



THE GETTYSBURG COLLEGE
JOURNAL OF THE CIVIL WAR ERA

Volume 10

Article 1

2020

Gettysburg College Journal of the Civil War Era 2020

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/gcjcwe>



Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

Recommended Citation

(2020) "Gettysburg College Journal of the Civil War Era 2020," *The Gettysburg College Journal of the Civil War Era*: Vol. 10 , Article 1.

Available at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/gcjcwe/vol10/iss1/1>

This open access complete issue is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.

Gettysburg College Journal of the Civil War Era 2020

Keywords

Gettysburg College, civil war

GETTYSBURG COLLEGE



**JOURNAL
OF THE
CIVIL WAR ERA**

Volume 10, Spring 2020

Editors – in-Chief:

Zachary A. Wesley, Cameron T. Sauers

Editors:

Brandon R. Katzung Hokanson, Garrett Kost, Carolyn Hauk, Christopher T. Lough, Brandon R. Neely Jaeger R. Held, Wesley Cline, R.J. Lehal, Marissa Honeycutt, Pierce H. Susco

Advisor:

Dr. Ian A. Isherwood

Cover Image: “Eleanor C. Ransom, Civil War nurse, with Union soldier who is showing her a bugle,” courtesy of the Library of

Congress

Interested in getting published in the *Gettysburg College Journal of the Civil War Era*?

If you or anyone you know has written an undergraduate paper in the past five years about the Civil War Era or its lasting memory and meets the following categories and requirements, then please consider visiting our website at <http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/gcjwe/> to enter your work for consideration for next year's publication.

Requirements and Categories for Publication:

Submissions should be typed in 12-point Times New Roman font and submitted as a Word document.

1. Academic Essays: We are interested in original research with extensive use of primary and secondary sources. Possible topics include, but are not limited to, military history, social history, race, reconstruction, memory, reconciliation, politics, the home front, etc. **6,000 words or less.**
2. Book Reviews: Any non-fiction Civil War-related book published in the last two years. Authors should have knowledge of the relevant literature to review. **700 words or less.**
3. Historical Non-fiction Essays: This category is for non-fiction works regarding the Civil War that are not necessarily of an academic nature. Examples of this include essays in public history of the war, study of the re-enactment culture,

current issues in the Civil War field such as the sesquicentennial, etc. Creativity is encouraged in this category as long as it remains a non-fiction piece. **2,000 to 6,000 words.**

Anyone with an interest in the Civil War may submit a piece, including graduate students, as long as the work submitted is undergraduate work written within the past five years. If your submission is selected, your work will be published online and in a print journal, which you will receive a copy of for your own enjoyment.

A Letter from Editors

This year has certainly been filled with twists and turns for the editors of this tenth volume of the Gettysburg College Journal of the Civil War Era. The strains on both authors and editors this year are unlike anything in this journal's history. We would, therefore, like to extend a hearty thanks to all of the hard work of our editors and authors in ensuring that this issue of the journal proceeds to publication. It is no small feat to do so at the best of times, nevermind during a global pandemic. We may take this volume as evidence of the high caliber of young historians at Gettysburg College and beyond. We are pleased to bring you this excellent collection of five academic essays, beginning with Hans Myers "Some Personal Coloring: Examining the Falsehoods of Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain at Gettysburg."

Myers challenges the popular narrative of the role of the 20th Maine on July 2, 1863, arguing that mythmaking has muddied history and legend. William Donaldson's "Robert Smalls and the steamship Planter: Turning the Tides for the Union Military in the Civil War," charts the daring escape of Robert Smalls, an enslaved inhabitant of Charleston, South Carolina, to the federal blockade, considering the tactical advantages afforded the Union navy by Smalls's journey to freedom. Sarah

Eiland's "The Unspoken Demands of Slavery: The Exploitation of Female Slaves in the Memphis Slave Trade" exploring the values assigned to the bodies of younger female slaves. Eiland argues that these women were assigned value primarily based on their reproductive potential, highlighted in slave auctions and the presence of mixed-race children of prominent white men in antebellum Memphis.

Erica Uzsak's "Frances Peter: A Loyal Woman of Kentucky," analyzes the diary of Frances Peter of Lexington, Kentucky. Peter actively recorded her Unionist sentiments, including wrestling with questions of unionism and emancipation nuanced by daily life in a border state. Finally, Sophie Hammond's "When This Cruel War Is Over": The Blurring of the Confederate Battlefield and Homefront During the Civil War," rounds out the collection. Hammond argues that the close links between the battlefield and the homefront in Confederate society, though initially a strength of the young nation, ultimately eroded in the face of the persistent class divides of Southern society.

We owe a substantial debt of gratitude to all of our associate editors for their hard work this year. We couldn't have brought this journal to you without their dedication! We, therefore, acknowledge the following: Wesley Cline ('23),

Carolyn Hauk ('21), Jaeger R. Held ('23), Brandon R. Katzung Hokanson ('20), Marissa Honeycutt ('23) Garrett Kost ('21), RJ Lehal ('23), Christopher T. Lough ('22), Brandon R. Neely ('23) Pierce Susco ('23). Thank you all for your dedication to the editorial process! We would like to thank Dr. Ian Isherwood ('00), our faculty advisor, for his constant guidance and support of student work. We would also like to thank Sarah Appedu (18'), whose technical support and editorial advice has been an invaluable component of the publishing process for this tenth volume.

And, on a final note to our readers, we hope you enjoy this collection! It is always our pleasure to share excellent student work with you, and we look forward to delivering our eleventh volume to you next year. Stay curious and

Sincerely,

Cameron Sauers, Gettysburg College Class of 2021
Zachary Wesley, Gettysburg College Class of 2020

Contents

- 1** **“Some Personal Coloring.” Examining
The Falsehoods of Joshua Lawrence
Chamberlain at Gettysburg**
Hans G. Myers, Thiel College & University
of Indianapolis
Academic Essay
- 29** **Robert Smalls and The Steamship *Planter*:
Turning the Tides for the Union Military
in the Civil War**
William K. Donaldson, University of North
Carolina Charlotte
Academic Essay
- 53** **The Unspoken Demands of Slavery: The
Exploitation of Female Slaves in the
Memphis Slave Trade**
Sarah Eiland, Rhodes College
Academic Essay
- 76** **Frances Peter: A Loyal Woman of
Kentucky**
Erica Uszak, Gettysburg College
Academic Essay

- 102** **“When This Cruel War Is Over” : The
Blurring of the Confederate Battlefield
and Homefront During the Civil War**
Sophie Hammond, University of Southern
California
Academic Essay

Contributors

Hans G. Myers graduated from Thiel College in Greenville, Pennsylvania, in May 2019 with a major in History and minors in English Literature and Performing Arts. He is currently a graduate student in Military and Social History at the University of Indianapolis, where he serves as the Gerald and Marjorie Morgan Graduate Assistant in History.

William K Donaldson - As a native of Charleston, South Carolina, and a grandson of Georgia sharecroppers, W. Kevin Donaldson has taken a particular interest in the study of the Old South in his undergraduate work. A senior at the University of North Carolina Charlotte, Donaldson, is majoring in History with a minor in Film Studies. He will graduate in May of 2021. Donaldson has been accepted into UNC Charlotte's early entry program to pursue his Masters in History beginning in the fall of 2020. As a non-traditional student returning to higher education after a 25-year hiatus, Donaldson is committed to the study of History and is proud to have been selected for The Gettysburg College Journal of the Civil War Era.

Sarah Eiland - graduated from Rhodes College in May of 2020 with a double major in International Studies and History, with a concentration in Public

History. At Rhodes, she was the two time Editor in Chief of *The Rhodes Historical Review*. In the fall of 2020, Sarah will be attending University College Dublin to pursue an MA in Gender, Politics and International Relations.

Erica Uszak '22- is a history major with double minors in Civil War Era Studies and public history. She works as a student Fellow for the Civil War Institute and has researched and written two soldier profiles for the Killed at Gettysburg digital history project. She also enjoys playing clarinet in the Bullets Marching Band and the clarinet ensemble.

Sophie Hammond is currently a junior at the University of Southern California. If the pandemic cooperates, she will graduate in May 2021 with majors in History and English.

“Some Personal Coloring.” Examining The Falsehoods of Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain at Gettysburg

Hans G. Myers

History is written for the most part from the outside. Truth often suffers distortion by reason of the point of view of the narrator, some pre-occupation of his judgment or fancy not only as to relative merits but even as to facts in their real relations. An interior view may not be without some personal coloring. But it must be of interest, especially in important transactions, to know how things appeared to those actually engaged in them.

– Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, *The Passing of the Armies*¹

For nearly 150 years, much of the focus of the Battle of Gettysburg has lay with Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain and the 20th Maine during the fighting on Little Round Top. While it is impossible to deny the heroism of Chamberlain and his men – the boldness of a bayonet charge at the

¹ Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, *The Passing of the Armies: An Account of the Final Campaign of the Army of the Potomac, Based upon Personal Reminiscences of the Fifth Army Corps* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1915), xi

zenith of the fighting is unparalleled – the historical record is one built upon truth, and the whole truth has not been presented in relation to the stand of the 20th Maine on the rocky heights on July 2, 1863 – to the detriment of the other men of their brigade who suffered just as valiantly to maintain Federal control of the heights.

In his work *General Grant and the Rewriting of History*, Dr. Frank Varney establishes a template on how to rehabilitate the historical record when, for too long, historians have been reliant on one or a small handful of sources. In his work, discussing the scapegoating of William Rosecrans by Ulysses Grant, Varney writes that “The argument might be made that historians have not blindly followed Grant, but that they have instead formed their own conclusions based on the evidence. But a close look at the primary sources indicates a sharp discrepancy between what too many historians have said and what the sources tell us.”² Much as in Varney’s model in examining the historical record of Grant and Rosecrans, there exists evidence that several of the main sources for what hereafter shall be called The “Chamberlain Myth” – of Chamberlain’s heroic bayonet charge

² Frank P. Varney, *General Grant and the Rewriting of History: How the Destruction of General William S. Rosecrans Influenced Our Understanding of the Civil War* (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2013), 269.

“Some Personal Coloring”

being the saving grace of the Army of the Potomac – are highly questionable, if not outright duplicitous in their nature, chief among them the memoir and recollections of Theodore Gerrish and Chamberlain’s report on the battle contained in the *Official Records*, that have obscured the fact that the 20th Maine alone was not responsible for holding Little Round Top.

The “Chamberlain Myth,” however, has been promulgated beyond simply historians to the general public: novelist Michael Shaara magnified the already extant myth a hundred-fold with his work on Gettysburg, *The Killer Angels*. Jeff Daniels’ performance in the film *Gettysburg*, and documentarian Ken Burns’ heavy focus on Chamberlain additionally serve to only strengthen the myth to the detriment of actual historical fact.

How did myth come to dominate and suppress actual history? Firstly, it is evident that Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain was not above promoting himself: in the years after the war, Chamberlain undertook an extensive speaking tour throughout New England, making himself into a celebrity delivering lectures on “The Left at Gettysburg” and his war experiences.³ A pair of

³ Glenn LaFantasie, “Joshua Chamberlain and the American Dream,” in *The Gettysburg Nobody Knows*, ed. Gabor S. Boritt (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997), 31; Alice Rains Trulock, *In the Hands of Providence: Joshua L. Chamberlain and the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC:

articles were published in 1912 and 1913 – one in *Cosmopolitan*, one in *Hearst's Magazine* – by Chamberlain,⁴ which, coupled with the posthumous publication of *The Passing of the Armies*, provoked backlash by some. Ellis Spear, who had served Chamberlain and the 20th Maine as acting Major at Gettysburg, wrote bitterly that “I have not read it through; like yourself, I was disgusted though not unprepared. . . . I knew Chamberlain in college in '54 to '58. He had the same infirmity then, notoriously of inability to tell the truth always.”⁵

But what did Chamberlain say in his articles and book which was so objectionable to Spear? It is apparent in a challenge laid in the introduction to Spear's unpublished memoirs: “It appears to me that the actors in these affairs owe to posterity a just and truthful account of what they saw without unjust disparag[e]ment to others and without boasting or misrepresentations of one[']s own services.”⁶ Ellis Spear, Chamberlain's one-time

The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 334; *Ibid*, 363-5.

⁴ *Ibid*, 373-4.

⁵ Ellis Spear to Oliver Willcox Norton, January 18, 1916, in *With a Flash of His Sword: The Writings of Major Holman S. Melcher, 20th Maine Infantry*, ed. William B. Stypke (Kearny, NJ: Belle Grove Publishing, 1994), 297.

⁶ Ellis Spear, *The Civil War Recollections of General Ellis Spear*, ed. Abbott Spear, Andrea C. Hawkes, Marie H. McCosh, Craig L. Symonds, and Michael H. Alpert (Orono, ME: University of Maine Press, 1997), 3.

“Some Personal Coloring”

second in command, charged that his commander had distorted the truth to give “unjust disparag[e]ment to others” and filled it with “boasting or misrepresentations” in order to benefit himself. Spear, however, was not the only vocal critic of Chamberlain’s truthfulness. Oliver Willcox Norton, who has served on the brigade headquarters staff at Gettysburg, similarly believed that Chamberlain had overreached: “It should be possible for those who remain ... to recognize the sincerity and the valor of their foes, to put aside all hatred and prejudice... In what the author has to say he hopes to do this. This attitude will not oblige him, in cases where writers have in his opinion deliberately misrepresented the facts to cover their own misconduct, to refrain from pointing this out.”⁷⁷ This veiled reference to Chamberlain – and to Norval Welch, the commander of the 16th Michigan – is borne out in Norton’s strident defenses of brigade commander Colonel Strong Vincent. Indeed, it was with Norton that Spear was corresponding in 1916 when he commented that Chamberlain was “notoriously of inability to tell the truth always.”⁸

⁷⁷ Oliver Willcox Norton, *The Attack and Defense of Little Round Top, Gettysburg, July 2, 1863* (New York: Neale Publishing, 1913; Reprint Gettysburg, PA: Stan Clark Military Books, 1992), 12. Citations refer to the Stan Clark Military Books edition.

⁸ Spear to Norton, January 18, 1916.

In that same letter, Spear continues discussing *The Passing of the Armies* – Chamberlain’s reminiscences of the Appomattox campaign which had just been posthumously published a few months before:

So far as I have read, “The Passing of the Armies” is a tissue of lies. He was not wounded on the Quaker road. I know that absolutely, as I was with him part of the time and not far off any time. His coat was torn by a bullet. Of his wound at Petersburg I know, as I went back to the Hospital after dark and was with him. He was in charge of our regimental surgeon and was sitting up, but making some fuss. He was wounded in the penis. Of course I made no examination but the surgeon explained the wound to me. It was a painful wound of course, as a catheter had to be introduced to carry urine past the wound. This was the only time he was touched by iron or lead. He artfully made much out of that wound, and by adroit and persistent lecturing and writing after the war. His literary ability was of a high order, and he always had a gracious manner, but was absolutely unable to tell the truth and

“Some Personal Coloring”

was of inordinate vanity.⁹

Even Thomas Desjardin, the modern-day historian of the 20th Maine, calls the Chamberlain myth “a story full of easily disproved details. A story that is as much construction as it is fact.”¹⁰ The birth of the myth of Chamberlain as the consummate hero of Little Round Top is, ironically, from Chamberlain’s opponents: specifically a feud between James Longstreet and William C. Oates carried out in the pages of the *Southern Historical Society Papers* in the 1870’s. Oates’ rebuttal to Longstreet formed the bedrock of the Chamberlain myth as not only the first widespread account of the fighting to be published, but also because so focused had Oates been on blaming Longstreet for the loss of “343 men and 19 officers” of the 15th Alabama’s 644 men¹¹ that he had neglected to actually conduct thorough research into the strength he possessed at Gettysburg, leading to Oates – by his own later admission¹² – *doubling* the number of

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Thomas A. Desjardin, *These Honored Dead: How the Story of Gettysburg Shaped American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: DaCapo, 2003), 130.

¹¹ William C. Oates, “Gettysburg: The Battle on the Right,” *Southern Historical Society Papers* 6 (1878): quoted in Desjardin, *These Honored Dead*, 131.

¹² William C. Oates, *The War Between the Union and the Confederacy and its Lost Opportunities; With a History of the*

men he actually took into battle against the 20th Maine.¹³

But the damage had been done: Howard Prince, the regimental historian of the 20th Maine, and Chamberlain both seized upon Oates' 644 men as evidence of the overwhelming number of the Confederate force they had fought.¹⁴ This bedrock laid, by Oates, colored histories of the war for decades: his paper for the Southern Historical Society would be the reference that men such as Chamberlain would turn to for troop numbers of the 15th Alabama for decades. And it was upon this bedrock that the foundation of myth was laid by Theodore Gerrish, a minister who had served as a private soldier in Company H, 20th Maine.

