

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

Gender & The Civil War

By **Jacqueline G. Campbell**, Francis Marion University

After the firing on Fort Sumter in April 1861 Americans were electrified. Across the country men rushed to volunteer while women waved flags and kissed them goodbye. Thus the Civil War began according to the standard narrative of traditional gender roles. Men went off to fight the enemy, drawing kudos and support from women who would keep the home fires burning. Black men and women did not figure into the narrative at all as tenets of appropriate gender roles did not seem relevant to such an underclass. All wars, especially a civil war, challenge deeply held world views and not least among these world views are gender assumptions. The way in which men and women understood their respective roles shaped the way they thought about, participated in, and ultimately remembered the war.¹

By the mid-19th century the industrializing and urbanizing areas of the North had encouraged the development of a separate sphere ideology molded around the model of the burgeoning middle-class family. Women were assigned the roles of moral guardians providing stability and shelter for men involved in the increasingly hostile world of business and politics. As gender became an especially salient political division in the North, women's economic roles were obscured and they were assigned a superior moral strength. This moral superiority encouraged white northern middle class women to leave the confines of their homes to pursue acts of benevolence and reform.

Southern women did not enjoy the same liberties of movement as their northern counterparts, nor were the lines of demarcation between home and work so rigidly drawn. The enduring significance of the southern household as the center of family life delayed the full flowering of a separate sphere. Ideology and race, rather than gender, remained the primary determinant of social and political power. In this more patriarchal society deference to one's betters remained central and planter women accepted their subordinate position as part of a reciprocal agreement that ensured their privileged position. This was not however based on a belief that women were inherently delicate creatures but that they chose to restrain their inner strength for the benefit of social harmony and family honor.²

¹ LeeAnn Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1890* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000).

² Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 227.

However, even while the North and South may have understood and interpreted gender distinctions differently, they both placed great importance on a woman's outward display of submission to male authority. They also shared the belief that these behavioral traits were the standard for society even while the material realities of many Americans' lives – working class and black Americans in particular - prevented them from aspiring to these roles.

Ideas about appropriate gender roles permeated the political discourse in the years leading up to the war. In the northern mind Southern men were impetuous, over emotional, and, because manual labor was assigned to the enslaved, lacking a work ethic. Southerners accused Yankees of being crass materialists who had abandoned the gentlemanly traits of honor and chivalry. Still men on both sides were full of bravado and bluster about their ability to win a quick and decisive victory and these early volunteers eagerly anticipated the opportunity to prove their manhood and serve their country.

Motivations did however vary regionally. Although northern soldiers maintained close contact with their home communities the Union called on them to prioritize nation over family, a division that was largely reflective of the separate sphere ideology that prevailed in the northern states. In the South however, where home remained central, white men saw the pursuit of an independent Confederacy as a means to protect their way of life against the Yankee invader. And, as most of the fighting would occur in the southern states, this was a much more tangible reality. Ironically, as southern men left to join the army their families were immediately exposed to dangers and hardships.³

Free black men in the North were also eager to offer their services to the Union. Frederick Douglass, an ex-slave and prominent author, urged the government to permit black men to fight but in the early years the northern war effort was focused on restoring the Union without dismantling slavery, and race prejudice ran so deep that white men refused to fight alongside black. Black men knew that if they could only don a soldier's uniform they could prove their manhood and climb a step on the social ladder.

From the outset eligible volunteers, who were eager for what they anticipated would be a grand adventure and a means to prove their manhood, were sorely tested. Army life subjected young men to drills, strict obedience to orders, foul food, and unsanitary conditions. They were also confronted with moral challenges: temptations of liquor, gambling, and the availability of prostitutes. These young men may have left their families and communities behind but letters from home reminded them of what their families expected and, as many of them came from the same neighborhoods, news of transgressions traveled quickly. Families were not only concerned that their male kin would be killed or injured but also that military life might destroy their moral character.

³ Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

Close contact with home helped to monitor the behavior of these young men although gradually a hardening process took place as they became accustomed to army discipline and exposed to the realities of war. By the summer of 1862 the boys who had joined up with a light-hearted romanticism were becoming increasingly desensitized to death and destruction on the battlefield. Yet these soldiers were not brutes, but men who cherished their own set of domestic values, and nowhere were the virtues of manhood more challenged than when soldiers and civilians came face to face.⁴

For the first fifteen months of the war the Union pursued a policy of conciliation in the belief that support for the Confederacy was relatively weak among all but the slave owning elite. Thus it made most sense to concentrate on winning military victories on the battlefield and exempting civilians as much as possible from the hardships of war. This policy, however, depended on the willingness of northern soldiers to leave civilians alone and vice versa; from the beginning this was seldom the case. In Missouri, for example, where a form of guerrilla warfare raged, the boundaries between soldiers and civilians (and thus frequently between men and women) became blurred. Women in Missouri were not only victims of warfare but frequently active participants. And yet soldiers sought to maintain some notions of gentlemanly behavior and showed a remarkable degree of restraint in their dealings with white women. Soldiers who took a woman's husband from his home and hanged him then returned the dead man's money and horse to his widow. Killing a male enemy might be an acceptable part of warfare but one could still be gallant to the bereaved wife.⁵

In fact soldiers frequently struggled with the meanings of their actions when they encountered female civilians. Many union soldiers who treasured thoughts of home as a haven now realized they had become invaders and even destroyers of home. Historian George Rable has suggested that the emotional tension caused by this contradiction might be termed "cognitive dissonance." Soldiers had to find a way to reconcile these contradictory feelings, and to a large extent it was the actions of defiant Confederate women that gave them the tools to do so.⁶

One of the most infamous clashes between soldiers and civilians occurred in New Orleans, which fell to Union forces in April, 1862. On city streets Confederate women did everything they could to insult the occupying troops. These "she adders" spat in soldiers' faces, made insulting gestures, and took great pains express every type of disdain towards enemy men. Union officers, who expressed a fundamental respect for women, came to military commander, Major General Benjamin Franklin Butler, expressing their anger and humiliation and imploring him to take steps to control this

⁴ Reid Mitchell, *The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁵ Michael Fellman, "Women and Guerrilla Warfare," in Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, eds., *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 147-169

⁶ George C. Rable, "Hearth, Home, and Family in the Fredericksburg Campaign," in Joan E. Cashin, ed., *The War was You and Me: Civilians in the American Civil War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

unruly female behavior. The resulting General Order No. 28 stated that if any of these so-called women insulted a U.S. soldier she should be “treated as a woman of the town plying her avocation.” In one gesture, the general had reduced what had been intended as a political act of resistance into a misdemeanor. In the face of concerns raised by local officials and even members of his own personal staff that this order might be misinterpreted as license to assault Confederate women, Butler argued it would actually protect them by encouraging men to restrain their own behavior. Rather than arrest unruly women, thereby creating martyrs and risking popular insurrections, Order No. 28 rendered them insignificant. Butler further explained that a common woman deserved no attention from gentlemen. According to the general his men were now honor-bound to ignore these women. The outcry that erupted in the Confederacy was immediate and intense as politicians and military leaders used the order as a rallying cry to troops to defend southern women against the brutality of northern soldiers. The reverberations were also heard in Britain where the Prime Minister claimed that history afforded no example “of so infamous an act as to deliberately hand over the female inhabitants of a conquered city to the unbridled license of an unrestrained soldiery.” The furor over the Woman Order, as it came to be known, resulted in heated debates on both sides of the Atlantic and set gender issues at the very heart of larger political and military decisions.⁷

This politicization of womanhood fed into wartime propaganda. Defiant and vituperative Confederate women were quickly branded “she devils.” Some Union men even blamed them for keeping up the war by displaying a vindictiveness and zeal for blood that crossed the boundaries of acceptable feminine behavior. Yet at the same time these examples were used to criticize the level of commitment shown by northern women.

