Delicate Flowers Don’t Grow in Harsh Conditions:

Examining Southern Honor During the Civil War

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When Major General Benjamin F. Butler invaded Louisiana, he was faced with an unlikely enemy — a teenage girl named Sarah Morgan Dawson. When he ordered "all devices, signs, and flags of the Confederacy shall be suppressed," she responded, "*Good.*" She would commit her time, energy, and silk to making new Confederate flags, and, when those were destroyed, she would manufacture more. When she inevitably ran out of red, white and blue silk, she would "sport a duster emblazoned in high colors." Pinning a flag to her chest, she dared a Union soldier to take it from her. If anyone tried, she resolved, they would be met with the pistol that she kept in her pocket. "I am capable, too," she concluded.[1]

Dawson's defiant attitude was not unique. Numerous Confederate women were forced to conduct themselves in ways that contradicted the image of a Southern lady. These women faced numerous pressures during the Civil War – to stay alive, support the war effort, and maintain their honor. On some occasions, it was not possible to do all of these things at once. For Confederate men, honor was tied to fighting and dying for their cause and protecting the honor of the women back home. In this, we see a continuation from the Antebellum period. But, for Confederate women, it was far more complicated. For these ladies, their idea of honor began to shift. In the absence of their husbands, brothers, and fathers, they valued their ability to protect themselves. In many ways, the Southern concept of honor serves as a lens to understanding the Civil War. Confederate men strove to act with honor, Confederate women wrestled with what wartime honor meant, and the Union's perceived dishonor served as a justification for women's defiance. All the while, Black southerners were cast to the periphery of the conversation.

Masculine and feminine honor in the Antebellum period, while sharing the same name, were entirely different concepts. Both men and women were expected to act honorably, as

[1] Sarah Morgan Dawson, "A Confederate Girl's Diary: 1842-1909," (Documenting the South: UNC. Accessed February 12, 2024), 24.

Southerners had "an ironic obsession with glory," but this looked different for each group.[2] Vernon Burton defined honor for white men in his *In my Father's House are Many Mansions.* He explained, it "connotated personal rectitude, independence of spirit, and the courage to maintain these characteristics against challenges; meant living by one's word, no matter the consequences; meant having redress for grievances and defending perceived 'rights.'"[3] As women were viewed as dependents in this society, they were not encouraged to adopt this same "independence" and resolve. In fact, much of the historiography that discusses honor focuses on the dueling, drinking, betting and fighting that men engaged in and omit women altogether. Or, where women are present, they "enter the male world of honor as objects to be fought over, not as possessors or honor themselves." Recently, however, scholars have begun to include women in this conversation, linking women's honor to their virtue. Whereas men's honor was marked by action, women's honor was defined by passivity. Sexual purity, prudence, modesty, and being concealed from the public eye were all aspects of a woman's honor.[4]

While honor and religion were largely separate for white men in the Antebellum south, the two were intrinsically tied for white women. The qualities that comprised women's honor overlapped with those values encouraged by the Church according to Catherine Clinton.[5] Elder took it a step farther, saying evangelical values and the cultural definition of womanhood were "nearly indistinguishable."[6] This is because obedience and chastity were hallmarks of both. Burton further explained that a woman's "Christian character" was one of the few things that she was "highly praised and remembered" for, alongside her gentleness and love for her family.[7] This

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[2] Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), xi.
[3] Orville Vernon Burton, *In My Father's House Are Many Mansions* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 180.
[4] Robert Elder, "A Twice Sacred Circle." *The Journal of Southern History* 78, no. 3 (August 2012) : 583.
[5] Elder." "A Twice Sacred Circle," 581.
[6] Elder." "A Twice Sacred Circle," 587.
[7] Burton, *In My Father's House Are Many Mansions*, 199.

implies that women were encouraged to steer into their religiosity. This is confirmed by the words of an Alabama planter, Bolling Hall. He promised his daughter, "If you learn to restrain every thought, action and word by virtue and religion, you will become an ornament."[8] Being an ornament is framed as something she should aspire to, and the way to achieve this status was to strive for those qualities, namely restraint, that society and church both promoted.