John J. Pullen, the regimental historian of the 20th Maine whose Twentieth Century history of the regiment remains a seminal work in the field of

15th Alabama Regiment and the Forty-Eight Battles in which it was Engaged (New York: Neale, 1905), 222.

¹³ Desjardin, *These Honored Dead*, 132; The 15th Alabama, in actuality, took 499 men into battle at Little Round Top, losing 18 killed, 55 wounded, and 19 missing, J. David Petruzzi and Steven A. Stanley, *The Gettysburg Campaign in Numbers and Losses: Synopses, Orders of Battle, Strengths, Casualties, and Maps, June 9-July 14, 1863* (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2012).

¹⁴ Howard Prince, "Twentieth Maine Regiment" in *Maine at Gettysburg: Report of Maine Commissioners, Prepared by The Executive Committee*, ed. Charles Hamlin, Greenlief T. Stevens and George W. Verrill (Portland, ME: Lakeside Press, 1898), 255-6.

“Some Personal Coloring”

Civil War regimental histories, is quoted in *These Honored Dead* as stating that “many books are built upon other books; and in writings on the Civil War, few books have been built upon more often than those of Theodore Gerrish.”¹⁵ Gerrish’s history of the fighting at Gettysburg appeared in his memoirs, *Army Life: A Private’s Reminiscences of the Civil War*, first published in 1882. In an introduction, Gerrish’s publisher writes:

It was first mainly published as newspaper articles, and read by hundreds who participated in the events of which MR. GERRISH has written. If there were any material errors in his statements, they would have been challenged at once by those properly jealous of their own reputation, and that of their officers; so that the author has really had the advantage of the criticism and indorsement of very many, equally as familiar with the facts as himself, and, on that account, his history may be taken as unusually reliable.¹⁶

¹⁵ John J. Pullen: quoted in Desjardin, *These Honored Dead*, 134.

¹⁶ J.H.D. in Theodore Gerrish, *Army Life: A Private’s Reminiscences of the Civil War* (Portland, ME: Hoyt, Fogg & Donham, 1882), 11.

In his memoirs, Gerrish possesses a simple, direct narrative style: he writes frequently of what he saw, and what he felt – making use of the personal “I” throughout the entire work. Suddenly, however, the personal tone vanishes entirely as Gerrish begins to describe the fighting at Gettysburg. “We” takes its place. Yet it is from Gerrish’s account of Gettysburg that everyone from Pullen to Ken Burns to Michael Shaara has drawn their inspiration.

What could explain the sudden shift in the tonality of Gerrish’s recollections? The answer is shockingly simple: Gerrish was not with the 20th Maine at Gettysburg, and was instead in an army hospital in Philadelphia – a bombshell revelation uncovered by Thomas Desjardin in his history of the 20th Maine at Gettysburg.¹⁷ Gerrish’s account of Gettysburg is then – at least, and at best – a second-hand accounting of events to which he was not a witness, and at worst a fabrication built around the framework of what others told him. Indeed, in Gerrish’s memoirs, several stories which have no other reference in primary materials find their root: that there were ten Confederates for every man from Maine,¹⁸ that the Federal and Confederate gun

¹⁷ Thomas A. Desjardin, *Stand Firm Ye Boys from Maine: The 20th Maine and the Gettysburg Campaign* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 127.

¹⁸ Gerrish, *Army Life*, 108.

“Some Personal Coloring”

barrels were close enough to touch at the height of the fighting,¹⁹ that the 20th Maine hesitated before making their famous bayonet charge,²⁰ and that Holman Melcher rather than Joshua Chamberlain was the officer who led the charge.²¹

What makes the account presented by Gerrish all the more salacious is that the author inserts himself into a narrative at which he was not present: He presents the ‘dying words’ of Captain Land, describes how his tent mate staggered about from a mortal wound, and how two wounded sergeants fell together – scenes he clearly could *not* have witnessed, yet presents as if he had. The “I” makes a sudden return in the midst of the chapter while discussing the beginnings of the fighting, as if he were desperate to earn for himself a piece of fame:

I know not who gave the first fire, or which line received the first lead. I only know that the carnage began. I wish that I could picture with my pen the awful details of that hour, -- how rapidly the cartridges were torn from the boxes and stuffed in the smoking muzzles of the guns; how the steel rammers clashed and clanged in the heated barrels;

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid, 110.

²¹ Ibid.

how the men's hands and faces grew grim and black with burning powder; how our little line, baptized with fire, reeled to and fro as it advanced or was pressed back; how our officers bravely encouraged the men to hold on and recklessly exposed themselves to the enemy's fire, -- a terrible medley of cries, shouts, cheers, groans, prayers, curses, bursting shells, whizzing rifle bullets and clanging steel.²²

Gerrish's 'account' of Gettysburg – truthfully, it cannot even be *called* an account given his absence from the regiment – is unreliable and peppered with falsehood given his apparent literary license with facts which he cannot have witnessed, and likely did not get from other veterans of the regiment given how strenuously and how furiously many other veterans of the 20th Maine countered his assertions following the publication of his memoir.²³ James Nichols, the commander of Company K at Little Round Top, went so far as to write an open letter to Gerrish in the *Lincoln County News* in which he accused Gerrish's account of being “a work of fiction” and challenged Gerrish's

²² Ibid, 108.

²³ Desjardin, *Stand Firm Ye Boys from Maine*, 128-9.

“Some Personal Coloring”

story virtually point by point.²⁴ In spite of the efforts of Nichols and others to correct the record, Gerrish’s memoirs began to circulate around the nation, and began to lay the groundwork of a myth upon which the next builder would be Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain himself.

Curiously, Chamberlain’s official report on the fighting, printed in the *Official Records* as dated July 6, 1863, refers to the hill as “Little Round Top.”²⁵ While to modern readers, this may seem perfectly normal – indeed, natural – for an author in 1863, it presents an interesting discrepancy. In his contemporaneous correspondence – two dated the same day as the report and one dated roughly two weeks later – Chamberlain refers to the hill twice as “Wolf Hill”,²⁶ and once as either “Sugar Loaf

²⁴ James Nichols in *Lincoln County News*, April 1882.

²⁵ Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, “Report of Col. Joshua L. Chamberlain, Twentieth Maine Infantry,” in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1889), vol. 27, part 1, 622-626.

²⁶ Joshua Chamberlain to Lieutenant George Herendeen, July 6, 1863, in *Through Blood & Fire: Selected Civil War Papers of Major General Joshua Chamberlain*, ed. Mark Nesbitt (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1996), 87.; Joshua Chamberlain to Fanny Chamberlain, July 18, 1863, in *Joshua L. Chamberlain: A Life in Letters*, ed. Thomas Desjardin (Oxford: Osprey Press, 2012), 202.

Hill”²⁷ or “Wolf Hill.”²⁸ Only once, in his letter to division commander James Barnes does Chamberlain use the name “Round Top”²⁹ before dismissing that name to refer to it as “Wolf Hill” once more.³⁰ There is a simple reason for this discrepancy: the name “Little Round Top” was not used to refer to the hill until 1867: indeed, until 1867, the hill did not *have* a name.³¹ Additionally, Chamberlain notes – as Desjardin illustrates in *These Honored Dead* – that “Captain Billings, Lieutenant Kendall, and Lieutenant Linscott are officers whose loss we deeply mourn...”³² Desjardin explains that by July 6, only Lieutenant Kendall had died, while Billings would not die until July 15 and Linscott until July 27.³³ This immediately calls into question the veracity of Chamberlain’s report as printed in the *Official Records*, and Desjardin has unearthed the answer to the unspoken question of just *when* the report was written:

²⁷ Joshua Chamberlain to James Barnes, July 6, 1863, in *Joshua L. Chamberlain: A Life in Letters*, ed. Thomas Desjardin (Oxford: Osprey Press, 2012), 201.

²⁸ Wolf Hill does exist at Gettysburg, but is approximately a mile to the north and east of Little Round Top.

²⁹ Referring to “Big Round Top,” which was simply called “Round Top” at the time.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 202 *n.* 30.

³² Chamberlain, “Report...”, 626.

³³ Desjardin, *These Honored Dead*, 139.

“Some Personal Coloring”

In March 1884, the War Department got around to the Gettysburg portion of the *Official Records*. A clerk noticed that the report of the 20th Maine Regiment was not in the files, and he wrote to the unit’s former commander to see about getting a copy. Chamberlain replied that he did not have one but would be happy to supply something since ‘justice to that regiment demands that so important a portion of their listing should be preserved.’ The War Department agreed and asked for the report along with a formal certificate ‘that it is an exact copy of the report made by you in the first instance.’ Desiring to give his regiment its just mention in these important records, Chamberlain shortly submitted what he called a ‘copy’ or ‘draft’ of his original July 6, 1863, report along with the requested certificate of authenticity... This copy of his report was in Chamberlain’s handwriting and had very few corrections – strange when considering that he wrote it in haste just a few days after the battle while the army was on the march. Despite these conditions, he

wrote it in eloquent style comprising just over 2,500 words.³⁴

But, Desjardin then informs us that Chamberlain's true official report on the Battle of Gettysburg does still exist, attached to a letter addressed to Brigadier General John Hodson, the Adjutant General of Maine, that is dated to November 4, 1863, and which resides currently in the Maine State Archives in Augusta.³⁵ The report – nearly a thousand words shorter than the report contained in the *Official Records* is dated July 6, 1863 and makes no reference to the name “Little Round Top,” or to the deaths of two officers who were yet alive. Additionally, the document lacks many of the rhetorical flourishes present in the “official” report filed by Chamberlain.³⁶

³⁴ Ibid, 139-40.

³⁵ Joshua Chamberlain to John Hodson, November 4, 1863, in *Through Blood & Fire: Selected Civil War Papers of Major General Joshua Chamberlain*, ed. Mark Nesbitt (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1996), 113; citation for the location of Chamberlain's report: Desjardin, *These Honored Dead*, 140.

³⁶ Joshua Chamberlain to George Herendeen, July 6, 1863 “Letter from Chamberlain – Gettysburg battle report” Letter. From Maine State Archives, *Joshua L. Chamberlain Correspondence*.
https://digitalmaine.com/chamberlain_corr/4/.

“Some Personal Coloring”

In other words, the single most important document ever written by Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain – his official report of the fighting on Little Round Top within the *Official Records* – is a forgery insofar as it was written 21 years after the fighting despite being postdated to only four days after the 20th Maine’s most famous battle. This report clearly draws upon the troop estimates of Oates’ 1878 paper for the Southern Historical Society, as well as some of the more lurid details contained in Gerrish’s account, and – no doubt – ephemera and memories gleaned from decades of conversation with other veterans. We can confirm, however, that Chamberlain *was* familiar with Gerrish’s account, as a fragment of a letter from Chamberlain to Gerrish is preserved in the Maine State Archives, wherein Chamberlain discusses the bayonet charge of the 20th Maine: “When I gave that shout, it was not exactly a command: Bayonet; I passed rapidly among the ranks of men forming our shattered line they caught up the word, and gave no chance to add “Forward” for the movement as a whole began as soon as they could get their bayonets fixed.”³⁷ This correspondence is evident in

³⁷ Joshua Chamberlain to Theodore Gerrish, circa 1882
“*Letter from Chamberlain to Rev. Theodore Gerrish Regarding His Recollection of Gettysburg, circa 1882*” Letter. From Maine State Archives, *Joshua L. Chamberlain Correspondence*.
https://digitalmaine.com/chamberlain_corr/56/.

Chamberlain's 'official' report in the *Official Records*, as he references "The word was enough. It ran like fire along the line, from man to man, and rose into a shout, with which they sprang forward upon the enemy, now not 30 yards away."³⁸

Chamberlain's report is, thus, an anomaly when compared to the other reports and correspondence contained within the *Official Records*, as it was fabricated with two decades of retrospection, and with a clear eye towards shoring up not only the importance of the 20th Maine, but also himself – as speaking tours depend upon having fantastic stories to tell. It was this behavior which so disgusted Spear and Norton in 1916 after the publication of *The Passing of the Armies* and his two articles for *Cosmopolitan* and *Hearst's*.

Not content with sensationalizing the official report of the battle based upon Oates' spur-of-the-moment troop calculations and Gerrish's spurious "memories" of Gettysburg, Chamberlain doubled down on the creation of his own myth. In June of 1913, Chamberlain's byline appeared on the article "Through Blood and Fire at Gettysburg," published in *Hearst's Magazine*. Containing sensationalism mixed with Chamberlain's usually unflappable rhetoric – at one point, he alludes to the ghost of George Washington having been seen

³⁸ Chamberlain, "Report...", 624.

“Some Personal Coloring”

riding with the army³⁹ – it is this article which includes the famous Chamberlain story wherein he informs his brothers as a Confederate shell burst overhead that “Another such shot might make it hard for mother.”⁴⁰ John Chamberlain had died in 1867,⁴¹ and Tom Chamberlain had died in 1896,⁴² both without leaving their own accounts of the fighting at Gettysburg in publication, leaving us Joshua’s article of fifty years later as the only widespread source for this story, though it may appear in the correspondence of one or the other.

Among other claims in the article is that the brigade was deployed below the summit because “the shot so rake [sic] the crest that we had to keep our men below it to save our heads,”⁴³ which is false; that he had been given orders to shoot the mutineers of the 2nd Maine “the moment they refused” to obey orders;⁴⁴ that the 20th Maine was the first of the regiments to form on Little Round Top (it was, in fact, the last);⁴⁵ that Gouverneur

³⁹ Joshua Chamberlain, “Through Blood and Fire at Gettysburg,” in *Bayonet! Forward: My Civil War Reminiscences*, ed Stan Clark (Gettysburg, PA: Stan Clark Military Books, 1994), 18.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 22.

⁴¹ Trulock, *In the Hands of Providence*, 340.

⁴² *Ibid*, 368.

⁴³ Chamberlain, “Through Blood and Fire,” 23.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 24.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 25; Spear, *Civil War Recollections*, 33; Desjardin, *Stand Firm Ye Boys from Maine*, 42.

Warren had gone looking for reinforcements for Vincent's Brigade;⁴⁶ that brigade commander Colonel Strong Vincent "felt that all was lost, unless the very gods should intervene,"⁴⁷ Chamberlain giving a field promotion to a dying sergeant who had been demoted to the ranks, George Washington Buck (curiously, most sources regarding his promotion cite either Gerrish or Chamberlain's article);⁴⁸ a letter received years later from a marksman in the 15th Alabama who twice tried to kill Chamberlain, but hesitated both times (Desjardin notes that no such letter was ever found in Chamberlain's voluminous files of received correspondence, and that Chamberlain was notorious for holding onto nearly every scrap of paper he received);⁴⁹ and again the famous claim of having taken four hundred prisoners – a number not borne out by any examination of the records of the Confederate regiments.⁵⁰

Of course, one need only see the name of the publication which carried Chamberlain's article to immediately become suspicious of its veracity. *Hearst's Magazine*, owned by the "father of Yellow Journalism," William Randolph Hearst, should immediately arouse skepticism that some incidents

⁴⁶ Chamberlain, "Through Blood and Fire," 27.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 31.

⁴⁹ Ibid; Desjardin, *These Honored Dead*, 143.

⁵⁰ Chamberlain, "Through Blood and Fire," 34.

“Some Personal Coloring”

contained within its pages may not be the whole truth: something on which Chamberlain agreed, writing to someone requesting a copy of the article from him that “The Hearst editors mutilated and ‘corrected’ my ‘Gettysburg,’ so I have not tried to get copies.”⁵¹ When Elliot Dill, then Adjutant General of Maine, wrote to Chamberlain in praise of the article, Chamberlain responded bluntly: “[it] is much curtailed and changed by the insertion of ‘connective tissue’ by the editor.”⁵²

Regardless of Chamberlain believing that the editors at *Hearst’s* had “mutilated” his story, the article inspired a furor among veterans of his brigade. “His literary ability was of a high order, and he always had a gracious manner, but was absolutely unable to tell the truth and was of inordinate vanity. As far as he could, he robbed Vincent,” Ellis Spear wrote to Oliver Norton after Chamberlain’s death.⁵³ Norton, who had served as Vincent’s headquarters brigade color bearer and bugler, clearly agreed even without the later correspondence with Spear: inspired partially by Chamberlain’s previous articles and speeches on the fighting for Little Round Top, Norton produced *The*

⁵¹ Joshua Chamberlain to “Mrs. Eckstrom,” May 28, 1913, Fogler Library Special Collections, University of Maine, *Chamberlain Family Papers*.

⁵² Joshua Chamberlain to Elliot Dill, June 12, 1913, Maine State Archives, *Records of the Adjutant General of Maine*.

⁵³ Ellis Spear to Oliver Willcox Norton, January 18, 1916.