In response to the accusation that northern women showed less fervor than their southern counterparts, the northern women’s Loyalty League took pains to point out the difference between women of the two regions. While they admitted that it might be natural to assume that those who were more “demonstrative” might have a deeper commitment, this was not the case. On the contrary, they explained “the feelings of northern women are rather deep than violent; their sense of duty is a quiet constant rather than a headlong or impetuous impulse.”⁸

Of course not all soldiers were men. Extensive research has revealed at least 400 women who claimed to have disguised themselves to take up arms. Evidence supporting such claims is limited to a handful and many may have made their claims to achieve notoriety or financial support. Still even the false claimants were manifesting a challenge to conventional roles.

⁷ Jacqueline G. Campbell, “*The Unmeaning Twaddle about Order 28: Benjamin F. Butler and Confederate Women in Occupied New Orleans, 1862.*” *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 2 (March 2012), 11-30. See also Michael T. Smith, “The Beast Unleashed: Benjamin F. Butler and Conceptions of Masculinity in the Civil War North,” *New England Quarterly* 89 (June, 2006), 248-76.

⁸“A Few Words in Behalf of the Loyal Women of the United States by One of Themselves,” Pamphlet 33, Loyal Publication Society No.10, New York, May, 1863 Wm. Bryant & Co. NYC.

Although some sought to stay at the sides of their husbands or lovers, others were motivated for similar reasons as were men. Some were fuelled with patriotism; others saw an opportunity for economic gain, or even just adventure. If 400 have been identified it raises the question how many more there may have been and how they succeeded in their ruse? The youth of the average soldier meant that clean shaven faces and higher pitched voices would not be an immediate give away. Also gender assumptions were so deeply engrained that no one would have questioned the gender of a soldier in uniform. Victorian Americans tended to be shy when it came to intimate matters and so it would not be unnatural to seek privacy when attending to personal hygiene. When one of his “sergeants” reportedly gave birth, Union Major General William Starke Rosecrans expressed only “moral outrage” at an act which he deemed to be “in violation of all military law and of army regulation.” No verified instance of a case in which the name of the mother/soldier or the offspring is known has yet come to light.⁹

While women-soldiers may not have made a significant impact on victory or defeat, this violation of gender roles does open windows to other themes of the war, for example physicals and Civil War era medicine. Physical exams did take place before enlistment but they were cursory at best. For the most part enough front teeth to tear open a power cartridge and the presence of a trigger finger would suffice. A similar lack of attention plagued Civil War hospitals as is evidenced by the case of Sarah Rosetta Wakeman. This young woman served in the Union Army for two years and spent the last month of her life in an army hospital without anyone discovering her secret. She was subsequently given a soldier’s burial.¹⁰

By war’s end 180,000 black men had also served as soldiers although they were not officially recruited into the Union army until July of 1862. Enlisting African American men flew in the face of deeply rooted racist assumptions. Most white Americans doubted that black men would make good soldiers and they further believed that it would demean white men to fight alongside them. However in the wake of several military defeats, northern morale was at a low point and consequently the numbers of white volunteers had declined. Black men had been eager for the opportunity to prove their manhood in the field, but by the summer of 1862 some of their enthusiasm had waned. Still Frederick Douglass urged them to enlist: “Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters, U.S.; let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket, and there is no power on earth which can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship.” Although nominally granted the chance to prove themselves, black soldiers suffered extreme discrimination. Not only was their pay less at first, but they were assigned more than their fair share of heavy labor and fatigue duty. Black soldiers were often issued inferior weapons and ammunition and also received

⁹ DeeAnn Blanton and Lauren M. Cook, *They Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers in the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001); Rosecrans quoted in Elizabeth Massey, *Women in the Civil War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 84.

¹⁰ Lauren M. Cook, *An Uncommon Soldier: The Civil War Letters of Sarah Rosetta Wakeman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995)

substandard rations and medical care. Their path to success was also limited by the fact that black soldiers could not receive an officer's commission.¹¹

In the fall of 1862 Lincoln authorized the enlistment of the first black regiments among the freed slaves of the South Carolina Sea Islands. While many newly freedmen were eager to take up arms, others were more reluctant to leave their families especially when they realized that their female kin were often abused by white soldiers. When the army began simply seizing black men, Union officers often faced resistance not only from black men and women but also from northern female missionaries who had been recruited help black families in the transition to freedom. These Yankee women saw themselves as protectors of black families and as shields against the sexual abuse of black women who could not demand the same level of respect from Union soldiers that white women might. One missionary reported that "no colored woman or girl was safe from the brutal lusts of the [white] soldiers - and by soldiers I mean both officers and men." She further complained that offenders were seldom punished.¹²

