "I know of nothing new or interesting to tell. The good people are all taking the best care of their neighbors business and their own as they can."[25]

The rumors and tales that circulated in the South encompassed minor and major infractions of proper behavior; still, any breach of propriety was a serious matter for plantation women. In a letter that she wrote to Charlotte Hannah, Mary Barksdale described her sister's account of a woman who wore "face paint." The use of makeup was not a minor offense in the antebellum plantation society; in fact, Barksdale saw it as a severe transgression. She instructed Hannah to do all that was in her power to prevent your Willie from "seeing her and never, no never invite them to your house together." She also stated that her sister wondered "how any body can admire such red cheeks and

[25]Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 216-217; George W. Knepper, editor, *Travels in the Southland 1822-1823: The Journal of Lucius Verus Bierce* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1966), 79; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 58; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 446-447; L. M. W. Gibbs to Charlotte Porcher, October 8, 1853, Porcher Family Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC.

lips" and thought that "it looked coarse." Caroline Merrick also addressed appearances in a letter to a friend when she described a neighbor's daughter as "very bright and lovely to look upon." Yet, she looked beyond beauty to the young lady's temperament and stated, "I see no material out of which the solid virtues which are necessary to the character of the true woman are to be formed."[26] Barksdale and Merrick wrote about issues that were easily apparent, but gossip regarding less obvious subject matter was even more important.

The discovery of secrets and their distribution throughout the neighborhood was vital to the societal evaluation of individual image and reputation. It created a mechanism that conserved or destroyed status and character. The elite women who suffered the destruction of their personal reputation, those who did not strictly adhere to community standards, were the ones who were also forced to endure exclusion from society. The shunning of these social pariahs was a fundamental part of the regulation of social position and prestige and the undeniable consequence of the continual flow of gossip.

Susan Dupont Petigru King of Charleston was followed by a constant stream of rumors because she failed to meet the preconceived expectations that society imposed upon elite southern women. Born into the city's prominent Petigru family in 1824, King grew up within the confines of regimented principles that defined the behavior of proper ladies. At the same time, she was quick tempered and adventurous, traits that made her

[26]Mary E. Barksdale to Charlotte Hannah, March 21, ca. 1850, Hannah-Barksdale Family Papers, Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA; Caroline Merrick to Friend, May 23, 1857, Caroline E. Merrick Letters, Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.

presumptuous and indiscreet and continually placed her under the public's censure. King became so notorious that the criticism was not confined to the residents of Charleston, but spread among the inhabitants of other areas. Sarah Baxter Hampton, a member of another prominent Charleston family, excitedly wrote to her mother that she met King, who made overtures of friendship toward her. In the end, however, Hampton decided that King was "too wicked" for them to form an alliance. Ella Clanton Thomas of Augustus, Georgia, recorded gossip about King in her journal, stating that she heard that the English novelist, William Makepeace Thackeray pronounced King "a fast lady." This depiction was further substantiated when she asserted, "This same lady Mrs. Harris was telling me, is indeed a fast woman. Her reputation being anything but unblemished…."[27]

Many of Susan Petigru King's problems resulted from an unhappiness that developed from her strained relationships with family members. She was persistently at odds with her mother because she was unwilling to abide what she regarded as her parent's intolerable faults. In turn, her mother Jane Amelia Petigru was not willing to protect or defend her daughter's reputation and sought to solve her dilemma by marrying off her troublesome daughter before gossip rendered her unmarriageable. Despite serious misgivings about her future, Susan Petigru relented to her mother's nagging determination and married Henry Campbell King on March 30, 1843. Nonetheless, the unhappy union did not release King from the tensions created by her untenable existence

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[27]Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, *A Family of Women: The Carolina Petigrus in Peace and War* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 15, 43-44, 54-57, 78-83; Ann Fripp Hampton, editor, *A Divided Heart: Letters of Sally Baxter Hampton 1853-1862*, Columbia, SC: Phantom Press, Publishers, 1994), 6; Virginia Ingraham Burr, editor, *The Secret Eye: The Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas 1848-1889*, With an introduction by Nell Irvin Painter (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 143.

at home, nor did it relieve her parents' concern over her character. King did not find the womanly contentment that society promised marriage and motherhood would bring, so instead, she sought to fill the void with fun and adventure.[28]

Susan Petigru King's impetuous nature made her coquettish and frequently led to flirtations with young men, which in turn led to gossip and scandal. One of the more serious incidents that were noted by her community involved Arthur Hayne, the son of South Carolina's renowned senator and governor, Robert Hayne. An admirer of King, Hayne developed a friendship with her, but his attention eventually turned to another woman, the actress Julia Dean. Once Hayne married Dean, King became the gossiper as she began to vehemently criticize his choice for his spouse and vociferously denounced the actress as an unsuitable wife for the son of the great Robert Hayne. King's participation in the ritual of scandal worked against her, though, when the intensity of her disapproval led her associates to conclude that the King-Hayne relationship was more than a casual flirtation and caused rumors of infidelity to emerge.[29] Yet, there were other scandals that were even more extensive.

Susan King caused further damage to her reputation when she attended a costume ball wearing jewelry that was loaned to her by Sara Felix, who was an actress and the sister of a well-known brothel madam. Condemned by association, society castigated King for her connection to the women and declared that she was immoral. To make matters worse, King wrote a full report of the ball for publication in the *Charleston Courier*. When the sponsors of the ball heard that the commentary was going to appear

[28]Pease and Pease, *A Family of Women*, 54-57.
[29]Ibid., 79.

in the newspaper, they demanded its suppression. They argued that the article violated society's standards and placed the women who were present in the public light. Regardless of their protest, the *Courier* printed the piece. When her community denounced her for her actions, King claimed that her description of the ball was a private letter that was published without her permission. Her claim was not widely accepted as the truth.[30] Still, gossip about King was not limited to her personal actions.

After her marriage, Susan Petigru King began to write novels and received critical praise for her talent as an author. However, her work deviated from the accepted model for women's literature and led to further rumors about her unwillingness to acknowledge society's principles. Instead of affirming southern gender conventions, King's books commonly disparaged the conventional position of women and the restrictions that marriage and motherhood placed on their lives. King's sins were compounded by her violation of communal standards of propriety when she used Charleston residents and events from their lives as models for her fiction. While the names of those involved were not revealed in the publications, King's indiscretion made their lives very public and ultimately led to more censure and gossip about her.[31]

Marriage and a woman's fidelity to the institution were prime subjects for injurious conversations. Since marriage was a chief element in the foundation of plantation society, communities placed wives under particular scrutiny as they searched for any violation of the marital values. Exposed infractions of these ideals quickly spread throughout the public and threatened the offender's social status. Ella Clanton Thomas

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[30]Ibid., 80.
[31]Ibid., 81-82.

recorded such a breach of appropriateness when she wrote of a school friend who gave birth less than nine months after her wedding. The friend, who was also named Ella, was the daughter of Bishop George Pierce and the wife of a man named Turner, who was studying to be a Methodist minister. Thomas stated that Ella was "quick and impulsive," but that she loved her despite her faults. Still, Thomas was stunned to learn that "*Five months and twenty days* after her marriage Ella became the mother of a little daughter" and exclaimed that "such an act required no announcement. What a shock it must have been to the family."[32] A late wedding was a grievous flaw, yet an even worse failing was the total lack of a wedding.

Mary Chesnut resolutely recorded the distress of fallen women in her diary. While noting a conversation with her mother-in-law, Chesnut wrote that the woman asked her about the marital status of an acquaintance, who was an unwed mother. Moved by pity, the mother-in-law was unable to think of the other woman as "a bad girl." Chesnut, however, had no such qualms and asserted that "an unmarried girl with two children was necessarily not a good woman." A few years later, Chesnut held similar views of her mother's ex-protégé, Fanny, who fell from a high social status to the lower classes. The young woman was infatuated with a young doctor, who later refused to marry her. She became pregnant and was "turned out-of-doors" by her strict parents. Eventually, Fanny began a relationship with a working class man and gave birth to six children. As the unwed mother of so many children, Fanny was completely separated from the world that she occupied before her fall from grace. One day she approached

[32]Burr, *The Secret Eye*, 127.

Chesnut's mother and, with tears in her eyes, told her "Woman! he has married me." The long overdue wedding did not restore Fanny's reputation, but that her former mentor knew of it her gave some comfort.[33] The scrutiny of marriage was not confined to the behavior of fiancés, wives, and fallen women, the alliance itself was also important.

Since marriages connected the wealth, power, and influence of plantation families, it was essential that the parties involved chose the appropriate mate. The failure to meet this requirement became fodder for gossip. It was this aspect of southern social conventions that allowed Susan Petigru King the opportunity to criticize Arthur Hayne's spousal choice. The diary of Frances Jane Bestor Robertson illustrated the traits that she considered desirable in a future husband. Robertson wrote about a young girl who married "an old widower" and questioned the reasons for her selection. She stated that the groom was "ugly…not very smart, & with all worth nothing." Robertson thought that "if a girl made such a sacrifice, it would be to accomplish some other object, than a husband without any recommendations." Ella Clanton Thomas also wrote of bad choices in her diary. In November 1855 Thomas recorded the marriage of Annie Cummings, a member of a prominent plantation family to Charles Hall, the son of a milliner. While Hall was educated and trained for a career as an Episcopalian minister, rumors questioned "the legitimacy of his birth" and caused Annie's father to look upon the union with "the greatest scorn."[34] Nonetheless, the couple did marry and created a social uproar that highlighted another serious marital error, the secret wedding.

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[33]C. Vann Woodward, editor, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 200, 831-832.

[34]Frances Jane Bestor Robertson Diary, October 23, 1851, Reel 2, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, AL; Burr, *The Secret Eye*, 140.

Elopement was a grave social transgression. It challenged the patriarch's authority, the observance of gender conventions, and the communal honor. When a young woman disregarded her father's wishes to marry the man of her choosing she eliminated the obedience that was essential to the South's gendered hierarchy and disturbed familial stability. She also left her family's reputation open to questions of worthiness. The significance of this social offense was evident in Ella Clanton Thomas's diary when she wrote that the Hall-Cummings union was "a bitter blow to [the family's] pride."[35] The guardians of Sally Canty exhibited similar sentiments when they learned of her secret marriage.

The elopement of Sally Canty a South Carolina heiress and Lieutenant Phil Augustus Stockton a northern naval officer generated gossip that quickly spread across the plantation community. Mary Chesnut explained the incident in her diary, stating that Stockton was "the handsomest man in the navy, and irresistible" and that "the bride was barely sixteen." The couple was married by a magistrate. After the ceremony Canty returned to Mrs. Greeland's boarding-school in Philadelphia until it was time for them to travel to her home in Camden, South Carolina. When the newlyweds arrived in the South, "they were received with a cold, stately, and faultless politeness, which made them feel as if they had been sheep-stealing." Upon Canty's confession of her elopement, her guardians decided that it was best to keep "her name from all gossip or publicity" by keeping things quiet and acknowledged the union. They did, however,

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[35]Steven Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 100; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White,* 59; Burr, *The Secret Eye*, 140.

assure the legality of the marriage by calling for a parson to perform a second ceremony.[36] There were others in the community, however, who remained critical of the elopement.

In a letter addressed to her daughter Marion Singleton, R. T. Singleton expressed her dismay over the Stockton-Canty elopement by referring to Canty's conduct as "truly criminal." Singleton also conveyed her thoughts about Stockton by stating that "any man capable of pursueing (*sic*) the course Stockton has done to lead a school girl astray, deserves the epithet bestowed on him…'a base scoundrel.'" Singleton expressed the wider communal sentiment when she wrote that Sally's "friends are very outrageous and indeed some of them talk of shooting Stockton."[37] The following month, R.T. Singleton was still articulating her shock in letters to her daughters.