Attack and Defense of Little Round Top, Gettysburg, July 2, 1863 in 1913, beginning with a polemic against “writers [who] have in his opinion deliberately misrepresented the facts to cover their own misconduct...”⁵⁴

Norton mounted a one-man crusade to attempt to halt the dissemination of the “Chamberlain Myth,” but it would be long after his death that the legendary status of Joshua Chamberlain would explode: John J. Pullen’s regimental history of the 20th Maine would appear in 1957; Michael Shaara’s *The Killer Angels* would erupt onto the scene and popularize Chamberlain in 1974; and from that would come both Ken Burns’ 1990 documentary series *The Civil War* and the Ted Turner-Ronald F. Maxwell film *Gettysburg* starring Jeff Daniels as Chamberlain would open nationwide in 1993, cementing a “Cult of Chamberlain” in the pop history community. As Desjardin wryly notes:

A long list of Chamberlain-related items has appeared in the marketing mainstream since 1990. They range from the more subdued tributes such as sculptures and paintings, to

⁵⁴ Norton, *The Attack and Defense of Little Round Top*, 12; In perhaps a bitter irony, the reprint edition from Stan Clark Military Books in Gettysburg features Chamberlain upon the cover.

“Some Personal Coloring”

the more outrageous such as floatee pens, action figures, and even a Chamberlain night-light. A member of the now enormous Chamberlain fan club can drink Chamberlain pale ale from a Chamberlain coffee mug propped up against a Chamberlain pillow, spying a Chamberlain wall clock or wrist watch. If we once held our heroes aloft in the writings of Nathaniel Hawthorne or Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, we now measure them largely by the number of times their image adorns a T-shirt. By this measure of merchandise as hero worship, Chamberlain is, for now at least, the unchallenged ruler of the Civil War.⁵⁵

Writing in 1913, Norton bitterly claimed that “justice has never been done to Vincent.”⁵⁶ Continuing, he wrote that: “A glance at Little Round Top was enough for him to realize its importance in relation to the field of battle and the necessity of occupying it without delay. Minutes were precious. In spite of all that Warren, Sykes, and Barnes did, it would have been too late had not Vincent moved without waiting for an order from

⁵⁵ Desjardin, *These Honored Dead*, 129.

⁵⁶ Norton, *The Attack and Defense of Little Round Top*, 266.

his immediate superior.”⁵⁷ Had Vincent delayed in waiting for an order from Barnes, he would have taken Oates’ place in fighting his way up the hill as the Confederates shot down upon them.

Norton summarized his purpose for writing his book on the very next page: “If I can show that the retention by the Union army of this key to the battlefield on July 2, 1863, is due to Strong Vincent and his gallant brigade, aided at the supreme moment by O’Rorke and his regiment, I shall feel that Vincent, O’Rorke, and the men of their commands who gave up their lives in that supreme effort did not die in vain.”⁵⁸ Norton assembled quite a repertoire of supporters for his claim. Daniel Butterfield wrote that “No man who lived and fought in the battle of Gettysburg did more for his country than Vincent.”⁵⁹ Daniel Sickles concurred: “Colonel Vincent’s part in the operations of that day, on the left of the Union lines, was distinguished by excellent judgement, prompt movements, and signal gallantry...”⁶⁰ Henry Tremain, commander of the 73rd New York of Sickles’ Excelsior Brigade during the battle, stated that “too much recognition cannot be given by this

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 267.

⁵⁹ Daniel Butterfield to Oliver Norton, February 19, 1901, in *Strong Vincent and His Brigade at Gettysburg*, 55.

⁶⁰ Daniel E. Sickles to Oliver Norton, November 21, 1901, in *Strong Vincent and His Brigade at Gettysburg*, 55-6.

“Some Personal Coloring”

country to the skill and heroism of General Vincent’s supreme effort and sacrifice.”⁶¹ Even James Longstreet wrote to Norton in praise of Vincent: “It gives me pleasure to state in reference to the worth of Little Round Top to the Union army at Gettysburg, it was everything to the success of the Union battle. General Vincent’s prompt action in moving to save that point, held it, and was the means of getting the battle to his side.”⁶²

What is glossed over frequently is Chamberlain’s own naked ambition and vanity: in August, 1863, he began a very public campaign to be promoted to Brigadier General, organizing a “firestorm of endorsements” to the War Department while attempting to keep it appearing spontaneous.⁶³ He wrote bitterly that commanding a brigade without the extra pay and allowances of a general’s star was “an ‘injustice’ that ‘quite cancelled the complement’ of having been given responsibility for the brigade.”⁶⁴ After the war he would be welcomed to town halls and auditoriums to Handel’s *See the Conquering Hero Comes*, likening himself to the historic military leader Judas

⁶¹ Henry E. Tremain to Oliver Norton, November 23, 1901, in *Strong Vincent and His Brigade at Gettysburg*, 56.

⁶² James Longstreet to Oliver Norton, December 6, 1901, in *Strong Vincent and His Brigade at Gettysburg*, 57.

⁶³ LaFantasie “Joshua Chamberlain and the American Dream,” 39-40.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 40.

Maccabee, whom Handel's oratorio was about.⁶⁵ As other writings about Gettysburg began to appear, and authors' memories began to challenge Chamberlain's story, whether intentionally or not, historian Glenn LaFantasie notes an "uncharacteristically defensive, and more than a little peevish" tone to Chamberlain's public remarks about Little Round Top throughout the 1880's.⁶⁶

Even Thomas Desjardin, the twentieth-and-twenty-first century historian of the 20th Maine admits that "the one person whose story embodies the elements of misunderstanding, miscommunication, and outright invention that the Gettysburg story has become is this Maine colonel – Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain."⁶⁷

Chamberlain himself would admit that he should not be the focus of all attention regarding Little Round Top: "I regret that these [Norton's gathering of official records and facts, published in his paper for MOLLUS] compel us to take account of the incidents connected with the actions of the regiment on the right of our brigade, some of the consequences of which led to so great a loss to the service as the fall of Vincent."⁶⁸ Chamberlain

⁶⁵ Ibid, 41.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 42-3.

⁶⁷ Desjardin, *These Honored Dead*, 129.

⁶⁸ Joshua L. Chamberlain to Oliver W. Norton, January 15, 1910, in *Army Letters, 1861-1865: Being Extracts from Private Letters to Relatives and Friends From a Soldier in the*

“Some Personal Coloring”

continued to admit that he should not be the sole focus of histories of Little Round Top in his letter, writing of Vincent that: “He was a noble man, and I have not known an abler commander in his grade. Nothing could exceed his skill and energy in taking the position on Little Round Top and the confidence he inspired in his subordinates. To this the result of the fight on the left at Round Top is very largely due.”⁶⁹

To use Chamberlain’s own words: “the result of the fight on the left at Round Top is very largely due” to the actions and efforts of Strong Vincent on July 2, 1863. In a separate letter, Chamberlain wrote that “I regard the timely occupation of that position, [Little Round Top] which was at that stage of the battle the key of the Union defense, as due to the energy and skill of Colonel Vincent.”⁷⁰ In spite of whatever Oates or Spear would write of Chamberlain’s ego and sense of entitlement regarding the stories of the Battle of Gettysburg, Joshua Chamberlain was – at least – aware that the stories of his heroism and the

Field During the Late Civil War, With an Appendix Containing Copies of Some Official Documents, Papers and Addresses of Later Date by Oliver Willcox Norton, ed. James R. Wright (Dayton, OH: Morningside, 1990), 363.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Joshua L. Chamberlain to Oliver W. Norton, November 18, 1901, in *Strong Vincent and His Brigade at Gettysburg*, 56.

heroism of the 20th Maine on Little Round Top required recognition of others.

Then why do historians continue to give such continued credence to the lionization of Joshua Chamberlain? It is, simply at the end of the day, part of human nature. History should be tidy, in the minds of the popular audience – and that means that existing narratives, such as Chamberlain’s self-aggrandizing after the war, become immutable after being the focus of so many books, television documentaries, and Hollywood movies. What has become fixed in the popular mindset cannot be easily dispelled – even from the mindset of academe. At the end of the day, human nature remains the same: stories of personal heroism and coolness under fire are difficult to remove, even when they are at best manipulative of facts, and at worse patently untrue. Chamberlain’s bravery is undeniable – wounded in the service of his country, ordering an unorthodox bayonet charge at his position at Gettysburg – but Chamberlain’s vanity must be remembered. It was not solely by his actions, as has been alleged for nearly 150 years, that the Federal left was saved at Gettysburg. The historical record of the battle is long overdue for a full reexamination in the vein of the research undertaken by Dr. Frank Varney regarding the acceptance of certain personal narratives as wholesale fact by earlier historians.

“Some Personal Coloring”

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Butterfield, Daniel. Daniel Butterfield to Oliver Norton, February 19, 1901. In *Strong Vincent and His Brigade at Gettysburg, July 2, 1863*. Chicago: O.L. Deming, 1909.

Chamberlain, Joshua Lawrence. Joshua Chamberlain to “Mrs. Eckstrom,” May 28, 1913.

———. Joshua Chamberlain to Fanny Chamberlain, July 18, 1863. In *Joshua L. Chamberlain: A Life in Letters*, edited by Thomas Desjardin. Oxford: Osprey Press, 2012.

———. Joshua Chamberlain to George Herendeen, July 6, 1863. In *Through Blood & Fire: Selected Civil War Papers of Major General Joshua Chamberlain*, edited by Mark Nesbitt. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1996.

- . Joshua Chamberlain to George Herendeen, July 6, 1863. In Joshua L. Chamberlain Correspondence, Maine State Archives. https://digitalmaine.com/chamberlain_corr/4/.
- . Joshua Chamberlain to James Barnes, July 6, 1863. In *Joshua L. Chamberlain: A Life in Letters*, edited by Thomas Desjardin. Oxford: Osprey Press, 2012.
- . Joshua Chamberlain to John Hodson, November 4, 1863. In *Through Blood & Fire: Selected Civil War Papers of Major General Joshua Chamberlain*, edited by Mark Nesbitt. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1996.
- . Joshua Chamberlain to “Mrs. Eckstrom,” May 28, 1913.
- . Joshua Chamberlain to Oliver Norton, November 18, 1901. In *Strong Vincent and His Brigade at Gettysburg, July 2, 1863*. Chicago: O.L. Deming, 1909.

“Some Personal Coloring”

———. Joshua Chamberlain to O.W. Norton, January 15, 1910. In *Army Letters 1861-1865, Being Extracts from Private Letters to Friends from a Soldier in the Field During the Late Civil War, With an Appendix Containing Copies of Some Official Documents, Papers, and Addresses of Later Date*. Chicago: O.L. Deming, 1903. Reprint: Dayton, OH: Morningside, 1995.

———. Joshua Chamberlain to Theodore Gerrish, circa 1882. In Joshua L. Chamberlain Correspondence, Maine State Archives. https://digitalmaine.com/chamberlain_corr/56/.

———. “Report of Col. Joshua L. Chamberlain, Twentieth Maine Infantry.” In *Reports – Operations in North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and the Department of the East. June 3-August 3, 1863: The Gettysburg Campaign, etc.*, edited by Lieut. Col. Robert N. Scott, 622-626. Vol. 27 Part 1, of *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate*

Armies. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1889.

———. *The Passing of the Armies: An Account of the Final Campaign of the Army of the Potomac, Based upon Personal Reminiscences of the Fifth Army Corps*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1915.

———. "Through Blood and Fire at Gettysburg." In *"Bayonet! Forward:" My Civil War Reminiscences*, edited by Stan Clark. Gettysburg, PA: Stan Clark Military Books, 1994.

Gerrish, Theodore. *Army Life: A Private's Reminiscences of the Civil War*. Portland, ME: Hoyt, Fogg & Donham, 1882.

Longstreet, James. James Longstreet to Oliver Norton, December 6, 1901. In *Strong Vincent and His Brigade at Gettysburg, July 2, 1863*. Chicago: O.L. Deming, 1909.

“Some Personal Coloring”

Nicholas, James. “Letter to Rev. Mr. Gerrish.”
Lincoln County News, April 1882.

Norton, Oliver Willcox. *The Attack and Defense of Little Round Top, Gettysburg, July 2, 1863*. New York: Neale, 1913. Reprint, Gettysburg, PA: Stan Clark Military Books, 1992.

Oates, William C. “Gettysburg: The Battle on the Right.” *Southern Historical Society Papers* 6. (1878). Quoted in Thomas Desjardin, *These Honored Dead: How the Story of Gettysburg Shaped American Memory*. Cambridge, MA: DaCapo, 2003.

———. *The War Between the Union and the Confederacy and its Lost Opportunities; With a History of the 15th Alabama Regiment and the Forty-Eight Battles in which it was Engaged*. New York: Neale, 1905.

Prince, Howard. “Twentieth Maine Regiment.” In *Maine at Gettysburg: Report of Maine Commissioners, Prepared by The Executive*

Committee, edited by Charles Hamlin, Greenlief T. Stevens and George W. Verrill. Portland, ME: Lakeside Press, 1898.

Sickles, Daniel E. Daniel E. Sickles to Oliver Norton, November 21, 1901. In *Strong Vincent and His Brigade at Gettysburg, July 2, 1863*. Chicago: O.L. Deming, 1909.

Spear, Ellis. Ellis Spear to Oliver Norton, January 18, 1916. In *With A Flash of His Sword: The Writings of Major Holman S. Melcher, 20th Maine Infantry*, edited by William B. Style. Kearny, NJ: Belle Grove, 1994.

———. Ellis Spear to Oliver Norton, February 1, 1916. In *With A Flash of His Sword: The Writings of Major Holman S. Melcher, 20th Maine Infantry*, edited by William B. Style. Kearny, NJ: Belle Grove, 1994.

———. *The Civil War Recollections of General Ellis Spear*, edited by Michael H. Alpert, Andrea C. Hawkes, Marie H. McCosh, Abbott Spear, and Craig L. Symonds.

“Some Personal Coloring”

Orono, ME: University of Maine Press, 1997.

Tremain, Henry E. Henry E. Tremain to Oliver Norton, November 23, 1901. In *Strong Vincent and His Brigade at Gettysburg, July 2, 1863*. Chicago: O.L. Deming, 1909.

Secondary Sources

Desjardin, Thomas A. *Stand Firm Ye Boys from Maine: The 20th Maine and the Gettysburg Campaign*. 15th Anniversary Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

———. *These Honored Dead: How the Story of Gettysburg Shaped American Memory*. Cambridge, MA: DaCapo, 2003.

LaFantasie, Glenn. “Joshua Chamberlain and the American Dream.” In *The Gettysburg Nobody Knows*, edited by Gabor S. Boritt, 31-55. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Petruzzi, J. David and Steven A. Stanley. *The Gettysburg Campaign in Numbers and Losses: Synopses, Orders of Battle, Strengths, Casualties, and Maps, June 9-July 14, 1863*. El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2012.

Varney, Frank P. *General Grant and the Rewriting of History: How the Destruction of General William S. Rosecrans Influenced Our Understanding of the Civil War* El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2013.

Robert Smalls and The Steamship *Planter* : Turning the Tides for the Union Military in the Civil War

William K Donaldson

When Robert Smalls was born on April 5, 1839, in Beaufort, South Carolina, he could not have known that he would spend the next twenty-three years of his life as property. Smalls also could not have known that he would be caught up in a deadly war in his homeland that held his continued enslavement or eventual freedom in the balance. Smalls possessed courage and determination that allowed him to take risks that many of his race could ill afford. In May of 1862, Smalls successfully coordinated the theft of the Confederate steamship *Planter* and gained freedom for his family and co-conspirators. Smalls was hired as a civilian boat pilot to serve in the Union military. Because of his “hero” status, he was recruited by Reverend Mansfield French to speak in the North about his escape and the success of the Port Royal Experiment in coastal South Carolina. Though Smalls made many contributions to nineteenth-century American history, this paper focuses specifically on the tactical military contributions he made during the Civil War and how they played a role in eventual Union victory.

Donaldson

Smalls was born to a house slave by the name of Lydia Polite. She had been the property of John McKee, and his son Henry McKee inherited her. Smalls was born in the slave quarters behind the McKee home and was likely the son of a white man. He may have been born as a product of an illicit affair between Polite and one of the McKees. Smalls was a favorite of both men and acted as a personal servant to the elder McKee and his son. In 1851, at the age of twelve, Smalls was sent by Henry McKee to Charleston to live with McKee's sister-in-law. Smalls' master agreed to allow Smalls to keep a portion of his earnings from his various jobs.¹

After arriving in Charleston, Smalls took on work as a waiter at the Planter's Hotel. He was then employed as a lamplighter for a city contractor. Smalls eventually went to work for John Simmons, driving a hoisting horse at the wharves of Charleston harbor. Simmons liked Smalls and began teaching him sail making and ship rigging. For seven years, Simmons employed and tutored Smalls teaching him shipboard work and elements of navigation.² Simmons once remarked of his

¹ Edward A. Miller Jr., *Gullah Statesman: Robert Smalls from Slavery to Congress, 1839-1915* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 7.