These young northern women who were recruited as missionaries were sympathetic to black women yet at the same time deeply prejudiced. They attempted to instill white middle class standards into black women's behavior while simultaneously denying them the privileges of white womanhood. They complained about black women's lack of housekeeping skills and at the same time urged them to be gainfully employed. Black women found themselves in a no-win situation. If they failed to earn a wage they were seen as lazy; if they neglected their homes they could never be seen as truly civilized or feminine.

The female missionaries who worked in South Carolina were just one group of northern women who took on new wartime challenges. While the war may have been more distant for northern women than those in the South, nonetheless there was a dramatic increase in the demand for women's voluntary and paid labor. Thousands of women were left to fend for themselves and their families in the absence of father, husbands, and sons and they found themselves both intentionally and unintentionally defying 19th century gender norms. Agitation for women's rights was set aside during the war, although female abolitionists remained active to assure that the war would result in emancipation as well as reunion. In the aftermath one of the questions that loomed over the North was whether women – black or white – would be rewarded for their sacrifices to the cause.

The collective efforts of women made a significant contribution as they prepared bandages, sewed uniforms, distributed clothing and food packages, and provided care at

¹¹ Frederick Douglass, *Douglass' Monthly* V (Aug, 1863), 852. See also James M. McPherson, *Marching toward Freedom: The Negro in the Civil War, 1861-1865* (New York: Knopf Publishers, 1968).

¹² Nina Silber, "A Compound of Wonderful Potency: Women Teachers of the North in the Civil War South," in Cashin, ed., *The War Was You and Me*, 35-59; Quote in Leslie A. Schwalm, *"A Hard Fight for We": Women's Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997, 102-103.

battle-side hospitals. Even as they stepped up as nurses, however, questions arose over whether women were uniquely nurturing or whether they were entering into a skilled occupation that demanded some level of authority and respect. Dorothea Dix, who had been an active reformer in the ante-bellum years, was appointed Superintendent of Nurses. Originally Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, one of the few female physicians in America, had applied for the position, but authorities were suspicious of a female doctor and appointed Dix in her place. Dix had very strict guidelines for her pool of nurses and insisted that they be at least thirty years of age and plain in appearance lest they arouse the passions of wounded soldiers. A former schoolteacher, Clara Barton, earned the nickname of “Angel of the Battlefield” for her wartime efforts. The Civil War taught her not only about carnage but also the problems of corruption and lack of supplies. As a result of her wartime experience Barton saw the need for a national, ongoing relief organization that would offer aid during wars and other national disasters, and she founded the American Red Cross.

Lower class women, often Irish or African American, who stood at the very bottom of the social ladder, were employed to do the hospital dirty work. African American women in particular suffered severe hardship as black soldiers were paid less than whites and their own work opportunities were severely limited. Irish women were also victims of extreme prejudice. During the New York City Draft riots that broke out in July 1863, Irish women were said to be among the most vicious protestors. When rioters began attacking black men, Irish women were seen claiming body parts as souvenirs. Other lower class women took up jobs as seamstresses who were paid by the piece. Their wages actually decreased during the course of the war. Employers justified such treatment by arguing that women supported only themselves when in fact they were now the primary breadwinners. Women in factories were also subject to unsafe working conditions, in arsenals for example where explosions frequently occurred. The worst disaster occurred at the U.S. Army Arsenal in Allegheny, Pennsylvania where 78 female workers died and many more were injured.¹³

Other women used their pre-war skills as fund-raisers to help the Union Cause and no organization was more important or successful than the United States Sanitary Commission. The USSC was founded in the spring of 1861 under the direction of New York based professional men whose goal was to create a private war relief agency dedicated to systematizing home front benevolent work. In an effort to organize localized women’s voluntary organizations the USSC called for every local society to be answerable to a central commission. The underlying assumption was that female voluntary efforts required male guidance. But gradually women began to demand both acknowledgement of their efforts and control of their own organization. They were able to make these demands because of the huge success of their fund raising activities – approximately fifteen million dollars. When confronted with the cash value of home front work, men of the USSC were forced to recognize the value of what had previously