The Stockton-Canty affair led to staunch warnings for the daughters of R. T. Singleton. Marion and Angelica Singleton also attended Mrs. Greeland's school in Philadelphia and, since they were acquainted with Sally Canty they were counseled not to follow the same path. Singleton cautioned her girls to "remember that you would not have the same excuse that Sallie Canty has—she has never known the care of a mother" and was "intrusted to the management of servants and no doubt imbibed many of their low principles." Despite the justification allowed to Canty for her misconduct, the Singletons instructed Marion and Angelica "to withdraw entirely from the acquaintance of Mrs. Stockton, as you must be in a greater or less degree contaminated by such an

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[36]Chesnut, Mary Boykin, *A Diary from Dixie*, Edited by Isabella D. Martin and Myrta Lockett Avary, (New York and London: D. Appleton and Company, 1914), 120-121.

[37]R. T. Singleton to Marion Singleton, May 16, 1830, Singleton-Deveaux Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

association." A neighbor, Mrs. Sumpter, also communicated concern for the reputation of the Singleton daughters when she advised their mother to "write to Mrs. Greeland to keep your daughters close in school as they do in France, and not let them visit—girls are not 'to be trusted.'" The support of Canty's guardian, Colonel Deas, helped the Stocktons to weather the storm and they were at least partially, accepted back into society. Of course, the revelation that Stockton was the son of a signer of the Declaration of Independence made it a little easier for the community to offer him forgiveness.[38] Nevertheless, most women who violated the southern social standards never experienced such leniency.

Margaret Eaton's experiences indicated that the plantation community prevented the possibility of corruption through association by removing from society women who failed to meet communal expectations. The danger of contamination from such women threatened the personal reputations of men as well as other women. White plantation women played an essential role in the foundation of male honor through the familial reputation. Since a man's honor was tied to that of his family, it was vital that he carefully formed his domestic connections and chose a respectable woman as a spouse. Gossip assisted in this task by identifying those women who were not suitable. While it aided men in safeguarding their honor, gossip threatened to not allow women to fulfill their social responsibility to be a wife and mother. Since even minor infractions of community standards resulted in rumors, misbehavior did not necessarily preclude a

[38]R. T. Singleton to Marion and Angelica Singleton, June 15, 1830, Singleton-Deveaux Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC; Chesnut, *A Diary from Dixie*, 120-122.

women's desire to marry and have children. Still, the ostracism that accompanied gossip and the loss of a woman's reputation generally left her unmarriageable and consigned her to life of maidenly spinsterhood.

In a letter to her brother, Sarah Baxter Hampton, the wife of Frank Hampton and daughter-in-law of Wade Hampton II, expressed her wonder at the marital status of her sisters-in-law. Unknowingly, Hampton touched on an old family scandal that rendered four Hampton sisters unsuitable for marriage. She stated that the Hampton family was "most remarkable" with "four unmarried sisters—each utterly different from the other and yet it [was] impossible to say which [was] the most attractive," all them models of "perfect femininity and womanliness." In Hampton's eyes, their conduct was also exemplary and caused her to write of her "admiration & gratitude at the beautiful behavior of the girls." They always made her "feel…as much at home as they [were]" and they "never [forgot] a moment to consider [her]." To Sarah Hampton, the fact that her husband's sisters never married was illogical. After all, they were lovely, considerate women who should have appealed to a number of men. Instead, they were left to live out theirs lives on their father's plantation.[39]

The scandal that so drastically affected Harriet, Catherine, Ann, and Caroline Hampton began with their uncle, James Henry Hammond. Married to their mother's sister Catherine, Hammond was in frequent contact with the sisters, particularly after the death of their mother in 1833. After the loss of their mother, the girls looked to their Aunt Catherine for motherly attention and visited her often. In approximately 1839, the

[39]Hampton, *A Divided Heart,* 26-30.

two families "became gradually more & more intimate" when the Hammonds purchased a new home and moved to Columbia, South Carolina, where they were "thrown into constant communication with all [the Hampton] children." The two oldest Hampton girls, Harriet and Catherine, even helped Hammond to decorate the new house while his wife was in confinement following the birth of her sixth child. Hammond wrote that he "found all of these young ladies extremely affectionate" and that they "profess[ed] great love for [him]." He later blamed the fondness expressed by his nieces for their indiscretions.[40]

The relationship between Harriet, Catherine, Ann, and Caroline Hampton and their planter uncle James Henry Hammond became intimate around 1841, when the girls were nineteen, seventeen, fifteen, and thirteen respectively. Missing a mother's instruction and supervision, the Hampton girls did not receive a complete indoctrination into the South's gender conventions and failed to comprehend the importance of safeguarding their personal and family image. Already subjects of gossip for hosting unchaperoned parties, the focus of the community's comments about the sisters became more serious and alleged that the girls exhibited "loose morals" and "ardent temperaments."

The only first-hand account of the liaisons between Hammond and the Hampton girls came from Hammond's diary, where he confessed that his transgressions included

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[40]Carol Bleser, editor, *The Hammonds of Redcliffe* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 9; Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 241; Carol Bleser, editor, *Secret and Sacred: The Diaries of James Henry Hammond, a Southern Slaveholder* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 174.

"every thing short of direct sexual intercourse." The December 9, 1846, journal entry gave Hammond's explanation of the entire situation with the four sisters and the consequences of his actions. He stated that his nieces were

> lavish of their kisses and embraces…and not only permitting but promptly responding to every species of dalliance which circumstances brought about between us….each contending for my love, claiming the greater share of it as due to her superior devotion to me, all of them rushing on every occasion into my arms and covering me with kisses, lolling on my lap, pressing their bodies almost into mine, wreathing their limbs with mine, encountering warmly every portion of my frame, and permitting my hands to stray unchecked over every part of them and to rest without the slightest shrinking from it, and all this for a period of more than two years continuously.

Hammond also claimed that the sisters tempted him beyond his resistance and that anyone who could condemn him had a "virtue of the closet, removed from temptation, incapable of realizing the extent of those by which I was beset."[41]

James Henry Hammond ceased his relations with the Hampton daughters in April 1843, when Catherine Hampton "took offence at a familiarity." Hammond maintained that, in an attempt to protect both his nieces and his wife, he resorted to "profound and utter secrecy" about his indiscretions. Eventually, on November 1, 1843, Hammond received a letter from Wade Hampton II that addressed the incident of April 13, 1843, and "denounce[ed] [him] in the coarsest terms." At the time, Hammond did not know how much he knew, but believed that Hampton was convinced that he "made a gross attempt to seduce perhaps to force his daughter Catherine." Due to his position as the governor of South Carolina and Hampton's supposed fatherly desire to protect his daughters, Hammond did not consider a challenge to a duel to be imminent. Still, he

[41]Bleser, *Secret and Sacred*, 171, 173; Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South*, 242.

began to fear that he would be attacked by Hampton's friends. Since duels took place between two gentlemen and Hampton no longer viewed him in that way, Hammond thought that it was possible that there may be an attempt to horsewhip him. Therefore, Hammond purchased small pocket pistols to carry. He suffered no physical attacks, although it quickly became apparent that his breach with Hampton was known within the legislature. Hammond's diary noted that he recognized that "Their desire was to black ball me and to mortify me and mine by keeping us out of Society and respectable persons from coming to our House." Hampton continued his campaign of revenge in 1846 when he sought to ruin Hammond's political career, at the expense of his daughters' reputations.[42]

In 1846, Wade Hampton II exacted further retribution on James Henry Hammond and destroyed the reputation and social position of his daughters in the process. Hampton used the family secret to block Hammond's election to the United States Senate. Hampton revealed Hammond's mistreatment of his daughters to key members of the South Carolina legislature, who insured Hammond's defeat. As one of the state's most influential men, Hampton made it patently clear that support for Hammond would be interpreted as a challenge to his social and political status. Hampton's machinations successfully attained the decline of Hammond's political career, but they also caused the downfall of his own daughters as they suffered "indelible disgrace." For plantation society, chastity was an essential element of female honor and the loss of virtue signaled a woman's unsuitability for closer connections to respectable members of the community.

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[42]Bleser, *Secret and Sacred*, 120, 169-171, 175-176; Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South*, 243-244.

The sisters' failure to meet their duty by observing the social values that they were taught made it impossible for them to recover from the resulting gossip. One state legislator concisely illustrated their new societal station when he asserted that "after all the fuss made no man who valued his standing could marry one of the Hampton girls." Following the scandal, Harriet, Catherine, Ann, and Caroline Hampton all remained unmarried.[43] The Hamptons were denied their proper roles as wives and mothers because of their personal behavior; others met the same fate for violating standards that were meant to uphold the plantation system.

During the 1830s and 1840s, the James S. Smith family of Hillsboro, North Carolina, was one of Orange County's leading families. Smith, a distinguished doctor and plantation owner and his wife Delia Jones Smith, the daughter of a well-known slaveholding family had three children, Mary Ruffin, Francis Jones, and Sidney. Regardless of her interests in politics and medical botany, the couple's oldest child Mary received the traditional female education that trained her to be the proper southern lady and plantation mistress. She was taught music, art, literature, and needlework and developed the good managerial skills. While their daughter received her education at home, the Smiths sent their sons to the University of North Carolina to be trained in their future careers, Francis in medicine and Sidney in law and politics. With Mary's celebrated family ties and illustrious social standing, Mary should have easily formed an outstanding marriage. By the early 1840s, however, her future began to take a different path as Francis and Sidney allowed their stormy quick-tempered natures to interfere with

[43]Bleser, *The Hammonds of Redcliffe*, 10, 33; Bleser, *Secret and Sacred*, 170, 290.

their gentlemanly training and common sense. Mary's reaction to her brothers' actions combined with their impropriety and misjudgments and caused the deterioration of family's respectability and honor.[44]

The events that led to the disgrace of the Smiths began in 1834, when Mary turned eighteen. With Mary at an age to enter society, James Smith decided that she required her own personal maid. She needed someone to accompany her when she went out and to serve her when she hosted guests at home. Hence, he purchased a fifteen-year-old slave girl named Harriet. With skin the color of "the warm inner bark of a white birch," Harriet's claim to African ancestry was uncertain. Her daughter later asserted that she was "three-fourths white and one-fourth Cherokee," which made her a valuable slave. Her worth was increased by a beauty that was accentuated by her "delicate features, flashing dark eyes and luxuriant wavy black hair." Mary was so pleased with the new maid that she showed her off to friends, such as a woman might display clothing or jewelry. Harriet soon became the object of male regard and female envy and the subject of many offers of purchase. Smith received many profitable bids to either buy or hire Harriet out for breeding purposes, all of which he refused. She remained with the Smiths and faithfully served Mary, waiting on her "hand and foot." In 1839, around the age of twenty, Harriet requested and was granted permission to marry a free-born mulatto

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[44]Pauli Murray, *Proud Shoes: The Story of an American Family* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1956), 35-37. The story of the Smith family was related to Murray by her grandmother, the daughter of Sidney Smith and the slave, Harriet. Since it is the reiteration of childhood memories during the later years of life, the facts may lead to some questions about their validity and the capacity of memory. However, it is the perception of the memories that is important here. Even if there are some deviations from the strict relation of the facts, their meaning remains the same. The significance of the continued support for the rules that maintained the slave system is still evident. Murray's grandmother was still able to grasp that violations of society's regulations led to ostracism and the loss of honor.

named Reuben Day. When Harriet gave birth to their son Julius in 1842, Day sought to purchase the freedom of his family. However, he was not able to save enough money before the Smith brothers returned home from school and caused the difficulties that tore the Days apart and began their own downfall.[45]