Women embraced religion willingly, as it promised to give them a sense of purpose. On the surface, the church recognized them as "moral individuals" with agency.[9] This was true to the extent that they were responsible for their own salutation and could speak publicly, however men were still tasked with judging "the authenticity of a woman's conversion experience."[10] Nevertheless, women found a sense of liberation in religion. This scared some southern men, but, ultimately, the value of having a second level of "discipline" led most husbands and fathers to condone female churchgoing.[11] A woman's honor being linked to the church in a way that a man's was not helps to explain why women outnumbered men two to one in church membership, and why they assumed the responsibility of fostering their family's spiritual well-being.[12]

Ultimately, maintaining white women's purity, especially elite white women's, was of paramount concern. A woman's purity was not only tied to her spiritual health, but also to a man's honor, as he was tasked with protecting her virtue. Victoria Bynum, in exploring this issue, found that white women's sexual activity was more intensely policed in the South than it was in the North. Outside of the context of marriage, motherhood was considered "the most appalling degradation," and it was often accompanied by severe punishment.[13] These women were tried by

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[8] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (Oxford University Press, 1982), 227.
[9] Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds* (New York:Oxford University Press, 1995), 135.
[10] McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 181.
[11] Elder." "A Twice Sacred Circle," 581.
[12] McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 141.
[13] Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 15- 17.

local courts, Church congregations, and, sometimes, both. This emphasis on a woman's chastity had less to do with the masculine fear of being cuckolded, as single women were controlled as harshly as married women, and more to do with the need to maintain racial purity.[14] A race-based labor system disintegrates as racial lines blur; thus, the best way to safeguard against this in a matriarchal system is to control the matriarchs' womb. Men 'protecting women' was men 'protecting women's purity;' and men 'protecting women's purity' was them 'protecting the race based slavery system.' Nevertheless, Southern white women grew accustomed to this protection and felt its absence during the Civil War.

In their wartime diaries, Confederate women used honor as a lens through which to judge Confederate and Union soldier's actions. Mary Boykin Miller Chesnut, writing in April of 1862 at the age of thirty-nine, stated simply, "All honor to the army."[15] Her husband was James Chesnut, Jr., who served as Jefferson Davis' aide and Brigadier General in the Confederate Army, so she was undoubtedly referring to the Confederate army.[16] While other Confederate women shared this sentiment, as can be gleaned from reading between the lines, they were not all this explicit. In May of 1862, Dawson wrote that her friend had seen soldiers marching to the depot. They waved their hats at a crowd of women and children, saying, "'God bless you, ladies! We will fight for you!'" The crowd, "sobbing with one voice," responded., "'God bless you, Soldiers! Fight for us!'" The retelling of this event was enough to fill Dawson with a wild excitement.[17] The idea that these men were going to war in order to protect the women and children was not only admirable to Dawson, but it struck a chord with her. They were doing their

[14] Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 17.
[15] Chesnut Mary Boykin Miller Chesnut, *A Diary from Dixie* (New York: Appleton and Company, 1905), 159.
[16] Chesnut, *A Diary from Dixie,* xviii.
[17] Dawson, "A Confederate Girl's Diary: 1842-1909," 27.

duty, acting honorably. After Columbia was burned by the Union, Emma LeConte worried about how her father, who was absent for the scene, would react to the way the women were treated. She understood that his failure to protect them from the ravaging reflected on his honor, thus shaking "his state of mind."[18] Finally, Belle Edmondson, a Tennessee native, wrote, "I would not have him [a Confederate soldier residing with her family] stay any longer for any thing, I am perfectly disgusted at the way in which our soldiers are lying about, shirking their duty."[19] Thus, whether they were praising Confederate men or critiquing them, they did so by talking about honor and duty.

Confederate women referred to Union soldiers as 'Yankees' or 'Yanks' in their private writings. This title carried a connotation of utter disgust, and it reads as if these women were spitting out the words. They did not respect the Union army in the same way that they respected the Confederates, despite them being men who, according to the culture they were raised in, wielded authority over them. They could spit on and disrespect Union soldiers, in public or private, because, as they understood it, they were not real *men*. They stood in opposition to honorable Confederate leaders, such as General P.G.T. Beauregard, who were determined to "fight and die like [men]" against the government that "shamefully abandoned" them.[20] Instead, the Yankees were drunken fiends who were not above waging war on women and children.[21]

The Union army did not wage war on women with guns but with invasions of privacy. Lisa Tendrich Frank, when looking at Sherman's March, explained that the assertion of the "aggressively masculine power of the Union over the passively feminine South" was a strategic

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[18] Emma LeConte, "Diary, 1864-1865," (Accessed February 12, 2024), 35.
[19] Belle Edmonson, "Diary, January-November, 1864," (Documenting the South: UNC, 1864), 3.
[20]Margaret Ann Meta Morris Grimball, "Journal of Meta Morris Grimball, South Carolina, December 1860-February 1866: Electronic Version," (Documenting the South: UNC, 1998), 23.
[21] LeConte, "Diary, 1864-1865," 32.