² Philip Dray, *Capitol Men: The Epic Story of Reconstruction through the Lives of the First Black Congressmen* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2008), 5.

Robert Smalls and The Steamship *Planter*

pupil, “That boy’s got the makings of a pilot. Ever see him at the bar when the tide’s going out? ‘Stead of dropping anchor and waiting for high tide he just backs up the ship and rides in with the swell.”³

In summer 1861, Smalls first boarded the steamship *Planter* and began working as a deckhand for \$16 per month. Smalls kept \$1, and he sent \$15 to his master, Henry McKee. In late 1861, the Confederate government leased the *Planter* and, soon after, Smalls became a wheelman, a position that gave him steering control of the steamship. Though he served as the “pilot” of the ship, he could not carry that title, as slaves were not allowed to hold such positions. Smalls was aboard the *Planter* when Confederate Lieutenant John Randolph Hamilton used the steamship to survey sand bars off the coasts of Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. The ship and her crew participated in the destruction of the federal lighthouse at Hunting Island, South Carolina, transported cannons, ammunition, soldiers, and laid sea mines (called torpedoes during the Civil War) in the Edisto and the Stono rivers in South Carolina.⁴ It was in this role that Robert Smalls learned Confederate military intelligence and refined his

³ Dorothy Sterling, *Captain of the Planter: The Story of Robert Smalls* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1958), 45.

⁴ Miller, *Gullah Statesman*, 6.

skills as a boat pilot along the southern coasts. These experiences would eventually make him an invaluable asset to the Union.

In December 1861, the United States Navy began sinking old ships in the mouth of the Charleston harbor. The vessels were filled with granite and sunk to cut off the harbor to supply boats attempting to enter the port to resupply the city, and the Confederate forces positioned there. The so-called “Stone Fleet” and the presence of warships of the Union navy kept Charlestonians fearing that an attack on the city could come at any time.⁵ As the wheelman of a Confederate vessel, Smalls was keenly aware of the Union blockade, because the U.S. Navy ships were visible from Charleston. Smalls hatched his plan to escape in April 1862, meeting with several other crew members of the *Planter* and other enslaved shipmen from Charleston.⁶

For two weeks in early May 1862, the *Planter* was tasked to remove cannons from Cole’s Island and move them to James Island, in Charleston harbor.⁷ On May 12, 1862, crews

⁵ “Charleston and Savannah: The Points of Operation of the Stone Fleet,” *New York Times*, December 10, 1861.

⁶ Okon Edet Uya, *From Slavery to Public Service: Robert Smalls 1839-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 13.

⁷ Charles Cowley, *The Romance of History In "the Black County,": And the Romance of War in the Career of Gen.*

Robert Smalls and The Steamship *Planter*

loaded four large cannons and two hundred pounds of ammunition on the ship for delivery to Fort Ripley, then under construction in the harbor.⁸ Circumstances quickly arose, creating an opportune moment for Smalls to execute his plan to escape. First, Smalls became aware that the three white Confederate officers serving on the *Planter* would be spending the night in Charleston instead of on ship which, “violated Confederate naval policy – at least one officer was required to remain with the ship at all times – but the rule was often disregarded.”⁹ Second, the Confederate guard boat that patrolled the entrance to the inner harbor was out of commission at that time.¹⁰ Lastly, due to the fear of impending attack by the Union, the Confederate forces in the city of Charleston announced that martial law would be implemented on the following day, May 13. Attempting to escape after martial law was declared would have

Robert Smalls, "the Hero of the Planter" (Lowell, Massachusetts, 1882), 10.

⁸ Uya, *From Slavery to Public Service*, 14.

⁹ Dray, *Capitol Men*, 7.

¹⁰ Samuel F. Du Pont, *The Blockade: 1862-1863*, vol. 2 of *Samuel Francis Du Pont: A Selection from His Civil War Letters*, ed. John D. Hayes (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), 23.

dramatically increased the chances of discovery and possible capture.¹¹

Robert Smalls knew that the stolen steamship would prove valuable to the Union forces for the war effort. Equally, the loss of cannons by the Confederate troops of Charleston would be significant militarily, as cannons were scarce and costly to manufacture. Because Charleston had effectively been cut-off by sea, and moving large cannons by land proved difficult, the loss of the *Planter* and her cargo would be a blow to the Confederacy.

Smalls' plan was fraught with likely failure and possible death. The idea endangered not only his life but also those of his wife, children, and the other slaves who joined the plot to escape. At 3:25 am on May 13, 1862, the *Planter* and its "contraband" crew steamed away from the Southern Wharf, positioned adjacent to the headquarters of Confederate General Roswell S. Ripley, the commander of the Second Military District of South Carolina. His command oversaw Confederate military operations in and around Charleston.¹² The

¹¹ Cate Lineberry, *Be Free or Die: The Amazing Story of Robert Smalls' Escape from Slavery to Union Hero* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2017), 17.

¹² U.S. War Department, *The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies in the War of the Rebellion*, 128 vols. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), ser. I, vol. 14, 825.

Robert Smalls and The Steamship *Planter*

next stop was the North Atlantic Wharf, where Smalls and his crew of seven retrieved Smalls' wife Hannah and their three children, as well as three other women and one child. The families were then hidden down below in the ship. The *Planter* turned for a final pass through the harbor as a Confederate vessel.

Six Confederate outposts in the Charleston harbor were obstacles to the success of Smalls' plan. The *Planter* first steamed within view of the Charleston Battery and Castle Pinkney, passed by Fort Ripley, (under construction,) and then headed toward the first manned fort with serious firepower, Fort Johnson. After passing Fort Johnson without raising any alarm, they noticed a guard boat patrolling the harbor but received no hail or approach. Fort Sumter was the greatest challenge of the plan. The fort was heavily fortified and had massive guns. The shipping channel was narrowed with the addition of a floating log boom to prevent unauthorized entry into the harbor but would allow blockade runner ships to enter under the watchful eye of the fort. For Smalls, passing this close to Fort Sumter must have been terrifying. He kept his composure, donned a disguise to help him to resemble the actual captain of the *Planter*, C. J. Relyea, and gave the properly coded steam whistle

signal. The signal allowed the ship to pass the fort as if going about its regular business.¹³

The *Planter* appeared to be on a regular mission for the Confederates. Not until the *Planter* made way for the main ship channel, parallel to Morris Island, did the Confederate forces at Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie suspect that something was amiss. A relatively small craft like the *Planter* would not sail out to the blockade for any reason. The fort's cannons were out of range, and due to the late hour, the Confederates raised the alarm too late. Smalls, his crew, and their stowaways made it out of the clutches of slavery and the Confederacy, but they had one more challenge to surmount. The *Planter* was approaching the Charleston Bar, "a series of submerged sandbars that formed the outer limit of the Charleston harbor."¹⁴ Due to the location of the Stone Fleet, there was only one way out of the shipping lane, to sail directly toward the U.S. Naval blockade fleet just beyond the Bar. As the *Planter* approached the blockade ships, it was mistaken for an enemy vessel attempting to ram or otherwise attack the fleet. The black crew of the *Planter* quickly lowered the Confederate flag

¹³ Stephen R. Wise and Lawrence S. Rowland with Gerhard Spieler, *Rebellion, Reconstruction, and Redemption, 1861-1893*, vol 2 of *The History of Beaufort County, South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 97-101.

¹⁴ Lineberry, *Be Free or Die*, 25.

Robert Smalls and The Steamship *Planter*

and raised a white bed sheet to alert the Union ships of their intention to surrender. As a dense fog rolled in, the first ship they approached was the *Onward*, a three-masted clipper ship.¹⁵

The captain of the *Onward*, Lieutenant John Frederick Nickels, called the crew of his ship “to quarters,” and they quickly turned the *Onward* to point her cannon at the *Planter*.¹⁶ With moments to spare, Nickels saw the white sheet and ordered the crew of the *Onward* to stand down.¹⁷ The last obstacle to the freedom of the clandestine crew of the steamship *Planter* was gone. Immediately after his relinquishment of the *Planter* to Lt. Nickels, Smalls handed over a collection of Charleston newspapers. The papers assisted the Union leaders to decipher what Confederates might know about Union military movements and gave some view of daily life in the city of Charleston and the

¹⁵ James M. Guthrie, *Camp-Fires of the Afro-American: Or, The Colored Man as a Patriot, Soldier, Sailor, and Hero, in the Cause of Free America: Displayed in Colonial Struggles, in the Revolution, the War of 1812, and in Later Wars, Particularly the Great Civil War, 1861-5, and the Spanish American War, 1898: Concluding with an Account of the War with the Filipinos, 1899* (Philadelphia: Afro-American Pub. Co., 1899), 312.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁷ U.S. Naval War Records Office, *The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, 27 vols. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1901), ser. I, vol 12, 822 (hereafter ORN).

surrounding areas.¹⁸ Smalls also turned over a book from the *Planter* that contained secret signals that the Confederates used to communicate between forts called “wigwags.”¹⁹ “Wigwags were coded messages transmitted across line-of-sight distances by an officer performing specific combinations of motions with a flag; each motion represented an alphanumeric character determined by the signaling code. At night the Confederates used torches instead of flags.”²⁰ Until the Confederates could account for the lost book, the Union military forces would be able to decode messages sent between forts all along the South Carolina coast.

Aside from the obvious benefits to the Union of having gained a ship, weapons, and contrabands, they also gained a psychological edge over the Confederates and the citizens of Charleston. On May 14, the *Charleston Daily Courier* published, “Our community was intensely agitated Tuesday morning by the intelligence that the steamer *Planter*...had been taken possession of by her colored crew, steamed up, and boldly run out to the blockades.”²¹ The *Charleston Mercury*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 821.

¹⁹ “Report to Accompany S.1313,” April 18, 1898, in “Committee on Claims Report,” in Lineberry, *Be Free or Die*, 73.

²⁰ Lineberry, *Be Free or Die*, 73.

²¹ “The Steamer *Planter*,” *Charleston Daily Courier*, May 14, 1862.

Robert Smalls and The Steamship *Planter*

reported on May 14, “The result of this negligence may be only the loss of the guns and of the boat, desirable for transportation. But things of this kind are sometimes of incalculable injury. The lives and property of this whole community are at stake and might be jeopardized by events apparently as trifling as this.”²²

Robert Smalls became a hero within Union lines, so too to hundreds of thousands of free African Americans in the North and those still in bondage in the slave states during the war. John Forbes, a Boston businessman, and abolitionist said in a letter to a friend, “The moral effect of such practical emancipation was worth much more than money.”²³

While the citizens of Charleston reeled from the loss of the steamship and the slaves, Lt. Nickels turned the *Planter* and crew over to Commander Enoch Parrott. The commander immediately assigned a Union crew to man the *Planter* and took the ship and its inhabitants south to report to Commander Samuel Francis Du Pont. As commander of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron, Du Pont later wrote that the *Planter* was, “a fine boat, can carry seven hundred bales of

²² “Disgusting Treachery and Negligence,” *Charleston Mercury*, May 14, 1862.

²³ John M. Forbes to Charles Sumner, May 16, 1862, in Uya, *From Slavery to Public Service – Robert Smalls 1839-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 17.

cotton, has a fine engine, and draws but little water and will be of greatest use to us---so that in herself she is a valuable acquisition, quite valuable to the squadron.”²⁴

Smalls met with Du Pont, and he shared important military information with the commander. Smalls divulged the abandonment of the battery at Cole’s Island, the source of the extra cannons aboard the *Planter*. The Confederates leaving Cole’s Island rendered James Island unprotected. If the Union army were able to capture James Island, they would have a manageable approach to attack Fort Johnson. Success in taking over Fort Johnson would allow the Union to control the entire inner harbor. Smalls gave Du Pont information about the construction of Fort Ripley. He informed Du Pont that only a few thousand Confederate troops were remaining in Charleston. A majority of the soldiers in the city had been redeployed to Tennessee and Virginia.²⁵ Du Pont was impressed with Smalls and said in a dispatch to the Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Wells, “His information has been most interesting, and portions of it of the utmost importance.” Du Pont went on to say, “I shall continue to employ Robert as a pilot on board the

²⁴ Du Pont, *The Blockade: 1862-1863*, vol. 2 of *Samuel Francis Du Pont: A Selection from His Civil War Letters*, 49.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

Robert Smalls and The Steamship *Planter*

Planter for the inland waters, with which he appears to be very familiar.”²⁶

The *Planter* carried a cargo of slaves on that early May morning, but it also transported some critical military hardware. The steamship carried her own two deck guns but also had the Cole’s Island weapons and a considerable amount of ammunition. A quartermaster’s list of the ordinance and ordinance stores aboard the *Planter* when delivered to the Union blockade included, 1 long 32-pounder weighing 7,200 pounds, 1 short 32-pounder weighing 3,300 pounds, 1 short 24-pounder weighing 1,476 pounds, two 8-inch Columbiads weighing 9,240 pounds each, one 7-inch rifle weighing 10,500 pounds, 200 pieces of 32-pounder shot, 150 pieces of 8-inch 32-pounder shot, 1000 additional pieces of ammunition, and 1000 powder charges. The estimated value of the ordinance aboard the *Planter* was more than \$10,000 based on United States wartime prices.²⁷

As he had mentioned in his letter to the Secretary of the Navy, Du Pont hired Smalls to become a civilian pilot for the Union navy. Du Pont chose this position because he could not enlist Smalls in the military. Enlisted African Americans

²⁶ Du Pont to Gideon Welles, May 14, 1862, ORN, ser. I, vol. 12, 821.

²⁷ House Committee on Naval Affairs, *Authorizing the President to Place Robert Smalls on the Retired List of the Navy*, 47th Cong., 2nd sess., 1883, Rep. No. 1887.

could not serve as more than deckhands with the classification of “boy.”²⁸ Smalls served as the pilot of the *Planter*, conducting military operations and transporting personnel for three months before being reassigned.

By May 31, the information Smalls supplied allowed Du Pont to take the Stono River and begin staging the attack of Charleston from this strategic vantage point. In a letter to Welles, Du Pont wrote, “From information derived from the contraband pilot Robert Smalls, I had reason to believe that the rebels had abandoned their batteries and accordingly directed Commander Marchand, the senior officer of Charleston, to make a reconnaissance to ascertain the truth of the report. This was done on the 19th instant and, the information proving correct, I ordered the gunboats on the next day...to cross the bar.” Du Pont further added, “This important base of operation, the Stono, has thus been secured for further operations by the Army against Charleston of which General Hunter proposes to take advantage.”²⁹

The evidence suggests that the carefully planned actions of the slave wheelman Robert Smalls led to immediate tactical advantages for the Union military. Due to his efforts on May 13, 1862,

²⁸ Welles to William W. McKean, September 25, 1861, ORN, ser. I, vol. 16, 689.

²⁹ Du Pont, *The Blockade*, 92-93.

Robert Smalls and The Steamship *Planter*

Smalls made significant assistance to the war effort. The contributions came in the form of military information he recalled of the Charleston harbor, maps, and documents from the *Planter*, the *Planter* itself and her weapons, and his experience as a competent boat pilot, knowledgeable of the coastal waterways of South Carolina. From 1862-1865 the Union used *The Planter* in eleven actions of the Civil War.³⁰

The theft of the *Planter* was a daring and memorable feat placing Robert Smalls in a long list of American heroes. In the remainder of the Civil War, and throughout the rest of his life, Robert Smalls contributed substantially to the betterment of his country, family, and race. He served as a major-general in the South Carolina Militia, as a Senator in the state house of South Carolina, as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for the 5th congressional district of South Carolina, as a private businessman, and as a customs collector in his home city of Beaufort, South Carolina.

³⁰ Bruce G. Terrell, Gordon P. Watts & Timothy J. Runyan, *The Search For Planter: The Ship that Escaped Charleston and Carried Robert Smalls to Destiny*, series 1, (Silver Spring Maryland: NOAA National Marine Sanctuary Program, 2014), 6.

Bibliography

Billingsley, Andrew. *Yearning to Breathe Free: Robert Smalls of South Carolina and His Families*. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2007.

“Charleston and Savannah: The Points of Operation of the Stone Fleet.” *New York Times*. December 10, 1861.

Cowley, Charles. *The Romance of History in “the Black County,”: And the Romance of War in the Career of Gen. Robert Smalls, “the Hero of the Planter.”* Lowell: Massachusetts, n.p., 1882.

“Disgusting Treachery and Negligence.” *Charleston Mercury*. May 14, 1862.