Upon the completion of their education, Francis and Sidney Smith returned to the plantation in Hillsboro and began to establish themselves in their chosen careers. It was also at this time that they took notice of Harriet. While Francis watched her from a distance, Sidney persistently pursued her. He followed her everywhere, blocked her passage in hallways or on the stairs and appeared out of the shadows to confront her. Harriet was frightened by the constant attention and nailed the door of her cabin closed every night. Friction between the two brothers erupted when Sidney attempted to corner and kiss Harriet and ended with Francis' threat to kill Sidney if he touched her again. Worried about the possible conclusion of the affair between her brothers, Mary Smith asked her father to intervene, but he was not concerned about their disagreement and claimed that his sons were simply sowing a "few wild oats." The tensions on the Smith plantation continued to build until Sidney resorted to violence.[46]

Sidney Smith confronted Reuben Day as he was visiting Harriet and order him to leave. When Day tried to explain that James Smith had approved of their marriage Sidney told him that slave marriages were not recognized in North Carolina. Since Harriet was a Smith slave he did not have any rights as her husband. Sidney also called Day a trespasser and threatened to whip him if he ever returned. Day tried to slip back

[45]Ibid., 37-40.
[46]Ibid., 40-42.

into Harriet's cabin one night and was badly beaten by both Francis and Sidney. He left Harriet and never returned. Once Harriet was alone, Sidney made his move. He broke open her cabin door, beat her into submission, and raped her. The scene was repeated night after night for weeks, until Francis stopped it. He waited in the shadows for Sidney and caught him returning from the slave quarters. A terrible fight ensued that left Sidney unconscious with a head injury. He never touched Harriet again and Francis became her protector. Already pregnant when the tension between Francis and Sidney exploded into violence, Harriet gave birth to Sidney's daughter and eventually bore Francis' three daughters. The status of these children within the Smith household caused the social infraction that resulted in gossip.[47]

Sidney Smith joyfully received his daughter Cornelia and boasted of her openly. Despite the disgrace that Mary Smith felt over her brother's actions, she found it difficult to simply relegate her niece to the slave quarters. As the matriarch of the Smith family, Mary became responsible for the preservation of the family reputation. After serious deliberation Mary found that she could not ignore the fact that the child was of Smith blood and that she could not allow her to be raised as a slave. Mary never admitted to any of their neighbors that Harriet's daughters were Smith offspring, but she took Sidney's and Francis's daughters into the Smith home and raised them in a world that resided somewhere between slavery and freedom. While Harriet, their mother continued to serve her mistress, Mary took on the maternal role and made the parental decisions that formed the lives of her nieces. She determined what they wore, where they went, how

[47]Ibid., 42-47.

they were trained, what duties they would have, and what privileges and punishment would be meted out. Mary also made sure that the girls received religious training and took them to church with her on Sundays. By candidly acknowledging kinship with Harriet's daughters, the Smiths defied the accepted principles that maintained the slave system. [48]

Various state laws in the South classified the children of slave mothers as slaves who were to be raised in the slave quarters. It did not matter that their father was a member of the master's family, they were still slaves. Martha Hodes has shown that the laws that relegated biracial children to slavery were beneficial for the master. The most obvious advantage received by planters was the financial gain. By consigning the offspring of slave women and white men to the status of slaves the planter increased the number of slaves on his property. The practice also kept illicit visits to the slave quarters a secret. The children simply became addition members of the slave population and were not brought into the notice of the neighborhood. Moreover, the children could be place in the care of their mother and the master did not have to be concerned with their care. Hodes has also addressed the issue of equality between the races as a reason for the states laws regarding biracial children. By assigning free status to the children of slave women and white men the law would disrupt the ideals of white supremacy that place the white race in a superior position. Thus, plantation society found it necessary for biracial offspring to be relegated to the slave quarters and its corresponding inferior status.

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[48]Murray, *Proud Shoes*, 45-46, 53-54; Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social & Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 38.

When Mary Smith refused to follow these dictates she placed herself outside of respectable society and became unsuitable for marriage.[49]

Sometime over the next two or three years, the Smith family moved to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, to escape the scandal that resulted from their children's behavior. Rather than conducting themselves as decent people, the Smith offspring disturbed the stability of southern society. Francis and Sidney refused to marry socially accepted women and consorted with a slave instead. Their sister Mary then took their children into the familial household and raised them as her nieces. The Smiths did not avoid further gossip and scandal by moving to Chapel Hill. Harriet's children still resided within their home and Francis still sustained a relationship with her. Mary regularly took her four nieces to church with her and was confronted with stares from the people who saw them. The community "nudged one another and said, 'There goes Miss Mary Smith and her girls.'" Once at the church, Mary sat alone in the Smith pew while the girls sat in the balcony. When asked who the girls were, Mary always replied "Oh, they're my maid's daughters. The communal criticism that remained with the Smith family assured that Mary remained single throughout her life.[50]

The letters and diaries of antebellum plantation women illustrate the existence of gossip within southern society and demonstrate its positive quality within the roles of reputation and honor. When women failed to exhibit the qualities displayed by proper ladies or to behave in a manner that upheld social principles, they became a danger to the

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[49]Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 30, 117.

[50]Murray, *Proud Shoes*, 47, 53-54.

cohesion of the region and had to be removed before they caused the onset of instability. They also threatened the existence of individual and familial honor and social status. Thus, it was necessary to monitor the activities of planter women. Gossip, scandal, and ostracism were the tools that were used to ensure the observance of communal conventions. They revealed misbehavior and led to the loss of reputation and honor, which resulted in exclusion from society.

The function of female reputation and honor were so significant to the persistence of a patriarch's or family's honor and communal position that southern society continued to embrace their related ideals during the Civil War. Even as plantation women were confronted with responsibilities that were outside of their general experience, the plantation community expected them to adhere to the region's gender conventions and to consider their importance to reputation and honor. Gossip and scandal remained instruments to force conformity and pervaded the writings of elite southern women.

CHAPTER V

Honor, Gender, and Confederate Women

The Civil War caused gender-based changes that required elite southern women to meet the responsibilities of an altered social role while they continued to safeguard their individual and family reputation and honor. The conflict created circumstances that challenged the gender standards that were espoused by plantation society and compelled modifications to the ideals of proper female behavior. Despite the need for these adjustments, though, the planter community attempted to maintain those principles that were essential for reputation and honor. Personal and familial image remained significant elements of social status and power and continued to be conscientiously guarded by the community. At the same time, the women of the South viewed secession and war through their own experiences and confronted the resulting hardships with strength and fortitude.

As Fannie Page Hume of Virginia recorded the events of November 7, 1860, in her diary she wrote that her grandfather "came home full of [Abraham] Lincoln's probable election." She continued the journal entry by stating that her friend, Lewis Williams, "entertained [her] on the subject" of secession, which led him into "the palmy days of Rome—then to her downfall" and caused her to declare "the times are alarming." Fannie Hume was only one in a multitude of elite plantation women who addressed the subject of secession during the fall and winter of 1860. Following the election of

Abraham Lincoln southerners reacted with animosity, anger, and fear for their liberty, constitutional rights, and their very way of life. Convinced that the coming Republican administration threatened the institution of slavery and the South's economic prosperity, the region's population, men and women alike, largely believed that their withdrawal from the United States was essential to the defense of plantation society.[1]

Ada Bacot of Charleston recognized the frequency with which the discussion of secession arose when she wrote that "the papers are filled with the news of the great excitement which pervades the entire state…every one seems to be full of secession, nothing else is talked of...if the people dont [*sic*] take some decided measure this time I will never trust to South Carolina again." She expounded further on the issue as she noted that her "only fear" was that South Carolina would "listen to some compromise." After all, while it was "said woman has no business with such matters," Bacot was confident that there was no "woman in South Carolina [who] does not have the interest of her state at heart." Emma Holmes agreed with her fellow South Carolinian and declared that secession "was born in the hearts of Carolina women." This spirited female devotion to the southern cause was underscored by *DeBow's Review* when it praised "the women of the South," for their forethought as they "saw that the time for secession had come, and, with a courage and a fortitude that would have adorned the annals of Sparta, prepared to meet and to bear up against all the privations, all the dangers, and all the sufferings that secession and war might bring on."[2]

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[1]Fannie Hume Diary, November 7, 1860, Hume Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC.

[2]Ada W. Bacot Diary, November 11 and December 12, 1860, Ada W. Bacot Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC; John F. Marszalek, editor, *The Diary of*

Despite the ever-present rallying cry for secession, the ambiguous nature of the South's political status caused concern for the uncertain future that loomed over the region. Fannie Hume worried about the meaning of the nation's division and stated that "the political horizon [was] darker than ever—the South almost in a revolution—God grant the light may soon spring up & our glorious Union be preserved." However, her hope of a resolution collapsed when on December 20, 1860, South Carolina's special convention unanimously voted for an Ordinance of Secession. When Catherine Devereux Edmondston heard the news of her state's decision she prayed that "it be not the beginning of Evils" to come and exclaimed that "bitterness & strife are the fruits of this political difference." On April 12, 1861, as the Civil War began, Emma Holmes reported the existence of further anxiety among "some few ladies who have been made perfectly miserable and nearly frantic by their fears of the safety of their loved ones." However, she also asserted that the women were the exception. She avowed that "the great body of citizens [seems] to be so impressed with the justice of our cause that they place entire confidence in the God of Battles."[3]

Despite Emma Holmes's belief that most southerners cheered the cause of secession, not all plantation women argued the benefits of the South's independence. Keziah Goodwyn Hopkins Brevard of South Carolina declared that her "heart has never been in this breaking up of the Union" and that she was "sorry our once strong country is

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Miss Emma Holmes 1861-1866 (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 1; Unsigned, "The Women of the South, *DeBow's Review* 6 (August 1861): 147-154.

[3]Fannie Hume Diary, November 10, 1860; Beth G. Crabtree and James W. Patton, ed., *"Journal of a Secesh Lady": The Diary of Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston 1860-1866* (Raleigh, NC: Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1979), 24, 26; Marszalek, editor, *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes*, 26.

now severed." She believed that the South would never "make the North succumb to her" and she was afraid that southerners "have began troubles for ourselves." Sarah Morgan of Louisiana also affirmed that she was "never a secessionist, for [she] quietly adopted [her Unionist] father's views on political subjects." She stated that while she did not "believe in Secession," she did support "Liberty" and wanted the South "to conquer, dictate its own terms, and go back to the Union" because with a divided country "inevitable ruin awaits both" regions. Morgan proudly acknowledged that she was a Unionist, but she also "confess[ed] [her]self a rebel, body and soul" and supported the South.[4]

In spite of their views of the Confederate cause, southern women failed to realize the extent to which they would be called upon to maintain the South's social order. While many of their wartime experiences placed them outside of accepted gender principles, they were also expected to sustain the important elements of their individual and family honor. Since they largely believed that southern women were "the custodian[s] of the virtue of the world" and that they "recoiled from injustice, oppression, and from what is worse than all, contact with evil," southern men depended on their female relations to support their reputation and to preserve their communal status. During the Civil War, southern women stepped beyond their normal female duties into vacant male responsibilities by managing plantations, protecting home and family, and championing their new government. At the same time, the women sought to uphold the

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[4]John Hammond Moore, editor, *A Plantation Mistress on the Eve of the Civil War: The Diary of Keziah Goodwyn Hopkins Brevard, 1860-1861* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993) 108, 110; East, Charles, editor, *Sarah Morgan: The Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 74., 410.

necessary domestic ideals that were essential for a respectable reputation. The desire to preserve southern society, which played a significant role in the making of the war, was a central force in requiring the adherence to pre-war gender customs. Just as the antebellum South depended on the ethic of honor to regulate community relationships, the doctrine became a fundamental element in amending the shifting ties between southerners. The wish to avoid essential changes in their societal traditions led them to view the maintenance of individual and familial honor as vital to a person's community position. Therefore, Confederate women needed to be careful to remain within their proper sphere.[5]

The socialization and life experiences of planter women placed them firmly within a social order that used the ideals of community image, reputation, and honor to maintain its intricate system of power relations. These women naturally associated their early indoctrination with their wartime identity and commitment to their new nation. Duty and family honor continued as the principles by which they measured their own actions against those of their neighbors. While it was important to them that their family members maintain the sense of societal and familial responsibility that dominated their lives in the antebellum period, they also connected that family honor to the war effort and shifted the emphasis on submission and familial loyalty to patriotism. It was within these limitations that plantation women sought to serve their family and their country during the war years.[6]

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[5]*Richmond Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, VA), 14 May 1862; Giselle Roberts, *The Confederate Belle* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 64.