maneuver to break the will of Southern women.[22] In this "domestic war," Union soldiers entered homes and violated the private areas that were restricted to "strange men." In addition to verbally abusing women, they also touched and destroyed personal items, including pianos, diaries, china sets, lingerie, and gowns.[23] To a Southern lady who abided by the expectations society had for her, this was utter humiliation. These actions had the same psychological effect as physically attacking a man in public. LeConte, who was in Sherman's path, recognized this parallel. She wrote,

> "This is civilized warfare! This is the way in which the "cultured" Yankee nation wars upon women and children! Failing with our men in the field, *this* is the way they must conquer! I suppose there was scarcely an able-bodied man, except the hospital physicians, - in the whole twenty thousand people."[24]

When the Union army failed with their husbands and brothers – their protectors – they decided to wage war on the 'innocent.' This behavior led Mary Maxcy Leverett and her peers to view the war "through the prism of the Union's dishonorable behavior and their personal shame."[25] Meanwhile, Union soldiers confidently charged forward, emboldened by the belief that slaveholding women shared responsibility for starting the war and contributed to its continuation.[26]

Confederate women were not so naive to believe that the war would not touch them, but they were horrified to realize the lengths that the Union army would go to in order to *dishonor* them. They anticipated food theft, the destruction of factories, and the freeing of slaves. They

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[22] Lisa Tendrich Frank, *The Civilian War: Confederate Women and Union Soldiers during Sherman's March*. (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 4.
[23] Frank, *The Civilian War*, 4-7.
[24] LeConte, "Diary, 1864-1865," 34.
[25] Frank, *The Civilian War*, 2.
[26] Frank, *The Civilian War*, 4.

considered these to be normal acts during a wartime invasion.[27] Before Sherman arrived in Columbia, LeConte expressed, " It is true some think Sherman will burn the town, but we can hardly believe that." She proceeded, then, to craft large pockets to wear under her hoop skirt; believing, falsely again, that they "will hardly search our persons."[28] Because this, she believed, would be a violation of her honor. Three days later, LeConte was "relieved and thankful" to hear that "Sherman has promised not to disturb private property."[29] She believed him, as she trusted that the invasion and destruction of homes would be unwarranted. Within twenty-four hours, however, she would write again, this time damning Sherman and his men and criticizing herself, saying,

> "Strange as it may seem we were actually idiotic enough to believe Sherman would keep his word! - *Yankee* - and *Sherman!* It does seem incredible, such credulity, but I suppose we were so anxious to believe him - the lying fiend!"

She was angry that she trusted, for even a second, that Sherman, a *Yankee*, would do the honorable thing. It is unclear why these women believed Union soldiers were dishonorable on one hand, and, yet, on the other, they expected that their own honor would be respected.

LeConte went on to paint a picture of the Union soldiers in Columbia as the city burned, making note of both the chaos and the deliberateness with which they acted. She described "Sherman's Hellhounds" as staggering, shouting, swearing, blaspheming "drunken devils" who were engaged in what they believed to be "noble work."[30] In this account, LeConte ascribed multiple dishonorable behaviors to the Union soldiers, especially considering they were behaving this way in the presence of women. However, she also noted that they thought they were doing

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[27] Frank, *The Civilian War*, 6-7.
[28] LeConte, "Diary, 1864-1865," 19-20.
[29] LeConte, "Diary, 1864-1865," 28.
[30] LeConte, "Diary, 1864-1865," 30.

the right thing. Much like on the battlefield, when one might prefer not to kill but does anyway for his cause, so too did these soldiers march with their turpentine, setting everything ablaze. As LeConte understood it, they were following orders.[31] Frank corroborated this idea, saying, "Northern men understood the sanctity of women's space and used it to their advantage."[32] This destruction, therefore, was strategic. This idea that "helpless" women and children would be devastated for the war effort was solidified for LeConte the following month when she visited her uncle. He told her a story about walking alongside a Union Officer. When he asserted to the Officer that the South would never yield, the Union Officer warned that they "would not spare or respect [Confederate] women " if it came to it.[33] This explicitly confirmed what LeConte already knew, what she had witnessed less than a month prior.