Dray, Philip. *Capitol Men: The Epic Story of Reconstruction Through the Lives of the First Black Congressmen*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2008.

Guthrie, James. M. *Camp-Fires of the Afro-American: Or, The Colored Man as a Patriot, Soldier, Sailor, and Hero, in the Cause of Free America: Displayed in*

Robert Smalls and The Steamship *Planter*

Colonial Struggles, in the Revolution, the War of 1812, and in Later Wars, Particularly the Great Civil War, 1861-5, and the Spanish American War, 1898: Concluding with an Account of the War with the Filipinos, 1899. Philadelphia: Afro-American Pub. Co., 1899.

Hayes, John D., ed. *Samuel Francis Du Pont: A Selection from His Civil War Letters.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969.

Lineberry, Cate. *Be Free or Die: The Amazing Story of Robert Smalls' Escape from Slavery to Union Hero.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 2017.

Miller, Edward A., *Gullah Statesman: Robert Smalls from Slavery to Congress, 1839-1915.* Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1995.

Rowland, Lawrence Sanders, Wise, Stephen R., Spieler, Gerhard, Rowland, Lawrence Sanders., Moore, Alexander, and Rogers, George C. *The History of Beaufort County, South Carolina.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997.

Sterling, Dorothy. *Captain of the Planter: The Story of Robert Smalls*. Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1958.

Terrell, Bruce G., Watts, Gordon P., Runyan, Timothy J. *The Search For Planter: The Ship that Escaped Charleston and Carried Robert Smalls to Destiny*. Series 1. Silver Spring Maryland: NOAA National Marine Sanctuary Program, 2014.

“The Steamer Planter.” *Charleston Daily Courier*, May 14, 1862

U.S. House of Representatives. Committee on Naval Affairs. *Authorizing the President to Place Robert Smalls on the Retired List of the Navy*. 47th Cong., 2nd sess., January 23, 1883. Rept. No. 1887.

U.S. Navy Department. *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*. Series 1, vols. 12, 16. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1901.

U. S. War Department. *Official Records of the Confederate States in the War of the Rebellion*. Series 1, vol. 14. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1901.

Robert Smalls and The Steamship *Planter*

Uya, Okon Edet. *From Slavery to Public Service: Robert Smalls, 1839-1915*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.

The Unspoken Demands of Slavery: The Exploitation of Female Slaves in the Memphis Slave Trade

Sarah Eiland

Within the domestic slave trade of the southern United States, the role of the female slave had a dual nature. Female slaves played an important role in the daily operations of domestic life and provided labor in areas that were not extremely physically demanding. Beyond their role as domestic laborers, enslaved women were acquired for the role their bodies played in the perpetuation of slavery. The inherent value of enslaved women came from the exploitation of their reproductive ability. White slave traders and white slave owners exploited female slaves for their own monetary or personal gain. As part of this exploitation within the Memphis slave trade, young women garnered prices higher than their older or less “desirable” counterparts and were subject to mistreatment by white slave owners due to their young age. Utilizing records from the Bolton Dickens and Company and Nathan Bedford Forrest’s involvement in the Memphis Slave trade, the abusive and exploitative nature of the Memphis slave trade emerges, explicitly, through the high prices for particular female slaves, the growth of the

mulatto population in Memphis, and the existence of mulatto children from prominent local figures.

Memphis, Tennessee had a large market for slave trade due to its prime location in a fertile, cotton-producing region on the Mississippi River and therefore was home to a large population of women held in urban slavery. Its location on the city's river made it easy to transport slaves from Upper South states to the slave markets in the states further south. Planters from surrounding areas would come to these Memphis markets to purchase them¹. In addition, Memphis's growing population bolstered a thriving local urban slave market. From 1850 to 1860 the white population of Memphis nearly tripled, growing from less than 7,000 in 1850 to less than 19,000 by 1860.² In tandem with the growth of the white population, the slave population also rose, increasing from around 2,500 to almost 4,000.³ This growth in the slave population goes against the trends seen in other southern urban areas, such as New Orleans, Mobile, and Richmond, during the same time period. Demonstrated by the decrease of slave populations in other southern cities, Richard Wade argues that the institution of slavery and its existence in urban centers were

¹ Frederic Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South* (Baltimore: J.H Furst Company, 1931), 250

² Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, 250

³ Marius Carriere Jr., "Blacks in Pre-Civil War Memphis," *Tennessee Historical Society*, (Spring 1989): 33

The Unspoken Demands of Slavery

incompatible. However, the trends in Memphis run contrary to that argument, suggesting that the institution of slavery thrived despite the urban threat.⁴

In the antebellum South, exploitation and mistreatment characterized the plight of the female slave. The survival of slavery as an institution depended upon the ability of the domestic slave population to sustain itself through the forceful impregnation of the female slave population. White slaveholders perceived enslaved women as “breeders,” and their value in the slave trade directly reflected their ability to reproduce⁵. Their femininity was reduced to reproduction.⁶ When searching for slaves to purchase, buyers searched for young slaves of child-bearing age to act as a self-renewing labor force.⁷ The most sought after female slaves were aged sixteen to nineteen and were “large enough to nurse,” demonstrating that the female slaves who carried the most value were

⁴ Richard Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South 1820-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 243-281

⁵ Wilma King, “Mad Enough to Kill: Enslaved Women, Murder, and Southern Courts,” *The Journal of African American History* 92, no.1 (Winter, 2007): 37-56

⁶ Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1999) 144

⁷ According to Walter Johnson, the most prized slave men were those aged nineteen to twenty-four, the ages in which they would be the most useful to production.

those of peak reproductive fitness.⁸ The age of a woman not only affected her ability to bear children but also determined her chance of getting sexually assaulted. A former slave who wrote about her experiences reported that “black female slaves were usually sexually assaulted when they were between the ages of thirteen and sixteen.”⁹ Diana Berry, in “In Pressing Need of Cash,” recounts how one slave owner did not want to pay full price for an enslaved woman’s “services” once he realized that his slave had a “disease of the womb” and was not capable of reproducing and providing more slave property.¹⁰ The services affected by a “disease of the womb” would have been the woman’s ability to bear children or perform other sexual acts. In a 1932 essay entitled “Black Folk and Birth Control,” W. E. B. DuBois, an early prominent civil rights actor, commented on the role slave women had of increasing the labor force in order to demonstrate the multi-generational societal ramifications the mistreatment of enslaved females had on the African American population. He stated that “as slaves, every incentive was furnished to raise the largest number of children possible” and named the

⁸ Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 144

⁹ Bell Hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (London: Pluto Press, 1982): 24

¹⁰Diana Berry, “In Pressing Need of Cash: Gender, Skill, and Family Persistence in the Domestic Slave Trade,” *The Journal of African American History* 92, no. 1 (Winter, 2007): 32

The Unspoken Demands of Slavery

“chief surplus crop” of the southern region to be the “natural increase of slaves.”¹¹ The physical health and reproductive value of bondswomen, another term to denote an enslaved woman, were the most important factors in the trading of female slaves. The belief that bondswomen were natural breeders combined with the accessibility of enslaved females, subjected them to sexual violence and exploitation.¹² The exploitation of female slaves was so ingrained into the institution of slavery that the continued existence of the slave trade relied upon the guarantee of ritual and continual rape occurring.

Male buyers perceived the “delicate” bodies of lighter skinned females, often associated with being mulatto (or mixed race), as not well suited for strenuous labor and therefore were valued in domestic jobs. “Lightness” of skin tone was associated with feminine and domestic attributes, and slaves with lighter skin were often described as delicate.¹³ As a result, lighter skinned females were favored over their darker counterparts and were more likely to be placed in a visible role.

¹¹ William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, “Black Folk and Birth Control,” *Birth Control Review* 16, no. 7 (June 1932): 166-167

¹² King, “Mad Enough to Kill,” 39

¹³ Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 152-153

The practice of buying slaves for sex or companionship occurred openly. Walter Johnson makes the argument that the high prices of female slaves revealed the sexuality of the slave market. The role that female slaves held in a household dictated their monetary value in the slave trade. The owner paid according to what he expected from the slave. Louis Hughes, a former slave who lived in Memphis and the surrounding area, spoke about the pricing of female slaves in his autobiography. He states that “servant women sold for \$500 to \$700, and sometimes as high as \$800...A house maid, bright in looks and well formed, would sell for \$1,000 to \$1,200.”¹⁴ Hughes’ description shows what was desirable and important to male slaveholders. The focus on physical appearance and the importance of being “well formed,” perhaps meaning sexually mature, alludes to the mistreatment of bondswomen by the buyers. The high prices paid by men were not only measures of desire but also of dominance. The ownership of a slave “mistress,” or “fancy,” gave slave owners and traders a reputation of power. Of course, when describing the slaves, slave owners would describe

¹⁴ Louis Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave: From Bondage to Freedom* (Milwaukee: South Side Printing Company, 1897): 15

The Unspoken Demands of Slavery

their property as “cooks,” “domestics,” or “seamstresses.”¹⁵

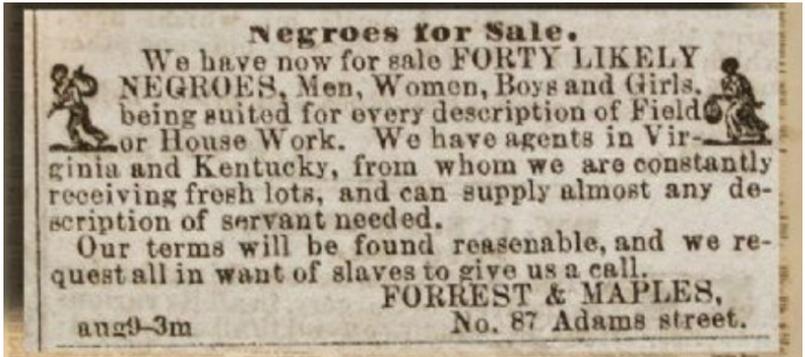


Figure 1: Advertisement from an October 25, 1855 edition of *The Memphis Eagle and Enquirer*

The trend in prices for female slaves, as described by Hughes, can be seen in the 1856-1858 slave ledgers of Memphis based slave trading company Bolton, Dickens and Company. The company ledger keeps records of their business transactions during those years, including the names of the slaves, the acquisition prices, and the prices the company sold them for. As seen in the advertisement from the *Memphis Eagle and Enquirer*, slave traders in Memphis consistently advertised their slaves as desirable or “likely negroes...suited for housework.”¹⁶ In the sample of

¹⁵ Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 114

¹⁶ *Memphis Eagle and Enquirer*, October 25, 1855

the ledger analyzed, the prices indicate a trend towards the purchase of slaves for domestic use. Due in part to advertisements from the time, it can be assumed that slaves sold by large slave trading companies were of the most desirable qualities, and therefore were sold for a price that reflected those qualities. Between 1856 and 1858, the average price for a female slave at Bolton, Dickens and Company was \$1,126. The price of \$1,126 is well within the \$1,000 to \$1,200 price range described by Hughes in which “well-formed” housemaids were sold for.¹⁷ However, female slaves were sold between the prices of \$887 and \$1,300, further demonstrating that many aspects went into consideration for the purchase price of a female slave.

Although women who could provide further services were valued monetarily more than servant women, male slaves were still valued the most. In the same slave ledger from Bolton, Dickens and Company, the average price for a male slave was \$1,262 with prices ranging from \$950 to \$1,450.¹⁸ While these prices alone do not show much about the gender differences in the slave trade, the higher average price combined with the fact that only 39% of the slaves analyzed were female, show a higher

¹⁷ Bolton Dickins and Company Slave Ledger, 1856-1858, Memphis and Shelby County Room collections, Memphis, Tennessee

¹⁸ Bolton Dickins and Company Slave Ledger

The Unspoken Demands of Slavery

demand for and value of the manual labor male slaves could provide. The prices for male slaves were consistently higher than female slaves due to the need for manual labor in the city and on plantations, and due to a society where women, black or white, were not valued or treated as highly as men.

Bills of sale from the time provide a more detailed look at the sale of enslaved females in mid-nineteenth century Memphis and demonstrate that, in particular, young women sold for higher prices than other female slaves. Many bills of sale provide the age of the woman being sold, a very important factor in determining her reproductive potential and therefore her monetary value to the buyer. An 1836 Shelby County bill of sale records a sale for “one thousand dollars...bargained sold and delivered...one Negro woman named Mariah twenty five years of age.”¹⁹ Considering this particular sale occurred in 1836, twenty years before the Bolton, Dickens and Company ledger sales, it can be assumed that with slight inflation due to the time difference, a sale of \$1,000 for a female slave was a large investment. The expensive price is notable considering that Mariah is recorded as being young and within child-bearing years. She

¹⁹ Bill of Sale, 1836, The Britton Duke Papers, Memphis and Shelby County Room collections, Memphis, Tennessee

had the potential to perpetuate her master's wealth by having children, justification for her high price.

Another 1836 bill of sale to the same man, Britton Duke, records the sale of a "mulatto girl aged about 12 or 13 years named Jane for... the sum of seven hundred dollars."²⁰ The sale of such a young girl for the price of \$700, in 1836, was most likely due to her lighter skin, thought to be more desirable. Slave owning men tended to pay more for mulatto women because their lighter skin, desirable for its perceived whiteness, was appealing to them.²¹ The higher prices for young, mulatto women, therefore, may be an indicator of future sexual exploitation and abuse.

Also 1836, Britton Duke purchased another female slave. This bill of sale does not state the age of the woman, but it does include the sale of her son as well. The bill of sale states "that this day I have bargan[sic] sold and delivered unto Britton Duke asertin[sic] negro woman by the name of Ceala and her son...for the sum of one thousand dollars."²² The price paid for Ceala, with a child, is the same price paid for Mariah, who was of childbearing age. These prices indicate the value of procreation in the

²⁰ Bill of Sale, 1836, The Britton Duke Papers, Memphis and Shelby County Room collections, Memphis, Tennessee

²¹ Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 155

²² Bill of Sale, 1836, The Britton Duke Papers, Memphis and Shelby County Room collections, Memphis, Tennessee

The Unspoken Demands of Slavery

slave trade. Both women promised the possibility of a self-sustaining slave population. The high prices that white men paid for alluring and fertile women, and the profits that slave traders made from the sales, exploit the existence of female slaves' womanhood. The slave trade reduced the value of female slaves to their worth as sexual objects.

The exceptional prices paid for particular slaves is very indicative of alternative motives for their purchase, as these high prices did not constitute the norm in all slave transactions. An 1862 bill of sale states that "Mary Ann" was bought for "about \$400."²³ There is no indication of age or skin coloration included in this bill of sale, but due to the significantly lower price it can be assumed that Mary Ann was bought for reasons more purely relating to the labor she could provide. A bill of sale for "Nathan" also helps to contextualize the prices seen in previous bills of sale. Nathan, a 45-year-old man, was sold for "about three hundred and thirty-six dollars."²⁴ Men, typically, sold for more than women due to the perceived greater value of the labor they provided. It shows that white male buyers were willing to pay more for the possibility of female companionship than for guaranteed

²³ Bill of Sale, 1862, Driver-Hunt family papers, Pink Palace Museum Collections, Memphis, Tennessee

²⁴ Bill of Sale, 1841, Driver-Hunt family paper, Pink Palace Museum Collection, Memphis, Tennessee

manual labor. This sale helps to demonstrate the value of sexual desirability in the slave trade.

An 1854 bill of sale by the Bolton, Dickens and Company slave trading firm sheds light on the pricing of slaves in the 1856-1858 slave ledger from the company, analyzed previously. This bill of sale details a payment of “nine-hundred dollars in full for a negro girl by the name of Mary, between the age of 13 or 14 years of age.”²⁵ In the slave ledger for the company, created solely as business records, no mention of age is recorded with each listing of a slave. This 1854 bill of sale from the company allows for a better understanding of their pricing of slaves in the slave ledger. As stated earlier, Louis Hughes wrote that the price range for a typical “well-formed” housemaid varied from \$1,000 to \$1,200.²⁶ Also as previously stated, the term “housemaid” or “domestic” carried with it the insinuation that sexual relations between the enslaved woman and slave owner may have occurred.²⁷ Due to the sexual connotations associated with domestic housemaids that sold for \$1,000 to \$1,200, or even more, it can be assumed that the “well-formed” enslaved women were of at least the age of sexual maturity, meaning at least 16

²⁵ Bill of Sale, 1854, Bolton, Dickins, and Company file, Memphis and Shelby County Room collections

²⁶ Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave*, 15

²⁷ Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 114

The Unspoken Demands of Slavery

to 19 years old.²⁸ Mary, the previously mentioned girl sold for \$900, garnered \$200 to \$400 more than the price for a typical servant while only being 13 or 14 years old.²⁹ The price indicates that despite having not yet reached peak maturity, the intentions of her buyer may have still been sexual in nature. The monetary value of 13-year old Mary also sets a price benchmark for the Bolton, Dickins and Company slave ledger. Since the average price for a female slave was \$1,126, many female slaves being sold were likely older than Mary and at the age of sexual maturity, therefore worth more to male buyers.