[6]Roberts, *The Confederate Belle,* 38, 53; Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina

The *Richmond Daily Dispatch* acknowledged the significance of female patriotism when it printed an article that exclaimed that "revolutions and great struggles of peoples for honor and right, always depend in a great measure for success upon the support and encouragement of woman." This nationalist fervor often took the form of pride in state and hometown. Sally Baxter Hampton stated "Carolina women say they are proud to give sons and husbands to defend their country." Emma Holmes also expressed her strong regard for her home when she asserted that she was "doubly proud…of [her] native state, that she should be the first to arise and shake off the hated chain which linked use [*sic*] with Black Republicans and Abolitionists." At the same time, Ella Clanton Thomas stated "…if I were not a Georgian I would wish to be a South Carolinian but the very name *Georgian* is of itself a heritage to boast of. I have always been proud of my native state but never more so than now." Louisiana's Kate Stone expanded her thoughts to encompass a wider territory when she wrote, "Throughout the length and breadth of the land the trumpet of war is sounding, and from every hamlet and village, from city and country, men are hurrying by thousands, eager to be led to battle against Lincoln's hordes. Bravely, cheerily they go, willing to meet death in defense of the South, the land we love so well, the fairest land and the most gallant men the sun shines on."[7]

Press, 1996), 23; George C. Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 144.

[7]*Richmond Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, VA) 11 April 1862; Ann Fripp Hampton, editor, *A Divided Heart: Letters of Sally Baxter Hampton 1853-1862* (Columbia, SC: Phantom Press, Publishers, 1994), 76; Virginia Ingraham Burr, editor, *The Secret Eye: The Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas 1848-1889*, With an introduction by Nell Irvin Painter (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 184; Marszalek, editor, *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes*, 1; John Q. Anderson,

An intense sense of patriotism that was demonstrated by some elite southern women led to accusations of abuse, insults, and rudeness by Union soldiers and northern publications. One paper avowed that the "malice and ferocity" of the women "in the higher circles of Southern society, seem almost incredible" as "they have been wont to seek occasions for venting their spleen against loyal men, and especially for insulting our soldiers." The article continued by claiming that Federal soldiers "were repeatedly shot after having been captured; and women, having accumulated pistols and hand-grenades, used them on *helpless* men." Southern newspapers rejected these allegations and returned to the antebellum ideal of proper female behavior to defend their women. Since the reputation of these women reflected on the honor of their families and their homeland, southern men had to create a female image that fit into the South's pre-war society. One commentary argued that the author did "not believe that Southern ladies would condescend to make indelicate and unladylike manifestations of their detestation of the invaders. They would not put themselves on a level with such creatures, nor unnecessarily expose themselves to insult." Yet, some plantation women thought that there was some basis for the northern complaints.[8]

On June 16, 1862, Sarah Morgan of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, recorded a story that was related to her by a friend, Lieutenant Biddle. The officer "assured [her] that he did not pass a street in New Orleans without being most grossly insulted by *ladies*" and that "a lady *spit*" on his friend "as he walked quietly by without looking at her." Morgan

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editor, *Brokenburn: The Journal of Kate Stone 1861-1868* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1955), 14.

[8]Unsigned, "Rebel Women," *Advocate of Peace* (July/August 1862): 116; *Richmond Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, VA), 9 May 1862.

followed the principles of honor that were familiar to her and was happy to report that the man "had the sense to apply to her husband and give him two minutes to apologize or die, and of course he chose the former." General Benjamin Butler, commander of the Union forces that occupied New Orleans, responded in a way that was more drastic than a challenge to a duel and caused an immense reaction throughout the South. Hoping to shame the city's resident into more genteel behavior, on May 15, 1862, Butler issued his controversial Order No. 28, or Woman's Order. The directive read,

> As officers and soldiers of the United States have been subject to repeated insults from women calling themselves ladies, of New Orleans, in return for the most scrupulous non-interference and courtesy on our part, it is ordered here after, when any female shall by mere gesture or movement insult, or show contempt for any officers or soldiers of the United States, she shall be regarded and held liable to be treated as a woman about town plying her avocation.

By essentially declaring that the women of New Orleans were less than ladies, Butler offended their honor and questioned their status within the community.[9]

Kate Stone expressed her resentment over the order when she wrote, "It seems that the openly expressed scorn and hatred of the New Orleans women for Butler's vandal hordes has so exasperated him that he issues this proclamation…Could any order be more infamous…may he not long pollute the soil of Louisiana." At her home in Georgia, Ella Clanton Thomas also conveyed anger over Butler's actions and compared them to the gentlemanly conduct that was important for pre-war southern society. She declared that the "remarkable order of Gen Butler…has plainly shown the women of the South what they are to expect from men who disgrace the name of man." Continuing,

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[9]East, editor, *Sarah Morgan*, 122; Henry Steele Commager, *The Civil War Archive: The History of the Civil War in Documents*, Revised and Expanded by Erik Bruun (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1950, 1973; revised, New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, Inc., 2000), 595; Burr, editor, *The Secret Eye*, 206.

Thomas related Butler's words to his image and stressed that he earned the "reputation of being the most vile loathsome of all God's creation…" She wondered if "there [was] not spirit enough left to the men of New Orleans to strike the dastard 'to the vile dust from which he sprang.'"[10]

Although Sarah Morgan took exception to the Woman's Order, she also sought to maintain the South's antebellum gender principles by holding southern women to a high standard. She asked in her diary, "Do I consider the female who could spit in a gentleman's face merely because he wore United States buttons, as a fit associate for me?" Unable to excuse such unladylike behavior, she placed herself above the women who committed similar deeds. She exclaimed, "In my opinion, the Southern women, and some few of the men, have disgraced themselves by their rude, ill mannered behavior in many instances. I insist that if the valor and chivalry of our men cannot save our country, I would rather have it conquered by a brave race, than owe its liberty to…demonstrations of some of these 'ladies.' If the women have the upper hand then, as they have now, I would not like to live in a country governed by such tongues." When these ideas led to questions about her loyalty to the Confederacy, Morgan once again relied on her education within the values of honor and countered, "*You* may do as you please; my brothers are fighting for me, and doing their duty, so this excess of patriotism is unnecessary for me as my position is too well known to make any demonstrations requisite."[11]

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[10]Burr, editor, *The Secret Eye*, 206-207; Anderson, editor, *Brokenburn*, 111.
[11]East, editor, *Sarah Morgan*, 122.

Patriotic duty and honor also led southern women to urge their men to join the war effort. To salute their support of the Confederate cause, newspapers and journals acknowledged the sacrifices made by the women. One article stated, that they "led the way to it, they inspired their husbands, they aroused their….love of country [which] was as pure as crystal." The devotion of the women "overcame in them all those apprehensions so natural to woman. They have given their husbands, their sons, and their brothers, not only without a murmur, but with enthusiasm, to the great cause." Despite their willingness to meet the burdens that war presented, many plantation women harbored a hidden sense of apprehension. Yet, they did not allow their doubts to hinder the dictates of honor. While Ella Clanton Thomas wished to keep her husband safe at home, she knew that it was not possible and she turned to her diary for some comfort. She resolved to accept the situation gracefully and wrote, "When Duty and Honour call him it would be strange if I would influence him to remain…I am proud to see [him] exhibit the noble, manly, spirit which prompts [him] to go."[12] Since women's image and honor was not divisible from that of her family, the preservation of her husband's honor was also the continuation her own.

Kate Stone and Sarah Morgan were proud to see their brothers fight for the Confederacy and southern society and they rested their families' honor upon their military service. After observing other soldiers, Morgan compared their worthiness to that of her brothers. She wrote that, "Courage is what women admire above all things…. Honestly, I believe the women of the South are as brave as the men who are fighting, and

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[12]*Richmond Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, VA), 17 April 1862; Burr, editor, *The Secret Eye*, 184; Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 43.

certainly braver than the 'Home Guard.' I have not yet been able to coax myself into being as alarmed as many I could name are….Thank Heaven my brothers are the bravest of the brave!" When Stone's soldier brother did not gain the attention that she believed he deserved, she placed part of the blame with him. She stated that he was "not ambitious for himself, but I am very ambitious for him. All my dreams of future glory for our name center in My Brother." When an article about his valor appeared in a local newspaper and was acknowledged by her community, Stone basked in the glory that he attained and related it to her family's reputation. She wrote, "I am very happy for my darling Brother has been mentioned for distinguished gallantry in the late battles. We are not surprised for we know him, but it is grateful [*sic*] to have others appreciate him."[13]

While expressing pride in their family members, elite southern women also communicated a sense of patriotism for their country and privately related their views on the politics of the day. Since politics were part of public sphere, they remained outside of the proper female realm and inappropriate for women's discussions. Ever vigilant of everything respectable, Sarah Morgan wrote in her diary that she "hate[d] to hear women on political subjects," because "they invariably make fools of themselves, and it sickens me to see half a dozen talking at once of what *they* would do, and what ought to be done." Still, she found that the significance of the South's political situation made it "necessary for [her] to express [her] opinion," therefore, she privately included it in her journal. On June 13, 1861, Mary Chesnut copied into her diary a letter from Louisiana Bradford, the wife of a Confederate congressman. The letter agreed with Morgan's

[13]East, editor, *Sarah Morgan*, 38, 182; Anderson, editor, *Brokenburn*, 121,135.

defense of traditional southern practices and urged other wives of Confederate congressmen and cabinet members to use their position to influence the younger generations. Bradford stated that "…although I am utterly opposed to *women* taking *any* part in affairs publicly, I am a great advocate for their influence, in the right time and right *direction*….There are so many *weak minded* women, who attach great importance to the mere *Forms* of *Society* that it will require great effort to counteract their influence….I do trust that good sense and *Christian* simplicity will long be the standards in our 'Southern Courts and firesides,' and that our women may be as *good* as *our men are brave!*"[14]

Despite the inappropriateness of female participation in politics, the letters and diaries of elite southern women reflect that they closely followed the issues of the day and they consigned their thoughts to their writing. Ada Bacot acknowledged her political interest when she wrote, "I confes I take but little interest in any thing else but what concerns my state, I feel as eager for news as any man in the state, but I know I am not able to do any thing for her defence being a woman, still that does not prevent my being interested." Ella Clanton Thomas wrote that "the ever memorable victory" at Fort Sumter "added fresh laurels to the glory of the gallant little state of South Carolina." Fannie Hume reacted to Lincoln's response to the loss of Fort Sumter by stating, "That infamous creature Lincoln has issued a proclamation calling for 75,000 troops to invade the South – retake the 'Forts' &c. – My blood fairly boiled when I read the <u>insolent</u> piece – God grant his attempts may be frustrated." Emma Holmes commented on the cartel

[14]East, editor, *Sarah Morgan*, 73-74; C. Vann Woodward, editor, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 73-74.

that was created by the Union and the Confederacy to exchange prisoners of war. She exclaimed "…I am delighted to see our government is at last trying to stop, most probably vainly, the frightful barbarities and enormities committed by the boasted 'most civilized nation on the earth,' deeds which would disgrace a savage."[15]