¹³ Judith Ann Giesberg, *Army at Home: Women and the Civil War on the Northern Home Front* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

been considered unpaid labor and also to reconsider notions about women's capabilities.¹⁴

With three out of four eligible white men in the army, the southern home front was even more a world of women. Food shortages, rampant inflation, and the breakdown of slavery were constant strains on a society that also had the enemy on its doorstep. Given the lack of factories in the South, women's work opportunities were severely limited. Poor women struggled, the majority on farms, but others as seamstresses and arsenal workers. Like their northern sisters, they suffered from the same low wages and dangerous working conditions.

Elite white women were the first to take on nursing positions and usually worked in a supervisory position. A few flourished, for example Phoebe Pember, who came from a wealthy South Carolina family and ran Chimborazo Hospital in Richmond Virginia. By 1862 the Confederacy authorized the hiring of women as hospital staff and Pember eventually took control of the Richmond hospital where more than 76,000 Confederate soldiers were cared for. Many other women found the horrors too much to bear.

The largest employer of women in the South was the Confederate Department of the Treasury who employed women to sign banknotes. The most likely candidates for these positions were affluent women who had elegant penmanship. Other work opportunities, such as teaching, were not viewed as a welcome opportunity for elite white women of the South. Rather than welcome the new work roles as empowering, they more often saw it as demeaning to their station.

A singular case of women who were recognized as playing valuable roles at the same time that they manipulated gender lines was espionage. Two of the most famous female spies, Rose Greenhow and Belle Boyd, both worked for the Confederacy. These women frequented Union camps, gathered information, and acted as couriers. Greenhow even received a full military burial after a drowning accident off the coast of North Carolina while she was carrying important dispatches. Stonewall Jackson awarded Boyd an honorary aide-de-camp position for her contribution to his Shenandoah Valley campaign by providing him with information about the position of enemy troops. After the war Boyd enjoyed a lucrative career giving dramatic lecture on her life as a spy. When female spies crossed enemy lines carrying information or medical supplies, which they hid in their skirts and corsets, their gender was actually an asset as it was unlikely that a woman would be subjected to a bodily search.

The most avid female Confederates came from the planter class. These affluent women saw the war in terms of their men's social, economic and political position and by extension their own place. So when these women identified with concepts of honor and duty, although they could not claim them in their own right, they merged their interests

¹⁴ Jeannie Attie, "Warwork and the Crisis of Domesticity in the North," in Clinton and Silber eds., *Divided Houses*, 247-59.

with their husbands and fathers. But as the war progressed and their privileges and affluent status diminished, their social identity was transformed. Although many of these women rose to the occasion and successfully took up the responsibilities of running plantations, these responsibilities became increasingly onerous. At first husbands wrote lengthy letters full of advice about planting, harvesting, marketing and negotiation with overseers and slaves. But mail was irregular and so for the most part women were on their own.

Of all the plantation demands it was slave management that tested planter women the most, and it was the assault on slavery that also eroded the foundation of their wealth. Mistresses did not command the same authority as masters and slaves knew it. Slaves disappeared, left work undone, ignored orders, and drove their mistresses to distraction. Planter women found these changes difficult to grasp. Many could not, or would not, accept that slavery was crumbling and clung desperately to the belief that slavery was really in the best interests of all southerners, black and white, and that slaves were truly the passive, faithful, helpless people planters imagined them to be. Occasionally there was a flash of insight that slaves might desire freedom, or that they were rejecting their owner's authority, but Confederate women could only push these thoughts so far. The conclusions were too disturbing – denial was easier.

That denial, combined with years of seeing slaves as extensions of themselves, left slaveholding women unprepared to deal with African Americans outside the institution of slavery. African Americans became the enemy, sometimes even more menacing than the Yankees. Fear and frustration led some planter women to conclude that slavery was more trouble than it was worth. This however was an extreme expression of disillusionment, not that they entertained the possibility that slavery was morally wrong. Ironically as the institution broke down, simultaneously those once affluent women were becoming more and more dependent on their slaves.