Many aspects of Memphis's slave population did not follow the trends seen in other prominent southern cities. Richard Wade argues that by 1860, most of the big cities of the South were "shedding slaves" and that less people had any stock in the system of slavery. He also argues that the introduction of slavery in the cities along with the widespread practice of "living out," caused the authority of the master to begin to break down. "Living out" removed slaves from the authority and constant supervision of their master.³⁰ Neither of these trends took place in Memphis. By 1860, the

²⁸ Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave*, 15 and Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 113, 144

²⁹ Hughes, *Thirty Years*, 15. This point makes use of the numbers provided in Hughes's autobiography

³⁰ Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 21, 82

slave population in Memphis had grown to the highest levels the city had seen, increasing by 56% in the 10 years leading up to 1860, unlike other southern cities.³¹ Kathleen Berkley refutes Wade's argument concerning the effects of slaves living out of the house. She states that due to strict local ordinances, slaves in Memphis did not have much intermingling with free blacks and other groups that would lead to a breakdown in the master's authority. In fact, Berkley uses an "Index of Dissimilarity" to measure the degree of segregation of a certain population against the rest of the population.³² She found that in 1850 slaves in Memphis were the "least residentially segregated group", meaning that slaves lived in very close proximity with their masters.³³ The rise in the slave population coupled with the close proximity in which slaves and masters lived, explains why the amount of sexual exploitation rose in Memphis during the same period of time.

In southern slave-owning households, the presence of mulatto slaves was the tangible evidence of the abuse of enslaved females. The close proximity in which owners and slaves lived in Memphis allowed for easier access to female slaves and therefore more opportunities for sexual abuse to

³¹ Carriere, "Blacks in Pre-Civil War Memphis," 33

³² Berkeley, "Like a Plague," 47-48

³³ Berkeley, "Like a Plague," 47-48

The Unspoken Demands of Slavery

occur.³⁴ It was in the white domestic household where “sexual exploitation of young slave girls usually occurred.”³⁵ In her diary, Mary Chestnut expressed the attitudes towards sexual relations between master and slave. She wrote that sexual relations between slaveholding white men and their female slaves “was the thing we can’t name.” “Every lady,” Chestnut stated, “tells you who is the father of all the mulatto children in everybody’s household, but those in her own she seems to think dropped from the clouds or so pretends to think.”³⁶ Chestnut’s statements on the treatment of female slaves prove that white slave-owning males did take advantage of their female slaves in the household. While the presence of slave mistresses was very prevalent in society, its effects were not talked about by the families affected.

Unlike other prominent cities in the South, the population of slaves in Memphis increased 56% from 1850 to 1860. The need for labor during this period of growth in Memphis during the 1850s fueled this continued reliance on slavery. White Memphians, enjoying the new wealth and growth associated with the city’s growth, valued the social

³⁴ Kathleen Berkeley, “Like a Plague of Locust: Immigration and Social Change in Memphis, Tennessee 1850-1880” (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 1980), 48

³⁵ Hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman*, 25

³⁶ *Mary Chestnut’s Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) 29, quoted by Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 115

status and distinction that being a slave owner provided.³⁷

The growth in both population and wealth during the 1850s caused the evidence of sexual exploitation of slaves to increase and become more visible. The 1850 and 1860 census slave schedules are useful when examining the prominence of sexual exploitation of female slaves, because included in the documents is the race of each enslaved person. The number of mulatto slaves at each period in Memphis's history can therefore be determined. A high percentage of the slave population being classified as mulatto would indicate that sexual abuse of enslaved females by white men was very prevalent in Memphis. It can be inferred that most sexual contact between white owners and their female slaves was not consensual due to the power dynamics that existed. An enslaved woman was nothing more than property that could be used, or abused, as the owner wished. Any women who did not "willingly respond to the sexual overture of masters and overseers were brutalized and punished."³⁸

³⁷ Carriere, "Blacks in Pre-Civil War Memphis," 33

³⁸ Hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, 26

The Unspoken Demands of Slavery

Memphis Ward	1850 Mulatto Percentage of Population	1860 Mulatto Percentage of Population	Change
1 st Ward	30.27%	34.4%	4%
2 nd Ward	24.4%	29.6%	5%
7 th Ward	3.15%	30.67%	27.5%

Figure 2: Data from slave schedules showing the change in the percentage of mulatto slaves present within the city

The data from the slave schedules, shown in the table above, show that as both the slave population and Memphis grew, so did the amount of sexual abuse of female slaves. In 1850, in the 1st ward of Memphis, the percentage of slaves who were labeled as “mulatto” totaled 30.27%. In 1850, in the 2nd ward of Memphis, 24.4% of the slave population were recorded as being “mulatto.” In 1850, in the 7th ward of Memphis, 3.15% of the slave population were recorded as “mulatto.”³⁹ A change can be seen in the data from the 1860 slave schedule. In the 1860 slave schedule for the 1st ward of Memphis, 34.4% of slaves were labeled “mulatto”, an increase of over 4%. In 1860, the percentage of slaves recorded as “mulatto” in the 2nd ward was 29.6%, an increase of over 5%. In the 7th ward, in 1860, the percentage of slaves labeled

³⁹ United States Seventh Census, 1850, Slave Schedule, Shelby County, Tennessee

as “mulatto” reached 30.67%, an increase of 27.5% in 10 years.⁴⁰

The growth in the population of mulatto slaves in the 7th ward of Memphis is the most significant for demonstrating an upward trend of the sexual abuse of female slaves in the mid-nineteenth century. Per the 1865 Memphis census, the 7th ward had the highest population of both whites and blacks in the entire city. 39.95% of the black population, 4,393 people, lived there in 1865, 5 years after the 1860 slave schedule was created. 4,361 white people, 26.1% of the white population, lived in the 7th ward in 1865.⁴¹ The large growth, an increase of 27.5%, in the number of mulatto slaves in the most populous ward of the city, shows that with the growth of urban slavery in Memphis the prevalence of sexual abuse also grew.

The slave population of Memphis grew in part to the large number of slave traders that operated in the city once the interstate slave trade became legal in 1855.⁴² They profited from Memphis’s booming economy in the 1850s by selling slaves to those in need of labor in or near Memphis and people traveling via the Mississippi

⁴⁰ United States Eighth Census, 1860, Slave Schedule, Shelby County, Tennessee

⁴¹ United States Census, 1865, Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee

⁴² Lester C. Lamon, *Blacks in Tennessee, 1791-1970* (University of Tennessee Press, 1981): 22

The Unspoken Demands of Slavery

River. The Bolton Dickens and Company and Nathan Bedford Forrest's slave trading companies held a large portion of the slave trading enterprise in Memphis and the surrounding areas. Forrest grew in prominence when the Bolton Dickens and Company slave trading business closed in 1858 due to an internal feud. He became one of the wealthiest men in Memphis and gained greater notoriety after his time as City Alderman, involvement in the Civil War, and involvement in the Klu Klux Klan.

In 1853, Nathan Bedford Forrest, just entering the Memphis slave trade market, made his first recorded purchase as a slave trader.⁴³ On November 10th, 1853, Nathan Bedford Forrest paid "twelve hundred and fifty dollars in full for a negrow woman named Catherine aged seventeen and her child named Thomas aged four months."⁴⁴ The exact purpose Forrest had in mind while purchasing Catherine is impossible to know. The high price of \$1,250 would seem to indicate that there was some alternative motive behind the purchase of Catherine, but Jack Hurst poses the theory that perhaps Forrest was simply making an investment with this purchase. The rising values of women of child bearing age would have caused the purchase of Catherine to be a smart investment at

⁴³ Jack Hurst, *Nathan Bedford Forrest: A Biography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 36-37

⁴⁴ Shelby County Register's Records, Book 16, p.125

the start of his Memphis business ventures. An 1864 article published in the *Chicago Tribune* makes a mention of a slave named Catherine, 11 years after the original bill of sale for “Catherine” was drawn up. The article, entitled “The Butcher Forrest and his Family”, begins by sharing the news of the capture of Fort Pillow by General Forrest and continues on to describe his family life and his business ventures as a slave trader. The article claims that Forrest had two wives, “one white, the other colored (Catherine) by which he had two children. His ‘patriarchal’ wife, Catherine, and his white wife had frequent quarrels or domestic jars.”⁴⁵ Hurst argues that if it were not for the emphasis of the name Catherine, with the same spelling as the 1853 bill of sale, due to the brief and biased nature of the article the claims would have been completely dismissible.⁴⁶

In the 1870 Memphis census, there is one entry that seems to prove many of the claims made by the 1864 article. In the 1870 census, in the 4th ward of the city there is a listing for a female Cath. Forrest, age 36, from Tennessee, labeled as mulatto. With just one name separating them and listed as being in the same tenement, there is a listing for a girl named Narcissa Forrest, age 13, also from

⁴⁵ *Chicago Tribune*, May 4, 1864

⁴⁶ Hurst, *Nathan Bedford Forrest*, 37

The Unspoken Demands of Slavery

Tennessee and also labeled as mulatto.⁴⁷ The evidence strongly suggests that the Cath. Forrest listed in the 1870 census and the Catherine bought in 1853 at age 17, rumored to have been Forrest's mistress in 1864, is the same woman. Many of the names in this particular census were abbreviated, furthering the argument that the "Cath. Forrest" listed is the shortened version of "Catherine Forrest."

The 13-year-old girl, therefore, may have been one of the children mentioned in the 1864 article. The Catherine bought in 1853 aged around 17 years old, would have been around 36 years old in 1870, making the timeline correct and any disparity in time likely due to the unavailability of exact birth dates and ages. The labeling of "mulatto" may also be accurate. In the original bill of sale there is no indication of the exact color of her skin besides referring to her as a "negro woman," typical of all bills of sale. If the Catherine in the 1853 bill of sale were actually mulatto, or had light mulatto-like skin, then the unusually-high original price of \$1,250 could be explained due to her more desirable skin tone. Lighter skinned women typically held more monetary value in the slave market. The presence of a child, also with the surname Forrest, further solidifies the argument that

⁴⁷ United States Ninth Census, 1870, Fourth Ward, Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee

these two women were indeed the mistress and child of Nathan Bedford Forrest. The child, Narcissa, is recorded as being mulatto. Thus, this proves that her father most likely was white. If Catherine was, in fact, mulatto and had a daughter with a man who was not white, the resulting child would not have been labeled as mulatto. Also, the birthdate of Narcissa would most likely be sometime in 1857, well before the 1864 publication of the article that named Catherine, Forrest's "colored wife" and mentioned two children that resulted from their relationship.⁴⁸ The presence of a slave mistress in a prominent household was a common occurrence for the time. Due to the societal status that slave owning represented, it would have made sense for Forrest, at the start of his Memphis ventures, to buy a slave through which to gain status. Taking the relationship a step further would have been a natural move for the period. It was "so common for female slaves to have white children, that little or nothing is ever said about it."⁴⁹

Memphis, a booming slave trading town, created an atmosphere surrounding slavery that

⁴⁸ Chicago *Tribune*, May 4, 1864, p.3

⁴⁹ Theodore D. Weld, *Slavery as It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* (New York, 1839): 101 accessed through John White, "Whatever Happened to Slavery in the Old South?" *Journal of American Studies* 8, no. 3 (December 1974): 383

The Unspoken Demands of Slavery

perpetuated the exploitative nature of owning slaves longer than other southern cities. In many ways Memphis was not very different than other cities important to the cotton industry, but the growth of the city and the continued growth of slavery made it unique in its region. The evidence that the sexual exploitation of enslaved women persisted, and even increased, until the eve of the Civil War, shows how deeply engrained into popular attitudes the acceptance of the abuse of women was in Memphis. The growth in the amount of mulatto slaves, the high prices for particular female slaves, and the existence of mulatto children from prominent local figures are specific ways in which the exploitative and abusive nature of the Memphis slave trade surfaced. In the mid-nineteenth century, Memphis's particularly unique construction of urban slavery caused its deviant trends and led to the continued exploitation of slave femininity, that occurred until slavery ended.

Frances Peter: A Loyal Woman of Kentucky

Erica Uszak

As a young woman in divided Lexington, Kentucky, Frances Peter staunchly defended her position as a Unionist, believing secession to be a foolish act which violated the Constitution. She tried to distinguish emancipation and Union as two separate issues but eventually came to accept emancipation, even though she came from a middle class slaveholding family, and she reproached former Unionists who switched allegiances because of it.¹ In her diary, she attacked those disloyal to the Union, as she destroyed the idea of the “honorable” Confederate soldier and the “proper” secessionist lady. Arguing that the Confederates had no honor because they had rebelled against the federal government, she claimed that Southern politicians had misled the poor Confederate soldiers, who were too ignorant to know that they, not the federal government, had crushed the Constitution under their feet. While Peter seemed to view the Confederate soldiers with some pity, she reserved her harshest words for the secessionist women in her town. She condemned the women as hypocrites who were only

¹Ancestry.com, “Robt. [Robert] Peter,” *1860 U.S. Federal Census - Slave Schedule, Lexington, Fayette County, Kentucky* [database on-line]. Provo: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2010.

pretending to be Christians and who were too aggressive in defending their political allegiances. Peter rejected the idea that these obscene, hypocritical women should be treated with the same respect as other “ladies” of Lexington, the Unionist women. An epileptic, Peter seldom left the house and relied on information from newspapers and her family and neighbors for her diary entries.² Since her epilepsy largely kept her from speaking publicly, she turned to the diary to express her political opinions. While her diary entries showed a greater sympathy for the suffering of Confederate soldiers, she expressed scorn for all secessionists, as they had no true concept of loyalty, honor or piety. To Peter, honor meant standing by the Union.

Peter insisted that Kentucky Unionists were truly loyal to the Constitution and the federal government, and she criticized Kentuckians whose support of the Union wavered because of emancipation. Peter opposed the formation of a political party against Lincoln, insisting on March 14, 1863, that such a divisive move would wrongly weaken the federal government and the war effort. Peter argued that if Kentuckians aligned themselves with a party opposed to Lincoln, the Lincoln

²Frances Peter, *A Union Woman in Civil War Kentucky: The Diary of Frances Peter*, eds. John David Smith and William Cooper Jr. (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000), xxiv-xxv.

Frances Peter

administration could turn a deaf ear to their needs for protection when Confederates invaded Kentucky.³ When the federal government shifted its national policy to include emancipation, Peter criticized the idea of permitting blacks to fight in the Union army. In February 1863, she claimed that arming blacks went “against the Constitution,” a document she valued most because its connection to the founding fathers.⁴ In November 1863, Peter declared that she had “always understood that this war was undertaken merely to put down rebellion” and insisted that the Confederates had to be defeated first before emancipation could be decided upon.⁵ However, a month earlier, Peter had admitted that she held little opposition to emancipation, remarking, “I for one would not be at all disgusted at having Ky slaves emancipated” and added that others were growing to accept emancipation, especially as the cost of slaves skyrocketed.⁶ In March 1864, a Kentucky Union officer faced backlash when he encouraged a public assembly to rebel against the federal government in response to the enlistment of black soldiers. Unionists called him a Copperhead and a traitor, and Peter, in agreement, vowed that Kentuckians would not “resist the Government on account of the

³ Ibid., 110.

⁴ Ibid., 96.

⁵ Ibid., 170.

⁶ Ibid., 167-168.

negro.”⁷ Even as former Unionists around her turned their backs on the federal government, Peter resolved to stand by the Union and slowly supported emancipation as part of the federal government’s policy.

Peter condemned the Southern elite for misleading the ignorant common Confederates. According to Peter (in an undated diary entry), the Southern elite told the common soldiers that they had seceded because of the federal government’s violation of their constitutional rights. Peter claimed that their rebellion against the federal government was the true violation of the Constitution.⁸ Claiming to have seen the Confederates’ ignorance, Peter explained that she understood how “a few designing men” turned “so many thousands against the Union of their fathers.”⁹ The “few designing men” belonged to the elite plantation class and they controlled politics, looking to protect their financial interest in slavery. Peter argued that the uneducated Confederate soldiers had been deliberately misled into the fight by the Southern elite, insisting, “How could men who had never read the Constitution or heard it read by a faithful interpreter know whether what they did was constitutional or not?”¹⁰ As Aaron

⁷ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

Frances Peter

Astor noted, conservative Unionists accused secessionists of attacking the nation that their ancestors had bled for.¹¹ Unionists dismissed the idea of secession as an honorable and legal act and held Confederate leaders responsible for misleading the people into rebellion.¹² Peter referred several times to the unranked Confederate soldiers as “poor deluded people.”¹³ As Elizabeth Varon pointed out, President Lincoln also made a similar statement concerning Southerners’ ignorance about secession, and it is likely Peter was echoing him and other Northern leaders.¹⁴ Peter believed the common Confederate soldiers had nothing to gain and much to lose. Looking with pity on the sick Confederates in the hospital, she remarked in October 1862, “Poor wretches! The Confederacy hasn’t done much for them!”¹⁵ By describing the Confederates as “poor, dirty, ragged, barefooted” who cried like “a pack of whipped hounds” while “straggling along like a flock of sheep,” Peter compared the march of the soldiers to the herding along of animals.¹⁶ She saw them not

¹¹ Aaron Astor, *Rebels on the Border: Civil War, Emancipation, and the Reconstruction of Kentucky and Missouri* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 48-49.