Some southerners addressed the military spirit of Confederate women. While they maintained aspirations of entering male roles as protectors of the nation, these women were careful not to step beyond that which was respectable. Virginia Clay-Clopton recorded this sentiment as it was conveyed to her by a soldier at Fort Sumter. He indicated a conviction in female loyalty by stating that "if [Major Anderson] were to kill everybody in the State, and only one woman was left, and she should bear a child, that child would be a secessionist. Our women are even more spirited than we are." Prominent women were even known to establish home guard units to defend their communities and their "rights, liberty, and honor." While they met for drilling and shooting practice, no one seriously expected they would take part in the war, not even the women themselves. Yet, it gave them a sense of security. They were not attempting to overturn the gender assumptions with which they lived or to tarnish their reputations; they were simply trying to fill the void of male protection left by their absent men. In July 1864, Ella Clanton Thomas resorted to similar actions to raise her courage and wrote of the event in her journal, stating "A large party of raiders were seen in the vicinity of Covington last night. I fired off two pistols shots tonight to keep my courage up….." Lucy Breckinridge of Virginia expressed her desire to take part in the war when she

[15]Ada W. Bacot Diary, January 19, 1861; Burr, editor, *The Secret Eye*, 183; Fannie Hume Diary, April 15, 1861; Marszalek, editor, *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes*, 187.

avowed "I wish the women could fight, and I do think they might be allowed to do so in the mountains and in the fortified cities…I would gladly shoulder my pistol and shoot some Yankees if it were allowable."[16]

Despite contemplating thoughts of participating in warfare or physically protecting their homes and communities, most elite southern women did not take their martial spirit to its ultimate conclusion. Still, there were some who aided the Confederate cause by uncovering Union secrets as spies. Cultural ideals that existed during the Civil War protected female spies from the physical danger that male spies hazarded. While both the Union and Confederate governments executed men who were captured as spies, the notion that it was unchivalrous to adopt such measures against women restrained the response to their intelligence work. Nonetheless, female operatives did gamble with their reputation and their honor. Just as Union General Benjamin Butler issued his famous Order No. 28 to shame the ladies of New Orleans into behaving properly, northern officials attempted to undermine the efforts of female agents by casting aspersions on their chastity. The idea was to intimidate the women who stepped outside their appropriate sphere by reminding them of their position in society. Thus, northern newspapers ran articles that referred to southern women who frequented covert dealings as Jezebels, loose women, or harlots. The southern response to these allegations was

[16]Virginia Clay-Clopton, *A Belle of the Fifties: Memoirs of Mrs. Clay of Alabama*, edited by Ada Sterling, with an introduction, annotations, and index to the annotations by Leah Rawls Atkins, Joseph H. Harrison Jr., and Sara A. Hudson (Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 1999), 144; Rable, *Civil Wars*, 152; Burr, editor, *The Secret Eye*, 230; Mary D. Robertson, editor, *Lucy Breckinridge of Grove Hill: The Journal of a Virginia Girl 1862-1864* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1979), 132-133.

mixed, some praised the women for their commitment to the Confederate cause and others censored them for their betrayal of southern social standards.[17]

Maria Isabella (Belle) Boyd was one of the Confederacy's most recognized female spies. Born in 1843 near Martinsburg, Virginia, Boyd was the oldest of Benjamin and Mary Rebecca Boyd's eight children. A locally prominent slaveowning family, the Boyds sent their daughter to Mount Washington's Female College, an elite southern boarding school in Baltimore. During her four years at the institution between the ages of twelve and sixteen, Belle Boyd received an education that sustained the southern way of life and indoctrinated her into the proper behavior of a southern lady. While her family was not wealthy, they had connections to the new Confederate leadership and became early supporters of Confederate independence. This support for the southern cause led Boyd to look for a way to aid the war effort and to begin her career as a southern spy. As Drew Gilpin Faust has pointed out, Boyd was successful because she manipulated the plantation gender values and used her female identity as a weak, submissive woman to cover her actions.[18]

Belle Boyd's decision to become a Confederate operative gained impetus from an incident that followed the Federal occupation of Martinsburg in July 1861. Boyd shot a Union soldier for insulting her mother as she attempted to stop him from raising the Stars

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[17]Elizabeth D. Leonard, *All the Daring of the Soldier: Women of the Civil War Armies* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 26. Catherine Clinton, *Tara Revisited: Women, War, & the Plantation Legend* (New York, London, and Paris: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1995), 89-90; Catherine Clinton, *The Other Civil War: American Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1984; Reprinted, 1999), 84.

[18]Belle Boyd, *Belle Boyd in Camp and Prison,* With a new forward by Drew Gilpin Faust and new introduction by Sharon Kennedy-Nolle (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 5; Leonard, *All the Daring of the Soldier*, 26; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 215.

and Stripes over their home. Despite causing the riot that followed the shooting, Boyd argued for the justification of her actions as a southern lady protecting her family and her home. Shielded by the social ideas that made drastic measures against women inappropriate, she was not found guilty of a punishable offense and the only consequence of the episode was the posting of a guard outside of the Boyd home. After receiving leniency, Boyd decided to become a Confederate operative and to use her position within federal lines to provide the southern army with as much information about the northern army as possible. She later wrote that she had one thought in mind, "that [she] was doing all a woman could do in her country's cause."[19]

Despite Federal efforts to stop Belle Boyd's covert activities, she continued to serve her country as a courier, a nurse, and a spy. The first discovery of Boyd's work by Union forces came very quickly after she began to gather intelligence. Unconcerned with the seriousness of her position, Boyd failed to use a cipher or even to disguise her script when writing letters to the Confederate officers. Found in possession of some of these notes, the Federal officers questioned Boyd and, with an admonishment to cease and desist; she was allowed to return home. Her second arrest came in March 1862, after she gained information that allowed troops under the command of Confederate General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson to win the Battle of Front Royal. Boyd was held for one week and then returned to her home. Finally, in July 1862 Union officials took Boyd into custody and imprisoned her at the Old Capitol Prison, which was converted from the Old Capitol boardinghouse in Washington. However, after one month in the city, due to

[19]Leonard, *All the Daring of the Soldier*, 26-27; Boyd, *Belle Boyd*, 86; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 215.

declining health she was released and banished to Richmond. In the summer of 1863, Boyd returned home inside the Federal lines and was once again arrested for violating her banishment. Confined for three months this time, she was once more released and sent into the Confederate lines.[20]

During periods of both freedom and internment Belle Boyd was subjected to attacks on her character and reputation. Federal guards at the prison where she was held no longer felt the restraint of chivalry and often treated her as a common woman. Since imprisonment suggested that she had placed herself beyond the protection that her gender afforded her, the men were "coarse, vulgar, and indecent by the throwing off of the little restraint which civilized society places upon the most abandoned prostitutes and their companions." Boyd asserted that she was not only verbally insulted, but that the guards were "rude to her, both by word and action." One in particular attempted to intimidate her by presenting "his bayoneted musket at her in a threatening manner." Another of men "charged bayonets, and actually pinned [her] to the wall by [her] dress, his weapon inflicting a flesh-wound on [her] arm."[21]

The assault was also conducted by Northern newspapers. Boyd blamed Mr. Clark of the *New York Herald*, a reporter who was domiciled at the Federal headquarters near her home, for "the first, violent, undisguised abuse with which [her] name was coupled in any Federal journal." She did not, however, excuse other Union papers, stating that she "must do the editors of the Yankee newspapers the justice to admit they were not slow to follow the example set them by Mr. Clark. They seemed to think that to insult an

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[20]Leonard, *All the Daring of* the *Soldier*, 27-30, 32.
[21]Boyd, *Belle Boyd*, 64, 141.

innocent young girl was to prove their manhood and evince their patriotism." On July 26, 1862, the *Richmond Daily Dispatch* printed a letter that illustrated the type of abuse that Boyd addressed in her memoir. Written to the *Philadelphia Inquirer* by a Union soldier in Front Royal, Virginia, the piece "acknowledged [Boyd's] superiority for machination and intrigue" and stated that her "pious, good old mother…regrets as much as any one can the violent and eccentric course of her daughter since this rebellion has broken out." The letter's author blamed Boyd's actions on her "blind devotion to an idea," which caused her to exceed "far the boundary of her sex's modesty to promote its success."[22]

One of the Confederacy's renowned female spies, Rose O'Neal Greenhow received both praise and censure as she risked her reputation and her honor to serve the southern cause. Born in 1817 on a small plantation in Montgomery County, Maryland, she grew up with limited financial resources and little education. Upon her father's death when she was a small child, Greenhow was sent to live with an aunt who ran the Old Capitol boardinghouse in Washington, D.C. Living in a residence that served as quarters for many governmental officials, she became associated with various up and coming young politicians and was part of Washington's society. In 1843, at the age of twenty-six, she married Dr. Robert Greenhow a Virginian who was both wealthy and socially well-placed. By her mid-thirties, Greenhow was the mother of four daughters and had

[22]Boyd, *Belle Boyd*, 103; *Richmond Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, VA), 26 July 1862; *Southern Illustrated News* (Richmond, VA), 18 October 1862.

become a person with significant social status in the nation's capital. In 1850, the Greenhows moved to California, where the doctor died in 1854.[23]

Following the death of her husband, Rose Greenhow and her daughters returned to Washington, D. C. Stepping back into high society, Greenhow quickly became one of the city's leading hostesses and gained a reputation as a person who could "obtain favors, influence members of Congress, and advance her friends' careers." When secession began in 1860 and the Civil War broke out in 1861, Greenhow immediately became a supporter of the Confederacy and determined to use her influence to the benefit of the new nation. She linked up with Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Jordan of Virginia, a former quartermaster in the United States Army, to establish a complex Confederate spy network in the Union's capital. Greenhow used her contacts to gain information and used a simple cipher to relate the intelligence to Confederate officers. Greenhow and Jordan also developed an elaborate system to relay messages with the use of window shades.[24]

Rose Greenhow's most famous covert work provided Confederate General Pierre G. T. Beauregard with intelligence about Federal preparations for an advance into Virginia, which gave the Confederacy an advantage during the Battle of Bull Run in July 1861. It also convinced Union officials to stop the flow of information from Washington into Confederate lines. In late July 1861, Allan Pinkerton, the head of the Union's newly formed secret service, ordered the surveillance of the Greenhow home and the

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[23]Leonard, *All the Daring of the Soldier*, 35-36; Ann Blackman, *Wild Rose: The True Story of a Civil War Spy* (New York: Random House, 2005), 165.