Certainly some of these women became disaffected from the Confederate cause. Some of them may even have written urging their husbands to come home. But others sought a more equal distribution of the costs of war. Petitions flooded state governors' offices asking for assistance and women even led bread riots in protest against speculators. Although in some instances this degenerated into vandalism, in others there were effort to distribute food to the needy. Others, especially in areas where they confronted the enemy, became even more staunch Confederates

The war in the Southern states involved more than just the movement of armies but also large sections of the population who became refugees. At least a quarter of a million southerners left their homes during the war, and to "refugee" became a verb. Women most often headed refugee families and had to make the initial decision about whether or not to leave home. The crisis began almost immediately after the war began when many Virginia women left their homes. By 1862 the early trickle had swelled to a flood across the Confederacy. Women often packed up and fled two or even three times.

These refugees came from all walks of life, although each wave contained a large number of the wealthy. To “refugee” began as a choice – one that only the wealthy could make as poorer women could not easily afford to abandon their homes. Most refugees fled to cities – Richmond, Raleigh, Columbia, and Atlanta became overcrowded with insufficient housing, food, or public services to accommodate such a rapidly increasing population. Refugees were extremely vulnerable, not only to enemy soldiers, but also to deprivation and disease. When these families did return to their homes they frequently found them destroyed or ransacked. They also found rotting carcasses of dead animals that soldiers had been unable to take with them and left unburied. These depredations only increased southerners’ hatred of the Yankee foe.

Slave families suffered even more from shortages of food and increased workloads. While of course they longed for freedom, their anticipation remained guarded and was sometimes replaced with a sense of betrayal as they suffered along with their owners, complicating their decision of whether to flee with or from Union troops. Certainly the Union soldiers were the vanguards of freedom, yet blacks had no reason to trust any white men, and as sexually vulnerable beings, African-American women were in a particularly precarious situation. Even if the Yankees should bring freedom, what was their new role to be? They could not join the army; most had family ties and some even felt loyalty to the white women with whom they had spent their entire lives. In fact many slaves, showed a reluctance to leave homes where they had lived and worked. African Americans could feel attachments to the land that had been their home, even though they detested the oppression they had suffered there

Many African Americans became angry and perplexed when northern troops destroyed their property, stole their goods and assaulted black women. Despite repeated orders to attempt to curb the indiscriminate pillaging of black homes, these infamous practices continued. The ingenuity of one slave simultaneously saved his own possessions and protected the female house servants. When he saw Yankees carrying off his blankets along with those from the main house, this slave begged the soldiers in a terrified tone “not to mix them [the blankets] with his as all the house girls had some catching disease.”¹⁵

While some male slaves could flee beyond enemy lines and enter camps from which they would be recruited into the Union army, it was a much more complex situation for black women. Camp Nelson Kentucky, a “contraband camp” where large numbers of black soldier were processed, serves as a good example. Although black women who came to join their menfolk cooked and did laundry, they were viewed only as burdens. White officers also believed they were dangerous and immoral women who might pose a sexual threat to the white soldiers. The commanding officer at Camp Nelson repeatedly forced black women from the camp threatening them with a lashing should they return. The worst atrocity occurred in November 1864 when 400 women and

¹⁵John F. Marszalek, ed., *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 403.

children were expelled, many without shoes or adequate clothing. One hundred and fifty perished in the freezing temperatures and half of those who returned subsequently died.¹⁶

In the final months of the war gender assumptions collided when battle front and home front truly became one in the course of Major General William Tecumseh Sherman's March through Georgia and the Carolinas. The Union army constructed a vision of the southern landscape as military terrain. When they brought war into southern households, however, soldiers were frequently astounded at the fierceness with which many white southern women defended their homes. Overt manifestations of female power disconcerted Union soldiers who carried their own set of domestic values into the war – values that were based upon the image of home as a “haven.” While some praised women's bravery, many others concluded that such inappropriate displays crossed the boundaries of acceptable feminine behavior.