¹² *Ibid.*, 84-85.

¹³ Peter, *Union Woman*, 54.

¹⁴ Elizabeth R. Varon, *Armies of Deliverance: A New History of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 4-5.

¹⁵ Peter, *Union Woman*, 51.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

as men capable of independent thought, but as a herd of mindless animals. They, in their ignorance, had been duped by the Southern elite. By depicting the soldiers as dirty and uneducated, Peter remained convinced by November 1863 that the Confederate soldier “is one of the most abused creatures I ever heard of, a perfect slave to his officers, and too ignorant to know how much he is imposed upon.”¹⁷

Peter denied the Confederate soldier the cultural notion of honor, demonstrating that loyalty to the Union was the only honorable path. Aaron Astor noted that “Like border state Confederates, Unionists employed a language of faith, fidelity, and honor.”¹⁸ However, Unionists had a very different definition of loyalty and honor than the Confederates, a definition that meant standing by the Union. Bertram Wyatt-Brown emphasized the connection between slavery and the Confederate notion of honor. Wyatt-Brown argued that in defending their honor and right to form their own government, Confederates defended their right to slavery and their racial superiority.¹⁹ In light of recent European revolutions, Unionists contended that the Southern elite slaveholder class shared the

¹⁷ Ibid., 170-171.

¹⁸ Astor, *Rebels on the Border*, 82.

¹⁹ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1880s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 208-209.

Frances Peter

oppressive qualities of the European aristocracies.²⁰ Even though her family owned six slaves in 1860, Peter, as a member of the Unionist middle-class, despised the pretentiousness of the elite Southern aristocracy and their fierce defense of secession and slavery.²¹ Thus, she set herself and her family apart from the Southern elite, as Peter sneered at the so-called chivalry of upper-class Confederate soldiers and contemptuously noted in October 1862 that those soldiers expected slaves to wait upon all of their needs and preferred to go “without washing & every thing else rather than help themselves.”²² Another Kentucky Unionist, Benjamin Buckner, upon witnessing the cruelties Confederates committed against his fellow Union soldiers at the battle of Shiloh, also concluded that the “*chivalry of the South*” was a myth. In a letter to a secessionist sympathizer, Buckner snapped, “I am sure that if you had seen as I have the Corpses of Federal soldiers bayoneted in their beds” that his secessionist friend

²⁰ Andre M. Fleche, *The Revolution of 1861: The American Civil War in the Age of Nationalist Conflict* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 3.

²¹ Ancestry.com, “Robt. [Robert] Peter,” *1860 U.S. Federal Census - Slave Schedule, Lexington, Fayette County, Kentucky* [database on-line]. Provo: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2010; Peter, *Union Woman*, xiii.

²² Peter, *Union Woman*, 55.

would see that the Confederates had no honorable “gentlemen” among them.²³

Peter used her diary to express admiration for her family and neighbors’ acts of defiance in the face of enemy soldiers. Although she did not directly articulate it, she seemed frustrated that she was unable to show her defiance to Confederate soldiers and turned to her diary to express her beliefs. Historian Kimberly Harrison noted that outright expression of political opinions was considered improper behavior for women. “Within traditional codes of gendered conduct,” a woman’s occasional outburst of a political opinion would be dismissed as an overemotional reaction.²⁴ In March 1862, Peter’s mother declared “down with secession” in front of a Confederate officer. While the Confederate officer, who was under parole, made no remark, Peter commented, “How did he stare!”²⁵ While the Confederate officer may have interpreted her mother’s statement as an emotional outburst, Peter applauded her, appreciating that the political remark came from a well-educated Unionist woman. In October 1862, she recorded how a Unionist neighbor

²³Quoted in Patrick A. Lewis, *For Slavery and Union: Benjamin Buckner and Kentucky Loyalties in the Civil War* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 81-82.

²⁴Kimberly Harrison, *The Rhetoric of Rebel Women: Civil War Diaries and Confederate Persuasion* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013), 81.

²⁵Peter, *Union Woman*, 14.

Frances Peter

had pointed a pistol at Confederate soldiers trying to take away her wagon, vowing, “I intend to do it [shoot] & you can kill me afterward if you like. I will try on one of you first,” prompting them to run away.²⁶ Peter noted with admiration that the Confederates did not try to take her wagon ever again. Although Peter did not directly express frustration at being unable to confront Confederates, she implied that she wished to be able to defy them like her mother and her neighbor. Another Kentucky Unionist, Josie Underwood, resorted to her diary and interactions with her family and neighbors to express her political beliefs. Underwood used the diary to vent her frustration at her inability to act against the Confederates, exclaiming at one point, “I felt like shooting them!”²⁷ According to historian Steven Stowe, a women’s diary “became a story and habit, a confidant and a mirror.”²⁸ Peter’s diary acted as a mirror in which she reflected an admiration for Unionist women in her community and a frustration that she was unable to directly interact with the enemies in her town.

²⁶Ibid., 58.

²⁷Josie Underwood, *Josie Underwood’s Civil War Diary*, ed. Nancy Disher Baird (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 101.

²⁸Steven M. Stowe, *Keep the Days: Reading the Civil War Diaries of Southern Women* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 29.

Peter deemed many actions of the “secesh ladies” as socially unacceptable and indicated that their aggressive political displays took away their right to be treated and viewed as Christian ladies like the Unionist women in town. Peter recorded a conversation in June 1863 with a Union soldier who told of how secessionist women often spat on him and insulted him. The Union soldier told of how once at the cemetery, angered by a secessionist woman’s remarks, he retorted, “Do they allow *rebels* to have a place of burial in a Christian cemetery?”²⁹ The secessionist women’s rudeness made him suggest that their behavior and actions against the Union made them unchristian. Despite Southern women’s claims to piety, Peter saw no evidence of Christianity in their actions, portraying them as hypocrites. Peter noted, “Today all the secesh ladies belonging to that church went dressed in their finest. We wondered what was ‘in the wind’ for they are not in the habit of going on week days Lent or no Lent.”³⁰ Then she discovered that they had gone to church only because Jefferson Davis had declared a day of fasting. Emphasizing that the secessionist women did not go to church out of a spiritual commitment, she implied that the women were not true Christians. Peter noted that several “union ladies” gave some things out of pity to the sick Confederate soldiers, who

²⁹ Peter, *Union Woman*, 136.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

Frances Peter

complained that the secessionist women had ignored their suffering. By highlighting this incident, Peter emphasized the Union ladies' compassion to enemy soldiers and the secessionist women's indifference and neglect. The Union women's compassion demonstrated that they were truly respectable ladies. Looking scornfully upon the secessionist women, Peter scoffed that they "liked very well to flirt with the officers but they don't take any notice of the common" soldiers.³¹ She vilified the women, describing a time where secessionist women sang Confederate songs and whose "hisses were so distinctly heard that the crowd was with difficulty restrained from stoning the house." The secessionist women proved that they were not ladies to be respected but rather "creatures," as Peter called them.³²

While Peter rejected the idea that secessionist women were true ladies, Southern women believed their status as ladies would keep them safe from violent Union civilians and soldiers. As Drew Gilpin Faust noted, the "shared fundamental cultural assumptions" that deemed white women as "ladies" would prevent them from harm, even if they acted out-of-line with cultural expectations about

³¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

³² *Ibid.*, 122.

women.³³ Peter described “a secesh lady (or rather a rebel individual of the feminine gender, for she disgraced the name of lady)” who boldly approached Confederate prisoners and sang Confederate songs for them. When a Union soldier guarding the prisoners tried to stop her, she “abused him and used very insolent language,” something a lady would never do. Enraged Unionists had started throwing stones, angered by the bold political actions of the secessionist woman.³⁴ Over the border in Tennessee, another diarist, secessionist Nannie Williams, vowed action against Union soldiers. She promised herself that when she came across a Union soldier, she would “almost shake her fist at him, and then bite my lip involuntarily and turn away in disgust—God save us!”³⁵ Another Confederate Kentucky woman, Lizzie Hardin, was admired throughout her town when she exchanged harsh words with a Unionist. Although she had stepped out-of-line with society’s expectations of women’s behavior, she was widely

³³Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 198.

³⁴Peter, *Union Woman*, 163.

³⁵Nannie Williams, *The Diary of Nannie Haskins Williams: A Southern Woman’s Story of Rebellion and Reconstruction, 1863-1890*, eds. Minoa D. Uffelman, Ellen Kanervo, Phyllis Smith, and Eleanor Williams (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2014), 25.

Frances Peter

applauded for her action.³⁶ Secessionist women believed that they needed to strike against the Union soldiers on their land and tried to use their status as ladies to protect them from hostile Unionists. However, secessionist women were perceived as a threat to the Union army and were confronted with hostility for their political actions. In March 1863, Peter commented sarcastically that if the secessionists were “so fond of the rebels[,] why not send them south to their friends!”³⁷ Two months later, she noted that those secessionist women married to Confederate soldiers were forced to move further south.³⁸ Peter emphasized that the secessionist women’s political behavior demonstrated that they should not be treated like ladies, as shown by the crowd’s violent reaction to the secessionist woman and by the removal of several secessionist women from Lexington.

Peter, a middle-class slaveholding woman, remained a fierce supporter of the Union. While some of her neighbors pledged support to the Confederacy, she claimed that secession was a treasonous act against the Constitution. Although her

³⁶Elizabeth Hardin, *The Private War of Lizzie Hardin: A Kentucky Confederate Girl’s Diary of the Civil War in Kentucky, Virginia, Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia*, ed. G. Glenn Clift. (Frankfort: The Kentucky Historical Society, 1963), 110.

³⁷Peter, *Union Woman*, 109.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 128.

family owned slaves, as she heard calls to turn her back on the Union because of the federal government's emancipation policy, she scoffed that to do so was treason and accepted emancipation. Peter remained convinced that the common Confederate soldier had been taken advantage of in his ignorance and dismissed the widely accepted notion of Southern chivalry. Although Peter admired bold acts by her mother and other women, she seemed to hint that she too wanted to directly defy the enemy. However, due to her struggles with epilepsy, she expressed her political voice in her diary. She maintained a strong contempt for the secessionist women, casting them to be weak supporters of the Confederacy and condemning them for their public expressions, vowing that they were not ladies like the Unionist women. Peter believed she was a truly loyal lady who stood by the Constitution and the Union within her divided town of Lexington.

Frances Peter

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Ancestry.com. "Robt. [Robert] Peter," *1860 U.S. Federal Census - Slave Schedule, Lexington, Fayette County, Kentucky* [database on-line]. Provo: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2010.

Peter, Frances. *A Union Woman in Civil War Kentucky: The Diary of Frances Peter*, edited by John David Smith and William Cooper Jr. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000.

Hardin, Elizabeth. *The Private War of Lizzie Hardin: A Kentucky Confederate Girl's Diary of the Civil War in Kentucky, Virginia, Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia*, edited by G. Glenn Clift. Frankfort: The Kentucky Historical Society, 1963.

Underwood, Josie. *Josie Underwood's Civil War Diary*, edited by Nancy Disher Baird. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009.

Williams, Nannie. *The Diary of Nannie Haskins Williams: A Southern Woman's Story of Rebellion and Reconstruction, 1863-1890*,

edited by Minoa D. Uffelman, Ellen Kanervo, Phyllis Smith, and Eleanor Williams. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2014.

Secondary Sources

Astor, Aaron. *Rebels on the Border: Civil War, Emancipation, and the Reconstruction of Kentucky and Missouri*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012.

Faust, Drew Gilpin. *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

Fleche, Andre M. *The Revolution of 1861: The American Civil War in the Age of Nationalist Conflict*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012.

Harrison, Kimberly. *The Rhetoric of Rebel Women: Civil War Diaries and Confederate Persuasion*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013.

Lewis, Patrick A. *For Slavery and Union: Benjamin Buckner and Kentucky Loyalties in the Civil*

Frances Peter

War. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2015.

Stowe, Steven M. *Keep the Days: Reading the Civil War Diaries of Southern Women*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018.

Varon, Elizabeth R. *Armies of Deliverance: A New History of the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Wyatt-Brown, Bertram. *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1880s*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

**“When This Cruel War is Over”:
The Blurring of the Confederate Battlefield and
Homefront during the Civil War**

Sophie Hammond

While fighting the Civil War, the Confederacy faced a terrible handicap: the vast majority of the war’s battles happened on its own soil. Despite General Robert E. Lee’s attempts to transition to an offensive war, very few significant battles took place in the North. At first, this situation galvanized Southerners. They strongly felt the moral imperative to defend their homes and families, and men enlisted in the Confederate Army in droves. By the end of the war, 90 percent of the South’s white men of eligible age had served.¹ Women on the homefront began the war invested in the patriotic ideals propagandized by the South’s new wave of pro-war literature and music, but soon many pleaded with their men to return home. As the war dragged on, concern for their families as well as the very real costs of war—Confederate soldiers were nearly three

¹ LeAnn Whites and Alecia P. Long, “Introduction”, in *Occupied Women: Gender, Military Occupation, and the American Civil War*, edited by LeAnn Whites and Alecia P. Long (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 1.

times as likely to die as Union soldiers²—encouraged a total of around 103,000 Confederates to desert (Alice Baumgartner, email message to author, November 18, 2019). The Yankee waging of total war intensified the effects of the divisive Southern class structure and of the collapse of Confederate patriotism, compounding the dejection of the South. I argue that the line dividing the Confederate battlefield and homefront was always extremely blurred, and that this blurring, though initially a source of strength, contributed significantly to the South losing the war. To this end, I will examine early Confederate propaganda and espionage, letters between soldiers and their wives, and the experiences of women subjected to the depredations of total war.

At first, Confederate propagandists succeeded in uniting the homefront by promoting a vision of Confederate solidarity—and especially of Confederate female solidarity—which elided the South’s tremendously divisive class system.³ Confederate women nearly universally rose to the occasion, sewing uniforms and flags, raising funds, and writing their own patriotic songs and poetry.⁴ The early songs of the Confederacy praised the Southern desire for revenge on the Yankees—

² Drew Gilpin Faust, “Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War”, *The Journal of American History* 76, no. 4 (March 1990), 1201.

³ Faust, “Altars of Sacrifice”, 1201.

⁴ Faust, “Altars of Sacrifice”, 1206.

“When This Cruel War is Over”

examples include the lyrics “Avenge the patriotic gore / That flecked the streets of Baltimore” from the song “My Maryland”—as well as the courage of soldiers and their loved ones.⁵ These songs were sung at home and on the march, and their ideals reflected those of the martial Southern society at large. With their women’s exhortations to fight bravely ringing in their ears, soldiers marching from home to the battlefield left a world which idealized war for a world which would require them to actually fight in one.

The homefront connected to the battlefield in other ways, too; actions taken at home could determine the outcome of a skirmish. Female spies for the South like Rose O’Neal Greenhow—a Washington, D.C. socialite whose circle included high-level Union officers in addition to high-level Confederates—were mythic figures. Their countrymen lauded them as true Confederate angels, ladies whose beauty could only be matched by their fiery passion for their new nation. Even scholars skeptical of Greenhow’s achievements credit her with helping to secure the Confederate victory at the First Battle of Bull Run, the first major battle of the war.⁶ Her betrayal of Union General Irwin

⁵ Steven Cornelius, *Music of the Civil War* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 42.

⁶ Michael J. Sulick, “The Spy in the Union Capital: Rose Greenhow”, in *Spying in America*:

McDowell's troop numbers, movements, and plan of attack allowed General Beauregard to reinforce his army and win.⁷ Beauregard attributed the triumph to Greenhow, and Colonel Jordan wrote to her that "[o]ur President and our General direct me to thank you. We rely upon you for further information. The Confederacy owes you a debt".⁸

The womanhood of these Confederate spies, and therefore the initial Yankee assumption that they were not engaged in battle-related military espionage, aided the Confederate war effort. One of Greenhow's messages to Beauregard was carried by Betty Duvall, another socialite, who hid it in her chignon and then unpinned her hair once she stood safely before Beauregard's aide.⁹ Greenhow herself took advantage of societal ideas about the sanctity of a woman's body. When Allan Pinkerton arrested her in August 1861 outside her home on suspicion of collaborating with the Confederacy, she was permitted inside to change clothes in the privacy of her boudoir, which allowed her to swallow her cipher code, to hide incriminating information in her skirt, and to take out the pistol she was hiding.¹⁰ Despite

Espionage from the Revolutionary War to the Dawn of the Cold War (Washington,

D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2012), 82.