Another invasion of privacy that Confederate women faced was the violation of their bodies. This is more difficult to evaluate and, therefore, scholars contend how often these assaults actually happened. In the years after the Civil War, two contrasting narratives arose. The first, pushed by Lost Cause memorialists, suggested that the Civil War was a high-violence war that targeted innocent women.[34] In light of this, I reference only contemporary diaries in this study. Many historians, on the other hand, described the Civil War as a "low-rape" war.[35] The truth is somewhere in the middle. Crystal Nichole Feimster argued that Union officers used rape and the threat of rape "as weapons of warfare" against southern women, despite the federal military defining rape as a crime punishable by court-martial and execution.[36] She pointed to General Benjamin Butler's infamous Order in New Orleans– sanctioning the use of sexual

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[31] LeConte, "Diary, 1864-1865," 32.
[32] Frank, *The Civilian War*, 14.
[33] LeConte, "Diary, 1864-1865," 52.
[34] Frank, *The Civilian War*, 5.
[35] Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1993), 88.
[36] Crystal Nicole Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the politics of rape and lynching* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 17.

violence to control women who 'unsexed' themselves by offending federal troops – to prove her point.[37] This order read,

> "As the officers and soldiers of the United States have been subject to repeated insults from the women (calling themselves ladies) of New Orleans, in return for the most scrupulous non-interference and courtesy on our part, it is ordered that hereafter when any female shall, by word, gesture, or movement, insult of show contempt for any officer or soldier of the United States, she shall be regarded and held liable to be treated as a woman of the town plying her avocation."[38]

This suggests that even though sexual violations were punishable during the Civil War, there were legal loopholes that some generals, most notably Butler, used to get around this. If these women did not act like ladies, Butler and his men were not obligated to treat them as such. Charles Ritter and E. Susan Barber echoed Feimster's claim, pointing instead to the more than four hundred Union soldiers who were court-martialed for sexual crimes.[39] They, similar to Feimster, believed that this only accounted for a small portion of actual instances, but they pointed to social considerations as their explanation for why women kept quiet.

Evaluating sexual assault during the Civil War is difficult because many Southern women considered rape a fate worse than death. When Confederate President Jefferson Davis had to leave his wife, Varina, at home, he advised her, "You can at least, if reduced to the last extremity, force your assailants to kill you."[40] Davis did not speak explicitly, which was common. Ritter and Barber explained that Southern men and women often talked around sexual violence, sometimes using euphemisms to communicate their thoughts and experiences.[41] Davis was telling his wife

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[37] Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, 17.
[38] Pamela D. Arceneaux, *Order no. 28*. (Photograph, New Orleans, 1862).
[39] E. Susan Barber and Charles F. Ritter, "Dangerous Liaisons: Working Women and Sexual Justice in the American Civil War." *European journal of American studies* 10, no. 1 (March 26, 2015).
[40] Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, 19.
[41] E. Susan Barber and Charles F. Ritter, "Dangerous Liaisons"

to accept death before allowing someone to rape her. Because it was seen fate worse than death, many historians have theorized that only a fraction of the rapes that occurred during the Civil War were actually reported. Feismer explained, "Because a white woman's virtue represented her most valuable commodity, much was at stake in making public a crime understood to tarnish that virtue."[42] Instead, they buried their memories in diaries or letters, and sometimes opted for forms of "private vengeance."[43]

Seeing the Union as a dishonorable enemy in this way made it easier for Confederate women to engage in acts of resistance. Sometimes, this looked like talking to Union soldiers in a manner that would have been considered disrespectful. When a Union soldier asked LeConte who the mayor was, she wrote that she "answered shortly and turned away." When he asked if she knew his initials, she responded with a biting "No," and then she quickly shut the door behind her.[44] Another woman in Columbia was even more brazen in her defiance. While Union soldiers were pillaging her home,

> "One asked her if they had not humbled her pride *now* - "No indeed" she said, "Nor can you ever". "You *fear* us anyway" - "No" she said. "By G-, but you *shall* fear me", and he cocked his pistol and put it to her head - "Are you afraid now?" She folded her arms and looking him steadily in the eye said contemptuously, "no". He dropped his pistol, and with an exclamation of admiration, left her."[45]

Southern women, who traditionally endured the status of dependents, harnessed the power of "no." Frank referred to this as using the "feminine weapon of words."[46] In the face of

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[42] Crystal Nicole Feimster, "General Benjamin Butler & the Threat of Sexual Violence during the American Civil War," *Daedalus* 138, no. 2 (April, 2009), 127.
[43] Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 118.
[44] LeConte, "Diary, 1864-1865," 35.
[45] LeConte, "Diary, 1864-1865," 36-37.
[46] Frank, *The Civilian War*, 13.

dishonorable men, these women felt, or at least acted as if, they were in control. At the very least, they did not feel obliged to roll over kindly.