[24]Rose O'Neal Greenhow, *My Imprisonment and the First Year of Abolition Rule at Washington* (London: Richard Bentley, Publisher in Ordinary to Her Majesty, 1863), 59; Katherine M. Jones, *Ladies of Richmond: Confederate Capital*, With an introduction by Clifford Dowdey (New York and Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1962), 115.

investigation of anyone coming or going from the premises. On August 23, Greenhow was placed under house arrest and the guards were given the authority to arrest any coconspirators that may unwittingly visit the house. Despite the efforts made by Federal agents, Greenhow continued to find ways to pass messages to the Confederates. Consequently, Greenhow and her youngest daughter, Little Rose, were transferred to Old Capitol Prison, the very boardinghouse were she was raised. In May 1862, after five months of internment, they were released and banished to the South.[25]

Just as Belle Boyd recorded that she was ill-treated while in captivity, Rose Greenhow also reported that she encountered behavior that defied propriety and insulted her sensibilities as an elite southern woman. It was not long after her house arrest began that Greenhow realized the extent to which she was to be insulted. A female detective was ordered to search her person for any important papers that may have been hidden among her clothing. Greenhow asserted, "I blush that the name and character of woman should be so prostituted." Mary Chesnut also noted this loss of privacy when she mentioned a "most bravely indelicate" letter from Greenhow. She made known the way in which "her delicacy was shocked and outraged, that she had been "for eight days…in full sight of men—her rooms wide open—and sleepless sentinels watching by day and by night. Soldiers tramping—looking in at her leisurely by way of amusement." Since her youngest child accompanied her to Old Capitol Prison, Greenhow was also concerned with the indignities that she experienced. Little Rose had been "torn from the peaceful delights of home, and the flowery path of girlhood, and forced to witness the hard

[25]Leonard, *All the Daring of a Soldier*, 37-39, 41, 43-44; Jones, *Ladies of Richmond*, 115.

realities of prison-life…hear the keys grating in dungeon locks," as well as the "vicious taunts of vulgar guards."[26]

Rose O'Neal Greenhow believed that she merely "performed [her] duty" to her country. Accordingly, she considered her ventures outside of the parameters of proper female behavior to be acceptable, they were for the Confederacy. As a principled southern woman, she expected to be regarded as a respectable lady. When her jailors acted with distain and treated her as an enemy spy instead of a woman of good repute she was resentful. While many southerners thought that the "Confederacy owe[d] her a debt they never can pay," others saw her as a threat to the preservation of the South's social traditions. For Mary Chesnut, Greenhow was a dangerous example and who set precedents that had dire consequences for southern women. She asserted that "women who come before the public are in a bad box now." Since women were suspected as spies, those crossing Federal lines were carefully examined; their hair, hoop skirts, and bustles all searched for important papers and contraband. Such personal invasions caused these women to experience humiliation "to the deepest degree" and left them open to censure. In a letter that she wrote to Mary Chesnut after Greenhow's 1864 death, Varina Davis, the First Lady of the Confederacy, also expressed disapproval of the spy. She stated that Rose Greenhow "was a great woman spoiled by education—or the want of it. She had left few less prudent women behind her—and many less devoted to our cause" and she wondered, "ought she not to be forgiven?"[27]

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[26]Greenhow, *My Imprisonment*, 7, 61-62; Woodward, editor, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 255.
[27]Greenhow, *My* Imprisonment, 7; Woodward, editor, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 172, 367, 664.

As the Civil War began, southern men began to recognize the high level of patriotism cherished by their women. Their admission was evident in the poem "To a Company of Volunteers Receiving Their Banner at the Hands of the Ladies," which appeared in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1861. Written by a woman and heralded by the male editor as an excellent work, the piece proclaimed the bravery and loyalty of southern women. However, it also addressed the limitations of their gender. It read in part, "But her feeble strength denies, though her heart is brave and true, therefore now her eager eyes, rest upon and follow you." Two years later, in 1863, the periodical continued to acknowledge the sacrifices that were made by the region's women. The short article, "Woman's Heroism," addressed the apprehension of women waiting for news of a loved ones' fate and tied their losses to the honor of fulfilling ones' national duty.

> Woman remains at home to suffer, to bear the cruel torture of suspense, to tremble when the battle has been fought, and the news of the slaughter is flashing over the electric wire, to know that defeat will cover her with dishonor and her little one with ruin…But she bears it all and bows submissive to the stroke. He died for the cause. He perished for his country. I would not have it otherwise….

Southern men praised the sacrifices that women made as they stepped into roles that were vacated by their male relatives, but they also encouraged the women to continue to strive for the maintenance of the society's traditional gender conventions.[28]

Despite their financial ability to move away from the effects of the war, most plantation mistresses chose to stay in their homes. For some the decision to stay resulted from a desire to follow the prescribed course of a wife. In January 1861, at the beginning

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[28]Cora, "To a Company of Volunteers Receiving Their Banner at the Hands of the Ladies," *Southern Literary Messenger* 33 (1) (July 1861): 17; Unsigned, "Woman's Heroism," *Southern Literary Messenger* 37 (2) (February 1863): 127.

of the secession crisis, Sally Baxter Hampton received an invitation to return to her northern parents during the difficulties in the South. Replying for his ill wife, Frank Hampton informed his mother-in-law that Sally decided to remain in South Carolina and explained his agreement with her choice, "I had left it to Sally to decide for herself. She has made the proper decision I think, that is to remain. It is hard for her—but she has behaved well through it all…. She will have truble—hardships & discomforts to go through with, but she has made it her home when there was no storm and I do not think it would be right to go off the first one that comes." For others, the decision to stay was formed for more practical reasons. It entailed an attempt to ensure the survival of the household and the family's honor and involved the acceptance of responsibilities that were outside of their traditional realm. During the absence of their husbands, brothers, and sons, these women dealt with the tasks that were necessitated by the planting, harvesting, and marketing of their crops, duties that they were unprepared to handle. Trained to be resolute in the face of adversity, they struggled through droughts, unsatisfactory harvests, and the invasion of Union soldiers to keep their households together. Confederate officials made these female planters into patriotic examples and urged other women to follow the pattern and to keep the fields planted and the home fires burning.[29]

The contributions that plantation women made to the Confederate war effort were considered significant and were evident in the records of the time. One item referred to

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[29]Clinton, *Tara Revisited,* 109-110; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics & Behavior in the Old South* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 234; Hampton, editor, *A Divided Heart*, 95; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 77.

southern women as "a noble race" for even the "delicate ones who have been reared in the lap of luxury" were busy working to aid the soldiers. In April 1862, the *Richmond Daily Dispatch* advanced this idea when it noted that

> All over the land they have been at work, making clothes and preparing provisions for the soldiers, nursing them in hospitals, and in their own houses, seeking to take the place of a mother and a sister to the poor sick and wounded stranger, and, when human help no longer availed, smoothing the brow damp with death, and sending up their prayers with the departing spirit to the throne of Heaven.

Judith McGuire of Virginia expanded on this thought and agreed that women played an important role in the southern cause. She considered the position of women in the conflict by writing that the South was "very weak in resources, but strong in stout hearts, zeal for the cause, and enthusiastic devotion to our beloved South, and while men are making a free-will offering of their life's blood on the altar of their country, women must not be idle."[30]

In 1895, Kate Cumming published, *Gleanings From Southland*, her memoir of her days as a Confederate nurse. Along with her memories of her hospital work, she also addressed the charitable efforts of the women who joined the many aid societies that were created in the region. She wrote that "the zeal and patriotism of the women were as great as ever. Societies of all kinds were formed for the benefit of the soldiers and their families who needed help. The wealthiest ladies in the city worked as hard as the poorest. All vied with each other as to who would do the most." Ella Clanton Thomas served as the director of the Augusta Ladies' Aid Society, which sewed uniforms, made

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[30] Judith W. McGuire, *Diary of a Southern Refugee During the War by A Lady of Virginia* (New York: E. J. Hale & Son, 1867; Reprinted, New York: Arno Press, 1972), 12; *Richmond Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, VA), 12 September, 1861 and 17 April 1862.

cartridges, and visited hospitals. The Confederate women who took part in aid societies expressed the demands of honor through the efforts that they expended on behalf of their community. The work that they completed within the organizations became the fulfillment of duty.[31]

Lucy Breckinridge and Emma Holmes reported their labors in their diaries. Breckinridge stated that while sewing shirts for soldiers, she "made the first whole garment that [she had] made in many years." Holmes recorded that she "attended a meeting of ladies…to form a society to furnish clothing for the Volunteers" and that "it was first intended only to be for the soldiers from the city, but has gradually become a State Society." A few days later she noted that she was learning to use a sewing machine and was able to make "nearly a whole flannel shirt." Despite her success, she found "particular dislike" in the endeavor and exclaimed that the project "needed all [her] patriotism to bring [her] to 'the sticking point.'" Still, she persevered and was always as "busy as possible, all the time making up underclothes, which is either sent on to Va. or given to those companies about to start." For Emma Holmes, her sewing was "a never-ceasing labor of love & patriotism, and the whole country from one end to the other is engaged in the noble work…" While, Emma Holmes had an aversion to the work that she was engaged in, she accepted it as her duty and as important to the continuance of honor.[32]

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[31] Kate Cumming, *Gleanings From Southland: Sketches of Life and Manner of the People of the South Before, During, and After the War of Secession, with Extracts from the Author's Journal and An Epitome of the New South* (Birmingham, AL: Roberts & Son, 1895), 36; Burr, editor, *The Secret Eye*, 6; Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 47.

[32]Robertson, editor, *Lucy Breckinridge*, 75; Marszalek, editor, *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes*, 65, 72-74, 82.

Plantation women also sought to do their duty by caring for sick and wounded soldiers. Since southern gender customs placed the treatment of the ill within the realm of female obligations, their sense of patriotism made it natural for Confederate women to extend their concern for the ailing beyond their families to the men of the nation's army. Nevertheless, the same gender ideals that placed the responsibility of attending those in need within the domestic sphere also restricted the role that elite southern women played as military nurses. Their work within the hospitals placed the women in close contact with strange men of the lower classes, a circumstance that challenged the idea that plantation women exemplified purity and was therefore disapproved of by the region's social standards. In 1862, one essayist asserted that "few [women] are fitted to perform" the duties of a nurse and that since the serve could be "performed without a doubt of their propriety" southern ladies should limit themselves to sewing clothing for the soldiers. Still, there were those who believed that women were important to the healing process. In October 1861, the *Richmond Daily Dispatch* carried an article that argued that women be given a part in the attending casualties. It read,

> female ministration is shut out of these great public hospitals, and woman's mission by the bed-side of the sufferer is consigned to carless, neglectful, unfeeling men servants, under the direction, perhaps, of a hard-hearted steward, who, satisfied to receive his salary and to live in comfort himself, cares only to keep up appearances with the attending physicians, and after the medical visits for the day are over, rests satisfied in the easy neglect of the helpless victims who have no means of redress, and who learn the virtue of uncomplaining patience in a school that the heart aches to contemplate.

Despite this sentiment that the feminine hand was vital for the care of the wounded, women who chose to take on the task of nursing risked jeopardizing their reputations and their family's honor.[33]

Sally Tompkins, a Virginia spinster, exposed herself to censure when she disregarded the social limitations, borrowed a house from a friend, and opened a twenty-two bed hospital in Richmond. Her efforts to help the sick and wounded men drew heavy male opposition in the city, for her "impropriety" of exposing females to the "ruffians" who served as soldiers violated long held beliefs about the proper behavior of women. An incident that was noted by Mary Chesnut seemed to indicate that male criticism may have had some merit. Her diary told the story of Mrs. Carter, who visited Tompkins's hospital and was confronted with the unwanted attention of the patients. Chesnut wrote that Mrs. Carter had a face that was "so strikingly handsome the wounded men could not help looking at her, and one was not so bad off but he burst into flowery compliment." In response to the young man's interest, Mrs. Carter "turned scarlet with surprise and indignation." Sally Tompkins thought that it would be best for the hospital if she could keep beautiful faces out of the wards in the future. Chesnut agreed that "girls [had] no business at hospitals."[34]

When the Civil War began the Confederate Medical Department did not meet the needs of the mounting conflict. Legislation approved by the Confederate Congress created the organization and eventually enlarged it. Yet, its funding for the formation of

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[33] Clinton, *Tara Revisited*, 82; "Florence Nightingale and Southern Ladies," *Southern Monthly* 2 (May 1862), as seen in Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 93; *Richmond Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, VA), 10 October 1861.