⁷ Sulick, "The Spy in the Union Capital", 82.

⁸ Sulick, "The Spy in the Union Capital", 83.

⁹ Sulick, "The Spy in the Union Capital", 83.

¹⁰ Sulick, "The Spy in the Union Capital", 84.

“When This Cruel War is Over”

her often “atrocious” blunders when it came to safeguarding information later in the war, Greenhow used Washington, D.C. high society as her own battleground, capturing information and passing it on to Confederate officers.¹¹

However much propagandists touted Greenhow as a sterling example of Southern womanhood, the self-denials and sacrifices the Confederacy demanded from its women would eventually exact too much, “alienating” women both “from that rendition of their interests [and] from the war”.¹² The songs of the war turned more melancholy and less bombastic as the death toll rose and it became difficult to maintain the same enthusiasm as before. The song “Weeping Sad and Lonely; or, When This Cruel War Is Over” was first published in Georgia in 1862. Popular in both “army camps and domestic parlors”, the anguish in the lyrics transcended the division between the battlefield and homefront. The song often created such a longing for home in soldiers that some regiment commanders banned it from being sung.¹³ Though Confederate propaganda advised women not to write letters focused on their own suffering and instead cheer on their fighting men, women followed this advice less and less as life at home became

¹¹ Sulick, “The Spy in the Union Capital”, 85.

¹² Faust, “Altars of Sacrifice”, 1201.

¹³ Cornelius, *Music of the Civil War*, 60.

increasingly lonely and, for many, financially difficult.

Women used their letters to communicate the pains of the homefront to those on the battlefield. In December 1861, Livonia Cooper of Tennessee wrote a heartbreaking letter to her husband. He was stationed near enough that she was able to mail him a load of bread, but they were unable to visit each other. Living alone with their first child and dreading a Christmas without him, she wrote, “[Y]ou said to kiss the baby every time that I think of you if I did I would do nothing else for I am thinking about you all the time and when I am asleep I am dreaming about you”.¹⁴ She did not encourage him to desert, but she was eager to see him any way she could: “Come home if you get sick [. . .] write soon write soon”.¹⁵

Later in the war, as the battles became increasingly deadly, women did sometimes encourage their men to desert, with growing vehemence. By spring 1862, the wife of Colonel Tully Graybill, of Georgia, urged him to do so with every letter.¹⁶ The no furlough policy prevented him

¹⁴ Thomas C. Mackey, “‘When You Eat the Loaf Think of Me’: A Tennessee Woman’s Civil War Letter December 1861”, *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (Fall 2007), 295.

¹⁵ Mackey, “‘When You Eat the Loaf Think of Me’”, 295.

¹⁶ Mark A. Weitz, *A Higher Duty: Desertion Among Georgia Troops During the Civil War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 99.

“When This Cruel War is Over”

from returning home for a visit, which devastated them both.¹⁷ He agonized over whether his highest duty was to his country or to his wife, and feared that his marriage would crumble entirely if he remained away.¹⁸ Many men abandoned Graybill’s scruples and deserted when their families assured them that they would lose no honor by doing so.¹⁹ Soldiers often feared losing the affections of loved ones by a prolonged absence, and this could compound soldiers’ desire to desert for other reasons. Desertion, of course, weakened the Confederacy militarily, but some soldiers already accepted that the Cause was lost. Infantryman Peter Dekle, also of Georgia, wrote to his family in September 1863 of his sense of hopelessness due to “see[ing] no possible chance of this war ending in our favor”, as well as his terror that one of the men who had stayed home would seduce his wife.²⁰ A poor white of low rank who no longer believed in the war, Dekle did not have the same social prestige or faith in duty that kept Colonel Graybill at the front. Dekle also wanted the ability to more directly protect his family: “You and the child is all I care for now [. . .] if I have to fight I will come home and do my fighting there.”²¹

¹⁷ Weitz, *A Higher Duty*, 100.

¹⁸ Weitz, *A Higher Duty*, 99.

¹⁹ Weitz, *A Higher Duty*, 98.

²⁰ Weitz, *A Higher Duty*, 99.

²¹ Weitz, *A Higher Duty*, 99.

Desertion was often the only option for soldiers desperate to go home to their suffering families. To prevent soldiers' furloughs from extending into desertion, furloughs were rare. In the Army of Northern Virginia, furloughs were only granted for "meritorious conduct", and only to less than 2% of the men (Alice Baumgartner, email message to author, November 18, 2019). By the end of the war, desertion was so prevalent that furloughs became a reward for apprehending a deserter. In April 1865, a month before the war ended, the Army of the Tennessee agreed that any enlisted man who helped to capture a deserter would get a 40-day furlough (Alice Baumgartner, email message to author, November 18, 2019). Deserters had a mixed reputation among their fellow Southerners. One Virginia planter saw deserters as traitors of the worst kind, "men of the low class [. . .] [who] get their living by pilfering from those who have gone to do battle".²² In contrast, poor whites, who suffered greatly during the war, did not always look down on men who left what was increasingly seen as a rich man's war and a poor man's fight. One disillusioned Louisiana deserter even defected to the Yankees because of the strength of his disgust at how Confederacy mistreated poor whites like himself:

²² Steven V. Ash, "Poor Whites in the Occupied South, 1861-1865", *The Journal of Southern History* 57, no. 1 (February 1991), 49.

“When This Cruel War is Over”

“[T]hey press Cattle and hogs and take the last feed of corn from a mans Wife and Children”.²³

When the Union Army embraced total war tactics in the South in 1864, the battlefield and homefront truly collided since civilian homes became casualties of war. Yankees plowed through the Southern states, scattering families, and destroying land, most famously in Sherman’s March to the Sea through the fertile heartland of Georgia. For some Unionist Southern women, and many enslaved women, the coming of the Yankees meant liberation.²⁴ For Confederate women, it meant unmitigated disaster. Historian Lisa Tendrich Frank points out a common error she sees other historians making: “[T]hey often neuter the home front by using the ungendered term of civilians to describe a region dominated by women”.²⁵ Sherman’s March to the Sea, therefore, involved psychological warfare mainly directed at Confederate women of all classes. Sherman specifically wanted to “demonstrate the vulnerability of the South”²⁶, as he said, and invading families’ private spaces became “an

²³ Ash, “Poor Whites in the Occupied South, 1861-1865”, 51.

²⁴ Whites and Long, “Introduction”, 5.

²⁵ Lisa Tendrich Frank, “Bedrooms as Battlefields: The Role of Gender Politics in Sherman’s March”, in *Occupied Women: Gender, Military Occupation, and the American Civil War*, edited by LeeAnn Whites and Alecia P. Long (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 34.

²⁶ Frank, “Bedrooms as Battlefields”, 36.

integral aspect of the campaign”.²⁷ Union soldiers in the March routinely dispensed with traditional deference towards women. They raided women’s bedrooms, demonstrating their ability to force their way into the most carefully guarded domestic spaces of the Confederacy, while women looked on in helpless rage.²⁸ Confederate women saw “the lost sanctity of female space” and the targeted destruction of their most prized possessions as an unconscionable violation—especially since it called to mind the ever-present threat of the violation involved in sexual assault, as it was meant to.²⁹

The threat and the reality of sexual assault made Confederate women feel in danger in their own homes, a powerful tactic for blurring the battlefield and homefront. Though Frank asserts that “very few white women were raped during the march”,³⁰ E. Susan Barber and Charles F. Ritter discuss many instances of Yankees’ brutal rape of both white and black women, pushing back against a prevailing scholarly consensus that the Civil War was a “‘low-rape’ war”.³¹ They examine assaults tried in Union

²⁷ Frank, “Bedrooms as Battlefields”, 34.

²⁸ Frank, “Bedrooms as Battlefields”, 33.

²⁹ Frank, “Bedrooms as Battlefields”, 33.

³⁰ Frank, “Bedrooms as Battlefields”, 44.

³¹ E. Susan Barber and Charles F. Ritter, “‘Physical Abuse...and Rough Handling’: Race, Gender, and Sexual Justice in the Occupied South”, in *Occupied Women: Gender, Military Occupation, and the American Civil War*, edited by LeeAnn Whites and Alecia P.

“When This Cruel War is Over”

military courts, assaults which included the rape of Susan, a slave, while nine months pregnant, and the rape of the white Harriet Smith while on her deathbed.³² While the United States discouraged the use of rape as a military tactic, certain soldiers took Sherman’s March to the Sea as a chance to commit “opportunistic crimes” directed at their enemy.³³ Many Union soldiers considered Confederate women, though noncombatants, to be as guilty of secession as Confederate soldiers—another way the battlefield and homefront overlapped. One of Sherman’s army chaplains argued that Confederate women should be “spare[d] our pity”, since they were “the worst secessionists”.³⁴ “Why should *they* not suffer?” he said.³⁵ Yankees also thought that through hurting Southern women, they could hurt the men who cared for them, deflating the Southern war effort. Union Lieutenant Colonel Jeremiah W. Jenkins, provost marshal of the invaded city of Columbia, South Carolina, announced, “[T]he women of the South kept the war alive—and it is only by making them suffer that we can subdue the

Long (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 51.

³² Barber and Ritter, “Physical Abuse...and Rough Handling”, 58.

³³ Barber and Ritter, “Physical Abuse...and Rough Handling”, 60.

³⁴ Frank, “Bedrooms as Battlefields”, 42.

³⁵ Frank, “Bedrooms as Battlefields”, 42.

men.”³⁶ Jenkins saw a direct connection between demoralizing the homefront and succeeding on the battlefield.

Dolly Lunt Burge experienced firsthand the kind of economic devastation, privacy invasion, and threats of sexual assault to her slaves that Frank, Barber, and Ritter write about. Before her marriage to Thomas Burge, a Georgia planter who owned over 100 slaves, Burge was Dolly Sumner Lunt, who grew up in Maine and was closely related to Radical Republican senator Charles Sumner.³⁷ Her Northern connections barely helped when Sherman’s army passed through her plantation on November 19, 1864. According to Burge’s diary, Union soldiers stole important possessions from slave cabins, including slaves’ life savings, as well as sentimental valuables from the plantation’s “dwelling-house”, including her young daughter’s doll.³⁸ Burge expressed both condescending patronization and real affection for her slaves, and felt especially angry at the soldiers who forced “[her] boys from home at the point of a bayonet” to fight for the Union.³⁹ She

³⁶ Frank, “Bedrooms as Battlefields”, 42.

³⁷ Dolly Lunt Burge, *A Woman’s Wartime Journal: An Account of the Passage over a Georgia Plantation of Sherman’s Army on the March to the Sea, as Recorded in the Diary of Dolly Sumner Lunt (Mrs. Thomas Burge)* (New York: The Century Co., 1918), vii.

³⁸ Burge, *A Woman’s Wartime Journal*, 28.

³⁹ Burge, *A Woman’s Wartime Journal*, 24.

“When This Cruel War is Over”

wrote, “Jack came crying to me, the big tears coursing down his cheeks, saying they were making him go. [. . .] [A] man followed in, cursing him and threatening to shoot him if he did not go; so poor Jack had to yield. [. . .] My poor boys! My poor boys! [. . .] [The boys’] parents are with me, and how sadly they lament the loss of their boys”.⁴⁰ (She did, however, class the loss of her slaves with the loss of her livestock: “There go my mules, my sheep, and worse than all, my boys”.⁴¹) She crowded some of her remaining slaves into her room, since “my women could not step out of the door without an insult from the Yankee soldiers”.⁴² Burge’s diary presents counterevidence to the prevailing historical narrative that Union soldiers were always a force of liberation for the slaves they encountered.

Burge leveraged her womanhood and her Northern relatives to plead for safety for her family. She turned to “[a] Captain Webber from Illinois”⁴³ who said he knew her brother, “claim[ing] protection from the vandals who were forcing themselves into [her] room”.⁴⁴ He promised her to let her brother know of her situation, to prevent her dwelling-house from being burned, and to give her daughter a new doll. Burge differentiated between Union soldiers

⁴⁰ Burge, *A Woman’s Wartime Journal*, 24-6.

⁴¹ Burge, *A Woman’s Wartime Journal*, 24.

⁴² Burge, *A Woman’s Wartime Journal*, 32.

⁴³ Burge, *A Woman’s Wartime Journal*, 27.

⁴⁴ Burge, *A Woman’s Wartime Journal*, 29.

who became opportunistic raiders and those who tried to limit their comrades' destruction: "[Captain Webber] felt for me, and I give him and several others the character of gentlemen. I don't believe they would have molested women and children had they had their own way."⁴⁵ But Captain Webber was able to do little to help her. By the next day, the vicious ruin wreaked by Sherman's army, which included setting fire to many of her outbuildings, "le[ft] [her] poorer by thirty thousand dollars than [she] was yesterday morning. And a much stronger Rebel!"⁴⁶ Though her dedication to the Cause remained more powerful than that of many other women in the same situation, she was left near-destitute and in no position to put up any further resistance against the Yankees.

In the Civil War, Southerners fought for the continued existence of their entire world. Whether they were wealthy planters and part of the "thoroughly wholesome, happy, and joyous life [. . .] among the privileged '4,000' under the peculiar civilization of the Old South" which planter's daughter Eliza Frances Andrews looked back on with such fondness as an old woman⁴⁷, or poor whites barely able to scrape a living—whether or not they even believed in the Confederacy—for all four years

⁴⁵ Burge, *A Woman's Wartime Journal*, 29.

⁴⁶ Burge, *A Woman's Wartime Journal*, 34.

⁴⁷ Andrews, *The War-Time Journal of a Georgia Girl*, 2.

“When This Cruel War is Over”

of the war, the Union was invading their land. This eventually badly damaged Southern morale. The concern of those on the homefront for those on the battlefield, and vice versa, only increased as the two fronts became increasingly intertwined. If the Civil War was both won and lost on the homefront as much as on the battlefield, how much easier it was for the Union to conquer a Confederacy demoralized at home and riven by class conflict, where women feared sexual assault and families lived in terror of losing all they owned in addition to losing their fighting relatives. General Lee insisted on respecting Union property during the March to Gettysburg and later refused to turn to guerrilla warfare, despising these tactics as cruel and dishonorable. The Union Army bringing the battlefield directly to the homefront through the tactics of total war may have been morally questionable, but it crushed the spirit of the Confederacy and was a major reason why the South lost the war.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Andrews, Eliza Frances. 1908. *The War-Time Journal of a Georgia Girl: 1864 1865*. New York: D. Appleton and Company.

Burge, Dolly Lunt. 1918. *A Woman's Wartime Journal: An Account of the Passage over a Georgia Plantation of Sherman's Army on the March to the Sea, as Recorded in the Diary of Dolly Sumner Lunt (Mrs. Thomas Burge)*. New York: The Century Co.

Mackey, Thomas C. "‘When You Eat the Loaf Think of Me’: A Tennessee Woman's Civil War Letter December 1861." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 294-298.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/42628305>

Secondary Sources

Ash, Steven V. "Poor Whites in the Occupied South, 1861-1865." *The Journal of Southern History* 57, no. 1 (February 1991): 39-62.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2209873>

“When This Cruel War is Over”

- Barber, E. Susan and Charles F. Ritter. 2009. “‘Physical Abuse...and Rough Handling’: Race, Gender, and Sexual Justice in the Occupied South.” In *Occupied Women: Gender, Military Occupation, and the American Civil War*, edited by LeeAnn Whites and Alecia P. Long, 49-64. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Cornelius, Steven. 2004. *Music of the Civil War*. Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Faust, Drew Gilpin. “Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War.” *The Journal of American History* 76, no. 4 (March 1990): 1200- 1288.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2936595>
- Frank, Lisa Tendrich. 2009. “Bedrooms as Battlefields: The Role of Gender Politics in Sherman’s March.” In *Occupied Women: Gender, Military Occupation, and the American Civil War*, edited by LeeAnn Whites and Alecia P. Long, 33-48. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Sulick, Michael J. 2012. “The Spy in the Union Capital: Rose Greenhow.” In *Spying in America: Espionage from the Revolutionary*

War to the Dawn of the Cold War, 81-86.
Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University
Press.

Weitz, Mark A. 2005. *A Higher Duty: Desertion
Among Georgia Troops During the Civil
War*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Whites, LeAnn and Alecia P. Long. 2009.
“Introduction.” In *Occupied Women:
Gender, Military Occupation, and the
American Civil War*, edited by LeeAnn
Whites and Alecia P. Long, 1-13. Baton
Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.