In addition to words, Confederate women sometimes wielded actual weapons. Jefferson Davis gave Varina a pistol.[47] Dawson wore a pistol and a carving-knife, and she expressed that she was not afraid to use them. In fact, she lamented, "I am afraid I *will* try them on the first one who says an insolent word to me. Yes, and repent for it ever after in sackcloth and ashes."[48] As far as we can tell from her diary, she never used either. The same cannot be said of another New Orleans native, Mrs. Henry M. Hyams. Emma Holmes, who lived in Charleston, had heard and recounted her story. Hyams was stopped by a "Yankee officer" and asked to bow to him. When she refused, he found her in violation of Butler's Order and "threw his arms around her and kissed her." She "drew a pistol and shot him dead in all the flush of his insolence." Holmes praised Hyams for this, considering her name "historic" among Southern women.[49]

As surprising as these accounts seem, it is possible that these women were well accustomed to wielding weapons long before the Civil War. J. G. Clinkscales, when recalling his life before the war, wrote, "many of the young ladies could ride as well as their brothers, and not a few of them could handle firearms with great accuracy and skill."[50] This was a point of concern for many Southern critics who grumbled that young girls were being taught to be "just as aggressive and difficult to manage" as boys. However, as they got older, they were encouraged to recognize their vulnerability.[51] Nevertheless, these skills lay dormant and, for those critics who lived in the North, their fears were realized when they faced female defiance during the war.

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[47] Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, 19.
[48] Dawson, "A Confederate Girl's Diary: 1842-1909," 24.
[49] Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, 18-19.
[50] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*,, 232
[51] Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South, 233.

In the absence of the men who were tasked with protecting them, Confederate women were not only capable of but took pride in their ability to protect themselves. This complicates the notion, purported by scholars like Drew Gilpin Faust, that it was Confederate women who ended the War by demanding their husbands come home.[52] LeConte expressed, well into February of 1865, that "the more we suffer the more we should be willing to undergo rather than submit." Even when the War seemed lost, she suggested moving away to Europe as an alternative to surrender.[53] She talked about her defiance with pride. Feimster, like Faust, explored the fear and frustration that Confederate women felt towards Confederate soldiers for "failing to protect them."[54] She pointed to Rebecca Latimer Felton, the daughter of a slaveholding family in Georgia, who continued to blame Confederate officers for failing to protect southern women for years after the war. As she understood it, Southern men, particularly those of the planter class, prioritized the "profit of slavery" at the expense of the protection of southern womanhood.[55] This is a far cry from Dawson's mentality, however, as she was "rather proud" of being in the "midst of flying shells," for she "ran the same risk, and was equal to the rest of the boys."[56] Perhaps she was elated with the excitement and would later agree with Felton, after being disillusioned by loss. Or, perhaps, Southern women's reactions to suffering were not uniform, even among the elite class.

In this conversation, age is an imperative consideration. When the Civil War started in 1861, LeConte and Dawson, our poster-children of Confederate women's bravery, were both teenagers. LeConte was thirteen and Dawson nineteen. Leconte discussed how pivotal these years of life were and described wartime as a "hard school to be bred up in."[57] Nevertheless, her

[52] Frank, *The Civilian War*, 14.
[53] LeConte, "Diary, 1864-1865," 46-47.
[54] Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, 127.
[55] Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, 12-13.
[56] Dawson, "A Confederate Girl's Diary: 1842-1909," 43.
[57] LeConte, "Diary, 1864-1865," 13.

dedication to the War effort was stronger and her attitude better than her older counterparts. Margaret Ann Meta Morris Grimball's diary, for example, was ridden with anxious sentiments. She was in her fifties when the war started, and she worried for her sons, her health, and the state of her home.[58] When she was asked to be "one of the managers to the Aid Society," an effort dedicated to the clothing Confederate troops and providing relief to the wounded, she declined. She did, however, make some hospital shirts.[59] What is striking is how monotonously she wrote about this effort. LeConte and Dawson responded to any kind of participation with an eager enthusiasm. The correlation between age and attitude tracks across my corpus.

Bertram Wyatt-Brown's evaluation of Southern girlhood helps to explain this discordance. From birth to "the boys' 'clothing' stage," around the age of four, girls were raised without much "sexual differentiation" from their peers. This meant that "they too were indulged, fretted over, and given every opportunity to make demands, and even allowed the sort of wild outdoor activity that led to easily preventable accidents."[60] Boys and girls were the same. In the next phase of development, while they were still quite young, girls continued to enjoy "a degree" of indulgence. The societal structures of control had begun working on them, but this is when fathers taught their daughters to ride horses, handle firearms, and even hunt.[61] This all changed "abruptly" as soon as girls reached menarche, or the first occurrence of menstruation. Almost in a moment, they were forced to "recognize their vulnerability to male aggression."[62] This went beyond the fear that these young girls would get pregnant, as their virginity was just as precious a commodity. Instead, here we see an acknowledgement of women's sexual agency. They had sex drives too, and that is why active steps had to be taken to suppress them. This is further