[34]Catherine Clinton, *The Other Civil War: American Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999), 82; Woodward, editor, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 149, 474.

military hospitals and for surgeons' salaries amounted to only $50,000. Convinced that the hostilities with the North would not last long, the Confederate government proved reluctant to invest a large amount of money into unneeded facilities. Therefore, when the fighting began in earnest and the number of casualties continued to increase, state and local aid societies attempted to bridge the gap that was created by the lack of military hospitals. The charitable associations established hospitals and wayside care facilities in areas where the government could not meet the demand of casualties. These medical institutions were supported through donations from individuals and through state funds. While general hospitals that were founded by the Confederate Medical Department were open to soldiers from all areas, the state-sponsored clinics gave priority to patients from their home states.[35]

By 1862, the Confederate government took over the administration of all military hospitals and set regulations for the staffing of those facilities. Surgeons and assistant surgeons received military commissions, while nurses were recruited on a volunteer basis. All salaries were paid by the Confederacy. The new policies also carried provisions for the employment of females within the hospitals. The new Hospital Law enabled medical institutions "with rations and suitable places of lodging" to hire "matrons and female nurses and attendants." Each facility was allowed "two matrons…to exercise a superintendence over the entire domestic economy of the hospital," as well as assistant matrons, ward-matrons, and various other nurses, cooks, and laundresses. The women who worked within the hospital setting were assigned

[35]Jean V. Berlin, editor, *A Confederate Nurse: The Diary of Ada W. Bacot, 1860-1863* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 6.

duties that held them within the domestic sphere and complied with social dictates. The procedures called for them to perform tasks such as seeing to the preparation of food for the patients, superintending the completion of the laundry, making sure that the hospital and its inmates were neat and clean, preparing the beds and bedding, and administering medications.[36]

Once they were accepted within the hospital system, many plantation women fought to resolve conflicted emotions about their role under the new conditions. Convinced that the evidence of their efforts to aid the Confederate cause was steadfastly linked to their individual and familial honor, they saw nursing as a way to meet the demands of duty. At the same time, however, the gender restrictions that they grew up with created hesitancy to place themselves in situations that were previously forbidden. Ella Clanton Thomas recorded a visit to the hospital in her diary and reported that she encountered a man "with the air of refinement about him." She wanted to approach him and to "shake hands with him & let him know how [she] sympathized with him," but was hesitant to do so because she "was restrained by the conventionalism which characterizes most Southern women, and prevents them from following the noble dictates of their nature."[37]

Mary Chesnut also had reservations about working with the wounded. While she admired women like Sally Tompkins, she was not sure that she had the ability to follow

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[36]Confederate Congress, *The Statutes at Large of the Confederate States of America, Passed at the Second Session of the First Congress; 1862. Carefully Collated with the Originals at Richmond. Public Laws of the Confederate States of America, Passed at the Second Session of the First Congress; 1862. Private Laws of the Confederate States of America, Passed at the Second Session of the First Congress; 1862.* Edited by James M. Matthew, Attorney at Law and the Law Clerk of the Department of Justice (Richmond: R. M. Smith, 1862), 64; Berlin, editor, *A Confederate Nurse*, 7.

[37]Burr, editor, *The Secret Eye*, 204.

the same path. She reported being sick after calls to local hospitals and even fainting during one visit. At one point, her diary noted the creation of a wayside hospital by Jane Cole Fisher. She praised Fisher's efforts and stated "I am ready and thankful to help every way, subscription and otherwise. But too feeble in health to attend in person. All honor to Mrs. Fisher." In Chesnut's eyes, Fisher earned a positive image by providing aid to the wounded soldiers. Chesnut eventually may it past her illness and became strong enough to resume nursing duties and was "so glad to be a hospital nurse once more." It was important to her because while she "had excuses enough…at heart [she] felt a coward and a skulker…there must be no dodging duty."[38]

Sarah Morgan also felt the restraints that were shaped by the South's traditional gender customs and related the frustration that they created within her to her diary. She asserted that

> If I was independent, if I could work my own will without causing others to suffer for my deeds, I would not be poring over this stupid page, I would not be idly reading or sewing. I would put aside woman's trash, take up Woman's duty, and I would stand by some forsaken man and bid him God speed as he closes his dying eyes. *That* is Woman's mission….If I could help these dying men! Yet it is as impossible as though I was a chained bear. I cant [*sic*] put out my hand. I am threatened with Coventry[39] because I sent a custard to a sick man who is in the army, and with the anathema of society…

Since the sick man that Morgan referred to was Lieutenant James C. Biddle, an aide to the commander of the occupying forces in her hometown of Baton Rouge, the criticism of her kindness probably carried some animosity for anyone who helped the enemy. Yet, Morgan's writing clearly indicated that she understood what society expected of her and

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[38]Woodward, editor, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 416, 641.
[39]The word "Coventry" was used as a polite euphemism for ostracism.

how she was to behave. She had a different idea of where women's priorities should be placed, yet she recognized that her actions were significant for her family. She claimed that her father would do all that was possible to protect her reputation, but she also recognized that since "he seems to think our conduct reflects on him," she had "no alternative" except to follow his dictates. Morgan understood that a patriarch's honor, and that of his family, rested on the actions of his entire household.[40]

The preservation of familial reputation and honor was a complex obligation for southern women who served as military nurses during the Civil War. After experiencing the pull of duty, hundreds of women entered into nursing to fulfill a sense of honor that was based on a demonstration of their patriotism and an awareness of their responsibility as women to help those in need.[41] They sought to aid their nation and the men that fought for the Confederate cause while upholding the crucial gender-based foundation of their communal image. They were praised for their patriotic sacrifice, but at the same time, they encountered criticism and disapproval for exposing themselves to the public sphere. Southern society continually reminded women that they were on the precipice of the improper and that proof of their status as honorable women required closely guarded behavior. Ada W. Bacot, Kate Cumming, and Phoebe Yates Pember were three of the elite southern women who navigated these multifaceted social standards and found their way through the maze of judgments to the completion of duty.

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[40]East, editor, *Sarah Morgan*, 123-124.

[41]George Rable has shown that estimates indicate that just under thirty-two hundred northern and southern women served as Civil War nurses.

Born in 1832, Ada W. Bacot, the eldest of Peter and Anna Bacot's six children, was raised on her family's plantation along the Pee Dee River in South Carolina. Like other young women within southern society, she received her formal education at a girls' school, St. Mary's Academy in Raleigh, North Carolina, while she was indoctrinated into the South's gender customs by her community. In 1851, at the age of nineteen, Ada Bacot married her second cousin Thomas Wainwright Bacot, Jr. and settled into the duties of a plantation mistress on Roseville, near her parents. Over the next few years the couple welcomed two daughters, Anna Jane and Emily Helen. But, it was not long before the Bacot household began to come apart. The Bacots lost both of their daughters by their second year and, in 1856, Thomas Bacot was killed as he argued with the plantation's overseer. By the time she began her wartime dairy in 1860, Ada Bacot was a twenty-seven year old widow who was once again childless.[42]

As early as January 1861, Ada Bacot began to write about serving the Confederacy as a nurse. However, it was not until August 1861 that her determination appeared in her diary. On August 21, she wrote that she and her father were "thinking of going on together to Va. in the capacity of nurses….I hope my wish will soon be realized, & I can go to Va. But I am afraid to hope too much." Even as she sought to fulfill her patriotic duty as a nurse, she began to have second thoughts about her suitability for the job. Bacot wondered "if there really [was] any danger could I defend myself. Some times I think I could then again I fear not, I fear I am nothing more than a weak woman at last." As a member of a society that placed emphasis upon gender restraints, she was

[42]Berlin, editor, *A Confederate Nurse*, 2, 4.

naturally undecided about her ability to step outside of societal norms. In due course, she overcame her doubts and began to actively seek a nursing position with the South Carolina Hospital Aid Association, an organization that established four hospitals in Charlottesville, Virginia.[43]

Almost certain of her acceptance by the aid society, Ada Bacot allowed her hopes of usefulness to rise, until they were once again dashed by social disapproval. On November 11, 1861, Bacot wrote that she had "given up all idea of going [to] Virginia" to join the aid association. Her father spoke about her nursing plans to Dr. John Chisolm, a surgical professor at South Carolina College who "told him to try & disuade [her] from going, that twas scarcely a place for a lady." Faced with the "bitter disappointment" created by the cancellation of her trip to Virginia, Bacot turned to her diary and poured out her frustration in its pages. She wrote, "I had hoped to be able to do something for my country, now my dream of usefulness is banished what can I do now, I cant give up I hope yet to be able to do something my own state may need me. Oh! how gladly would I sacrifice my all for her." Ada Bacot was not defeated and within a month she realized her "dream of usefulness."[44]

On December 6, 1861, Ada Bacot recorded reading an address by Reverend Robert Woodward Barnwell, the director of the South Carolina Hospital Aid Association, which called for women to travel to Charlottesville to take on the duties of nurses in the society's hospitals. In the address, Barnwell indicated that "what was needed was the presence of the ladies themselves, not so much as nurses, as to superintend the different

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[43]Ibid., 5, 47, 49, 52.
[44]Berlin, editor, *A Confederate Nurse*, 52, 55-56; Ada W. Bacot Diary, November 11, 1861.

departments, to read to them & in fact to supply all the charms of home to soothe the sick beds of the our noble soldiers." With her father's blessing, Bacot immediately contacted Barnwell and she became one of the ladies who made the journey to Virginia. By mid-December, she was settled into rooms at Charlottesville's Maupin House and was working at the Monticello Hospital as a housekeeper. In January 1862, Bacot moved into the position of hospital nurse and remained there for the following year.[45]

In January 1863, Ada Bacot became entangled in a controversy that eventually caused her to leave nursing and to return to South Carolina. Bacot was offered and accepted the new rank of matron of the Midway Hospital in Charlottesville and quickly related it to your new friends. A disagreement began when her close friend James McIntosh, an assistant surgeon who also boarded at the Maupin House, opposed her transfer. When she responded to this disapproval by backing out of the job that she had already accepted, Bacot angered Dr. E. J. Rembert, the hospital director. During the interview, Rembert aggravated the indecisiveness that Bacot was already experiencing when he told her that "he thought it would be more patriotic for [her] to go than stay here." Torn between duty to her nation and adherence to the social standards that were ingrained within her, Bacot returned to McIntosh for further advice. She later stated that "he was so very very kind…just like a dear brother" and that he promised to think the matter over. The next day McIntosh counseled Bacot, stating that "he still was of the opinion [she] had better stay where" she was because she "was not born in the same

[45]Berlin, editor, *A Confederate Nurse*, 8, 59-60, 65; Marszalek, editor, *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes*, 101.

station of life that Mrs. Rion[46] was, that [she] had never been accustomed to labour, there fore [she] could not undergo what [Mrs. Rion] did except at the expence of comfort, pleasure & health, that it was my duty to take of myself." Bacot gave her priority to the demands of societal restraints and did not take the matronship at the Midway Hospital. Within months of the incident, she left nursing and returned to her home in South Carolina.[47]

The journal and memoir written by Kate Cumming also illustrate the tangled principles of duty and honor that Civil War nurses encountered. Born in 1835 in Edinburgh, Scotland, Kate Cumming moved with her family, first to Montreal and then to Mobile, Alabama. Since several of her formative years were spent in the American South, Cumming was conscious of her Scottish roots but grew up a southerner. By the time of the Civil War, she was a "comfortably situated young lady of Mobile." As the war began, Cumming's mother and two of her sisters left for England, which left her with her father David Cumming and one brother David Cumming, Jr. Illness restricted her activities in the early months of the conflict; however, as she recuperated Kate Cumming began to take an interest in nursing. Having heard an address by Reverend Benjamin M. Miller, an old friend of the family who called on ladies to go to the front to aid in nursing the sick and wounded, she resolved to take up the challenge. Nonetheless, her family's

[46]Mrs. Rion was the departing matron at Midway Hospital.
[47]Berlin, editor, *A Confederate Nurse*, 15, 177-178.

disapproval of her plans restricted her involvement to the work of soldiers' aid society and to "gathering blankets, quilts, and delicacies of all kinds for the troops."[48]

Kate Cumming's desire to become a military nurse was strengthened as she saw long-time friends and acquaintances march off to war. Finally, as she watched the Twenty-first Alabama, a unit that included "many…men [they] had known from boyhood, had been schoolmates and been associated together at Sunday school and church," she could no longer contain her thoughts of duty. She "resolved then and there that if Mr. Miller would take [her, she] would go with him and do [her] best." Her father gave his blessing to her plan, but the rest of her family was vehemently opposed to it. One claimed that "no sister of his should take such a step" and another one stated "that nursing soldiers was no work for a refined lady." A third brother-in-law, whose mother and sister worked with Florence Nightingale during the Crimean War, asserted that Cumming "would be mistaken if [she] thought [their] position would be like theirs, for they went under the auspices of a powerful government, who gave them every assistance, while [the Confederate government] was too poor to give [them] any." In other words, the Confederacy would not be able to safeguard the female nurses as they would be protected by their family at home and would jeopardize their reputation and social standing. Still, throughout her experiences during the war, Kate Cumming continued to believe that "none, excepting the most high-toned and refined women, had any business doing that most sacred of all duties—alleviating suffering."[49]

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[48]Kate Cumming, *Kate: The Journal of a Confederate Nurse*, Edited by Richard Barksdale Harwell (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959; Reprinted 1987 and 1998), x-xi; Cumming, *Gleanings From Southland*, 37.