Many Confederate women drew on a deep inner strength and refused to be passive victims. Instead they demanded protection as their right. This female tenacity and valor was one recognized by southern husbands and fathers. When a Confederate soldier in the Virginia trenches learned that Sherman's soldiers were an imminent threat to his South Carolina family, he warned his female kin that they were likely to lose all their material possessions. His words, however, expressed no concern over their physical safety; instead he advised his mother and sister that boldness was the key to weathering the storm. If any Yankee should try and enter the house he advised his wife to shoot!¹⁷

A devastated home front was Sherman's most immediate goal. He trusted that his invasion would leave in its wake a population focused on the need for food and shelter, rather than on supporting further political and military conflict. Many civilians were both materially and spiritually exhausted and concerned over shortages of food but not demoralized. Women who had encountered and survived the enemy now filled their correspondence with vows to continue the struggle. While in other places women's commitment to the cause may have waned in the final months of the war, as their many sacrifices seemed increasingly useless, these women felt that they had shared in an active defense of the Confederacy. They now called upon southern soldiers to remain at their posts and exact vengeance on the enemy. Of course it was too late for such remonstrance, but even the news of Lee's defeat did not quash their hopes. Many remained convinced that, while the South might be overpowered, it would never be conquered and that the next generation would see an independent Confederacy. In fact it was their duty to become guardians of the memory the war.

In the wake of the war husbands and sons, who once urged their wives and mothers to meet the Yankee invader with defiance and even with firearms, exhorted them

¹⁶ M. B. Lucas, “Camp Nelson Kentucky during the Civil War: Cradle of Liberty or Refugee Death Camp?” *Filson Club Historical Quarterly*, 63 (No. 4, 1989), 439-52.

¹⁷ Elliot Welch to his mother, February 12, 1865, quoted in Jacqueline Glass Campbell, *When Sherman Marched North From the Sea: Resistance on the Confederate Home Front* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 10.

to honor the dead and strew flowers on the graves of the fallen heroes. Southern white women were no longer players in their own right but were now the support system for heroes who had glorified themselves on the battlefield. This image of a dedicated and loyal southern womanhood fed into Lost Cause rhetoric; a rhetoric that the North would eventually come to embrace.

Scholars have noted that war simultaneously reinforces and disrupts gender roles. On the one hand men are called to war to defend a female population waiting passively on the home front; on the other, it immediately presents women with the challenges of new roles and responsibilities in the absence of their men. For southern men, raised in an honor bound society that required outside recognition, the war provided an ideal arena in which to prove their manhood. War held a similar appeal for northern men, who found their path to independence increasingly obstructed by a burgeoning commercial capitalism. The reality of war, however, did not always live up to its promise, as regimentation, drill, and subordination often overshadowed displays of heroism.

Paradoxically, as the currents of war led women, especially those who endured invasion of the home front, into an increasingly political role, that required demonstrations of courage and honor, the soldier's daily regimen consisted largely of drills, marching and fighting, all of which focused on the male body. The most extreme case, of course, was the practice of paying for a substitute to fight in one's place. And just as horrific, it was the body parts of injured soldiers- amputated arms and legs, bandaged heads and injured knees, frostbitten fingers and toes – that increasingly represented the cost of war.

Yet in the post war years this objectification of men's bodies was reinterpreted as a celebration of masculine valor while women's experiences became increasingly depoliticized. The North dominated the publication of women's wartime experiences until the early 20th century and the first books praising northern women's patriotism did not hesitate to compare their virtues with southern female vices. Authors hurled accusations of malevolent crimes that ranged from displays of malice to demands for trophies of Yankee skulls. Little wonder that when southern women had the opportunity to tell their own stories, they were less than sentimental. By the time their memoirs were printed, southern women who had lived through the war had spent years nurturing bitter seeds of resentment and their voices expressed rancor and frustration against Yankee villains while retaining respect and reverence for southern champions. Men such as William T. Sherman became the personification of Yankee atrocities, while Confederate women were increasingly portrayed as his long-suffering victims. As the perfect foil to Yankee moral depravity, General Robert E. Lee was honored as the ultimate hero who embodied the finest concepts of manhood - the valor of a soldier within a framework of chivalry and honor.