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[58] Grimball, "Journal of Meta Morris Grimball," 21, 38, 52, 60.
[59] Grimball, "Journal of Meta Morris Grimball," 41.
[60] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, 231.
[61] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, 232.
[62] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, 234.

confirmed in Wyatt-Bertram's assertion that women were encouraged to resist making matches "based largely on sexual attraction."[63] The accusation that they would implies that women were not passive sexual objects. Furthermore, T.R. Drew, writing contemporarily, articulated, "She cannot [that is, ought never to] give utterance to her passions like a man."[64] Women had the same desires as men, but the expectations set on them were different. They were to show ladylike, Christian restraint.

While some women refused to conform to these pressures, other women actively reinforced the ideals that men established. When Emily Virginia Semple was four years old, she was used to running around and getting bruised. On this particular day, her sunbonnet kept dropping over her eyes. Her father told her to remove it before "butting [her] brains out." Before she could, however, her mother stepped in, "fearful of the ill effects of sunlight on a girl's white complexion." Her mother won the argument and the bonnet stayed.[65] Emily was still too young to embrace marriage as her *raison d'etre*, as menstruating women were compelled to do, but her mother had already done this on her behalf. Doing this was practical as well as physiology. If a woman did not marry, "there were no appropriate alternatives."[66] They could be a seamstress, landlady, housekeeper, governess or teacher. These were roles that married women assumed in their own households, and, therefore, unmarried women performing these activities for wages led them to feel guilty or self-conscious.[67] This is likely due to the women in society who had committed themselves to promoting men's idea of a lady. When a woman did not submit to her "feminine dependence," she became the subject of gossip and was sometimes publicly humiliated. This was even true of women who did marry but were the "scolding wife" to a

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[63] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, 233.
[64] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, 277.
[65] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, 231.
[66] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, 229.
[67] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, 229.

"hen-pecked husband;" or, in colloquial terms, "wore the pants."[68] A woman was to aspire to be an obedient wife and little else.

These considerations serve to explain why young women like Dawson and LeConte were willing to show greater defiance during the War. They were not so far removed from their childhoods, in which they rode horses, shot guns, and ran around with the boys. The idea that these girls were "raised without much sexual differentiation" is evocative of one of Dawson's diary entries where she wrote, "Pshaw! there are *no* women here! We are *all* men!"[69] Yet, these girls were still old enough to have felt the pressure to act ladylike, explaining their differing reactions to men they deemed honorable and dishonorable. Contrarily, Grimball's diary was filled with anxieties about her sons, concerns about her home, and hundreds of prayers. Regardless of the enemy's disposition, these women largely attempted to maintain their decorum. These tonal differences are visible in topic models created using Confederate women's diaries.

Topic modeling works on a bucket-of-words model. It does not care about word order, it merely cares that the same sets of words occur together over and over again. For example, a topic model might start to notice that where the word *clouds* appears, *rain* appears. It does not know why, it just knows that these terms repeatedly appear in proximity to one another. It identifies *topics*. Each of the topic models below was created using seven Confederate women's diaries. The first looks at women who were 21 years old or younger when the war started, and the second looks at women who were 26 or older. Although Southern women often married young, in my corpus those under 21 years of age were unmarried. There are more topics in the first model because the young women in this particular sample wrote more than their older counterparts.

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[68] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, 228, 230.
[69] Dawson, "A Confederate Girl's Diary: 1842-1909," 25.