[49]Cumming, *Gleanings From Southland*, 37-39.

Her family's resistance to her plans strengthened Kate Cumming's resolve and made her more determined to follow through. She was steadfast in her belief that if the Confederacy "did not succeed, the women of the South would be responsible." For Cumming, this "conclusion was forced upon [her] by what [she] could not [fail to] see without willful blindness. Not for one moment would [she] say that there are no women in the South who have nobly done their duty, although there was an adverse current, strong enough to carry all with it." Therefore, despite the views of family, Kate Cumming joined the ranks of the military nurse. Between 1862 and 1865, she followed the Confederate army on campaigns through Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Georgia. As Cumming met her duty to serve her nation, she was continually confronted by warnings of impropriety.[50]

Within six months of taking on the responsibilities of nursing, Kate Cumming admitted that she had some doubts about the respectability of women working in hospitals. Still, her sense of patriotic duty and her desire to help the wounded took precedence and she reaffirmed her conviction that caring for war casualties was women's obligation. Cumming wrote,

> There is a good deal of trouble about the ladies in some of the hospitals of this department. Our friends here have advised us to go home, as they say it is not considered respectable to go into one. I must confess, from all I had heard and seen, for awhile I wavered about the propriety of it; but when I remembered the suffering I had witnessed, and the relief I had given, my mind was made up to go into one if allowed to do so.

The tensions that Kate Cumming recorded did not disperse with the presence of the female nurses. While some men began to acknowledge the work done by the women,

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[50]Cumming, *Kate: The Journal of a Confederate Nurse*, xix, 4.

many others held to the societal traditions that were familiar to them. Cumming met General Sterling Price while she was with the hospital in Corinth, Mississippi. She was happy to meet the military hero, but he was not similarly generous. He commented that he "was not behind his sex in complimenting the ladies for the sacrifices they are making in doing their duty." He did not believe that their efforts at the front fell within the realm of proper female behavior.[51]

Phoebe Yates Pember, like Ada Bacot and Kate Cumming, struggled through doubts and social criticism to perform the duties of a nurse for the Confederate army. Born in 1823, Pember was the fourth of seven children in the prominent Charleston family of Jacob and Fanny Levy. Little is known about her early life, yet her writing indicates that she received some kind of formal education and that she was properly indoctrinated in the South's social standards. In 1856, at the age of thirty-three, Phoebe Levy married Thomas Pember, but their marriage was short-lived. Thomas Pember died in 1861 in Aiken, South Carolina. As the Civil War began, the widowed Pember joined her family as refugees in Marietta, Georgia.[52]

In 1862, at the age of thirty-nine, Phoebe Yates Pember became the chief matron of the Chimborazo Hospital in Richmond, a large facility that treated 76,000 patients during the war. Pember described the initial proposal that offered her the position of superintendent of the hospital's nurses as "a startling proposition to a woman used to all the comforts of luxurious life." As she considered the offer, Pember's decision was

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[51]Ibid., 27, 65.

[52]Phoebe Yates Pember, *A Southern Woman's Story*, With a new introduction by George C. Rable (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), ix.

influenced by the societal limitations that governed southern society. She was unable to completely escape "the natural idea that such a life would be injurious to the delicacy and refinement of a lady" and would cause her "nature [to] become deteriorated and her sensibilities blunted." For Pember, the thought of such an occurrence "was rather appalling." In the end, though, her patriotism gave her need to aid her country priority over her fear for her standing as a lady and she accepted the assignment as chief matron.[53]

Phoebe Pember's concerns for the refinement and respectability of the plantation ladies continued to be a significant part of her character and initially impacted her hiring policies. Since the hospital had "no lack of applicants when the want was circulated," Pember had the freedom to choose by social class as well as by suitability for the job. Remembering her earlier doubts about the propriety of ladies working in such a position, she "hesitated between ladies of education and position, who [she] knew would be willing to aid [her], and the common class of respectable servants." Finally, she settled on the applicants from the servant class "because it was to be supposed they would be more amenable to authority." Still, after experiencing the course, indecorous conduct of the "respectable servants," Pember decided that it was important to have "refined ladies" present in the hospital because their dignified manner improved the care of the soldiers.[54]

As the war progressed and Phoebe Pember became more experienced in her responsibilities as Chimborazo's chief matron, she was more comfortable with the role of elite southern women in the Confederate hospitals. While she continued to observe the

[53]Ibid., 2.
[54]Ibid., 18.

region's gender customs, she also became more firmly convinced that it was the patriotic duty of Confederate women to tend the sick and wounded among the army. In her memoirs, Pember wrote that the women that she worked with "were gentle-women in every sense of the word, and though they might not have remembered that *noblesse oblige* they felt and acted up to the motto in every act of their lives." To the notion that these women lost any of their delicacy or refinement by performing the tasks of a nurse, Pember answered that there was "no unpleasant exposure under proper arrangements, and if even there be…woman *must* soar beyond the conventional modesty considered correct under different circumstances."[55]

There is no question that the lives of elite southern women changed during the years of the Confederacy. Confronted with the ravages of war and the loss of loved ones on the battlefield, the women faced a world that was new to them. They took on responsibilities that were previously outside of their normal domain and sought to fulfill their duty to family, home, and the Confederacy. At the same time though, plantation society expected the women to preserve their traditional gender customs. The planter community encouraged women to adhere to the established standards of proper female behavior and the ideal of the southern lady. For the Confederate plantation society, reputation and honor, both individual and familial, remained the foundation of their families' social status and influence.

[55]Ibid., 89-90.

CONCLUSION

Within the patriarchal society of the antebellum South's plantation system, women led restricted lives that were controlled by social principles and gender conventions that were viewed through a prism of honor. Shaped by the ideals of personal and familial image, the precept required the total acquiescence of women. Since the link between a man's reputation and the actions of his family was significant to his social status and power, female submission and obedience to male authority were essential. The rules of honor dictated that southern men use women's compliance to social norms to ensure the proper female behavior and to safeguard the male reputation. Through a sense of family and community pride, elite women accepted their predestined roles as wives, mothers, and daughters and sought to appropriately represent the honor of their husbands, sons, brothers, and fathers. Despite their own personal feelings about the limitations placed on their lives, planter women stoically submitted themselves to the requirements of southern society and worked to present the impression of perfect southern women.

While elite southern women did not always fit seamlessly into the mold of true womanhood, they continued to support the South's social values and endeavored to preserve their personal and familial honor. Louisa McCord and Sarah Grimke came from prominent plantation families in South Carolina and were indoctrinated into the region's ideals for the suitable comportment of women. But, neither of these women exemplified all of the female characteristics that were respected by southern society. McCord was the

plantation system's only female political writer and was often referred to in male terms. Jane Caroline North of South Carolina once described McCord as "a masculine clever person with the most mannish attitudes & gestures." Yet, McCord supported the social principles of her homeland and included writings on gender and the proper conduct of women in her many works. She embraced the importance of women's duty and described women who met their obligation as "the highest and most intellectual specimens of womanhood." Even Grimke, who left the South to join northern abolitionists in their fight against slavery, wrote that a woman's adherence to her sense of responsibility contributed extensively to "the happiness of the family." For plantation women, their relationships and their requirements were expressions of their acceptance of the South's social structure. Consequently, the duty that McCord and Grimke addressed was the female dedication to southern gender principles and women's defense of family honor.[1]

Mary Bayard Clarke and Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas were two more women who did not always present a complete portrait of the perfect southern woman. Yet, they both recognized the importance of reputation to themselves and their families. Clarke was the daughter of one of the largest slaveholders in North Carolina and a published author. To appease her father's objection to her activity and to protect his place in

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[1]Michael O'Brien, ed., *An Evening When Alone: Four Journals of Single Women in the South, 1827-67* (Charlottesville and London: The University Press of Virginia, 1993), 174; Richard C. Lounsbury, ed., *Louisa S. McCord: Poems, Drama, Biography, Letters* (Charlottesville, VA and London: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 131-136; Sarah Grimke, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and Other Essays*, edited and with an introduction by Elizabeth Ann Bartlett (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 57-58; Elisabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 100.

society, Clarke used a pseudonym during his lifetime. Clanton's father was one of the wealthiest planters in Georgia, but financial difficulties forced her to take a position as a schoolteacher in the years that followed the Civil War. Prior to the war, in the early years of her marriage, Clanton defended the image of her husband by writing that James Jefferson Thomas was a "noble exception" to the depravity of men and that she believed that she made the correct decision when she "staked [her] own reputation upon his." Clanton and Clarke accepted the connection that existed between their personal reputation and the honor of their relations. The bond that so intimately tied together the reputation and honor of family members was also part of the foundation that secured the substructure of the South's social order.[2]

Historians Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Kenneth Greenberg, Edward Ayers, and the other scholars who have studied the ethic of honor have shown that it served to form the social parameters of the southern plantation system. It divided classes, genders, and races and restricted the options of the people who lived within its scope. Through its strict ranking of the household and the community, the tenet created standardized principles for behavior. The South's gender conventions did not escape the influence of honor and were interpreted through the ideology that formed around the code. For planter women,

[2]Terrell Armistead Crow and Mary Moulton Barden, editors, *Live Your Own Life: The Family Papers of Mary Bayard Clarke, 1854-1866* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), xxv, xxxi; Virginia Ingraham Burr, ed., *The Secret Eye: The Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas 1848-1889*, with an introduction by Nell Irvin Painter (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 3-10, 147-148.

this idea of communal conformity expanded to include family and translated into the promulgation of women's duty to personal and familial honor.[3]

Plantation women played an important role in the maintenance of the South's social order and were a significant element in the ethic of honor. Since noncompliance was dangerous to the southern way of life, gender assumptions taught women to recognize the necessity of their cooperation and to accept the restraints that the doctrines placed upon their lives. Their submission to male authority and to the communal principles that shaped southern society ensured the political, social, and economic dominance of the plantation system. It also secured their personal and familial reputation and honor and contributed to the character of planter women. As they strove to achieve the qualities of true womanhood and to exhibit the traits of purity, piety, submission, and domesticity, the women sustained a female identity that supported their personal and familial honor and established their family's social status.

The vital nature of the female responsibility to the ethic of honor and the social order of the plantation system made the connection between women and honor an important aspect of the southern interpretation of women's duty. The continual exposure of elite women to the dictates of honor and their intricate functions within southern

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[3]Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 12, 16, 64, 88, 114; Brenda Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 38; Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 253; Kenneth Greenberg, *Honor & Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Death, Humanitarianism, Slave Rebellion, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 11, 25, 33-34, 46; Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance & Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th Century American South* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 26-27; Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 4, 6.

society created a female perspective of the ethic. When planter women accepted the authority that the code had over their community's gender standards they indicated an awareness of its consequence within their lives and the way that they saw themselves. Through its influence over the South's social principles the code of honor shaped significant elements of women's identity.

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