Figure 1: Confederate Diaries Topic Model, 21 and Younger

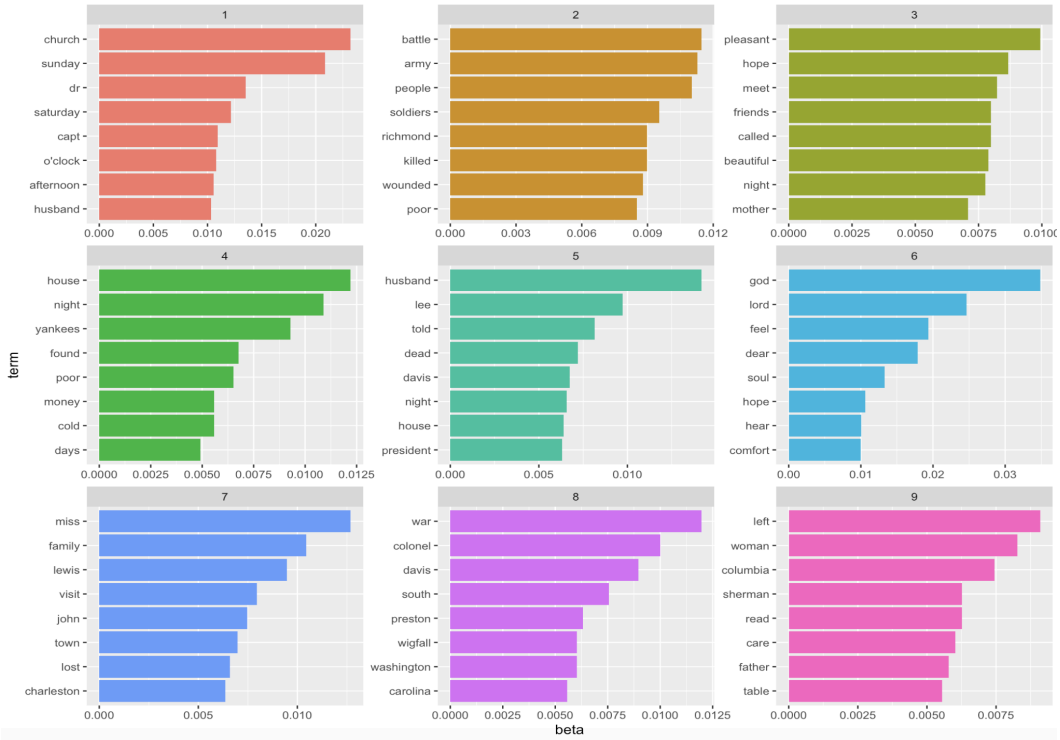
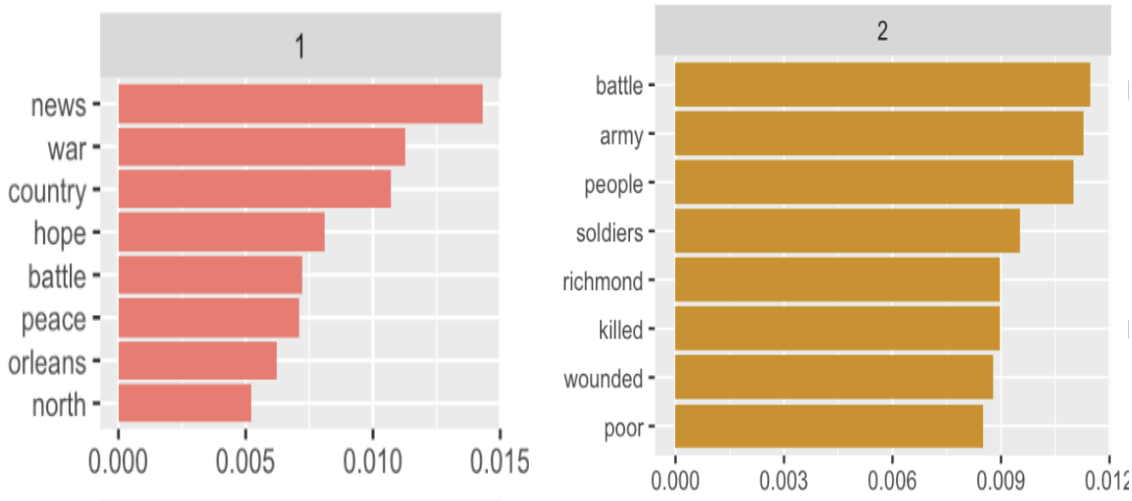


Figure 2: Confederate Diaries Topic Model, 26 and Older

Without reading the diaries, it is not immediately apparent what each of these topics are referring to. However, for our purposes here we are looking for a general trend. The topics in Figure 1, on the whole, have a more positive connotation. We see words like “hope,” “happy,” “glad,” and “beautiful” appearing in multiple topics. Whether they are discussing activities at home, as we see in Topic 7, or travel as seen in Topic 13, these girls are not overcome with dread. In figure 2, contrarily, we see words like “poor,” “lost,” “dead,” and “wounded” occurring frequently. This is not to say that positive words never appear in Figure 2 or negative words in Figure 1, but, overall, each topic model has a different tone. This is most evident when comparing a similar topic in each model. Figure 1 Topic 1 and Figure 2 Topic 2 could both be labeled “War.”



Across the corpus, younger women talked about hope and peace when they discussed the war, while older women focused on the wounded and the killed. This specific observation is not something that you would immediately notice while reading the texts, but it stands to reason that younger women, who were more enthusiastic about the war effort, would have been more sanguine when discussing it. Whereas the older women, who felt greater pressure to restrain themselves, felt more defenseless and, therefore, lamented their circumstances.

Despite these differences, the Civil War pointed to the need for certain societal changes for both older and younger women. Feismer explained, "The horrors of the war set the stage for the emergence of the new and powerful southern women;" they wanted protection in the form of rights.[70] Emboldened by years spent protecting themselves, frustrated by bearing the brunt on the homefront, and accustomed to relaxed gender expectations, these women, old and young, remembered that they were not so dependent and helpless. And, if they had to defend themselves socially and physically, they deserved legal rights as well. This process was often quicker for younger women because they had less to years of conformity to unlearn, but they were not the only ones who recognized how vulnerable one was as a dependent in a society with a protector who was fallible. Afterall, when women married, they "traded their autonomy for the protection and support of their husbands."[71] If men failed to uphold their end of the bargain, as many did during the war, why should women be held to theirs? Their experiences in the war forced them to redefine how they saw themselves and what they valued.

This mentality of a fair exchange influenced how Confederate women viewed their enemy as well as their brother, fathers, and husbands. If the enemy was dishonorable, they did not have to act like ladies, freeing them up to blur the gendered line. Their defiance was less emboldened when they perceived Union soldiers as "gentlemen." This is evident in the tone they used to write about these encounters. Edmonson provided a number of examples. When she had to pass through a Union holding, she wrote, "had to pass through the Yankee Camp, no trouble, spent the day and came back this evening."[72] Compared to her other entries, this one was rather bland. Similarly, in April of 1864 she wrote,

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[70] Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, 8.
[71] Burton, *In My Father's House Are Many Mansions*, 248.
[72] Edmonson, "Diary, January-November, 1864," 15.

> "Another day of excitement - about 30 Yanks passed early this morning, only six came in for their breakfast…they behaved very well, and seemed to be gentlemen, in fact we so seldom see gentlemen among the Yankees that we can appreciate them when they are met with."[73]

Here again, Edmondson did not express any aggravation or irritation. She did not use colorful language to describe the enemy or recount any ways that her or her mother resisted. They served the soldiers breakfast and they moved along. The contrast between the reception of "gentlemen" Yankees and despicable ones is most evident when Edmondson's family received a mixture of both in their Memphis home. Of the one that 'did not seem to be a gentleman,' she wrote "oh! how heartily I despise him." With this remark, we finally see a return to passionate language. Yet, on the same day, she "promised to make a Confederate flag" for another Union soldier, "and he promised he would not reenlist." She did indeed work on a flag for him and even looked forward to giving it to him the next time he came.[74] Because he acted like a gentleman, she felt compelled to act like a lady.

For many of the women included in this study, these complexities unraveled slowly over the course of the War. In Morgan Dawson's diary, however, they were evidenced in the course of a single week in May of 1862. New Orleans fell to Union control on April 25, 1862 and remained in their possession for the remainder of the War. When Dawson wrote on May 10, General Benjamin Butler and his 15,000 troops had entered her city. The American flag, which she "once loved," flew from every peak. In protest, she went home, made herself a small Confederate flag, pinned it to her shoulder, and marched downtown.[75] She was accompanied by her friend Nettie, who hid her Confederate flag under her dress. Still, they were the "only two

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[73] Edmonson, "Diary, January-November, 1864," 42.
[74] Edmonson, "Diary, January-November, 1864," 43-44.
[75] Dawson, "A Confederate Girl's Diary: 1842-1909," 27.

who ventured…to the State House terrace." As the growing crowd looked at them, Dawson was filled with pride at her bravery and defiance, motivated by disgust for the Union invaders. She wrote, "Butchers! Does it take thirty thousand men and millions of dollars to murder defenseless women and children? O the great nation! Bravo!"[76] In waging war against women and children, they did not deserve her respect and she would not give it to them.

Dawson's attitude changed entirely as soon as she perceived the Union soldiers as honorable. This shift occurred later that very day when she saw fifteen or so Federal officers standing on a terrace of the State House. As she watched them, she was surprised that they were "fine, noble-looking men…showing refinement and gentlemanly bearing in every motion." She was so impressed with them that she held them in higher esteem than her fellow Confederates. In her detailed description of the "ragged little boys" and men with gaping-open-mouths who composed the crowd that gawked at the Union soldiers, these men stood apart as worthy of admiration. She concluded, "They prove themselves gentlemen, while many of our citizens have proved themselves boors." Furthermore, she considered those who could not bring themselves to respect these men to be "bigoted" and "narrow-minded." These men carried themselves so honorably that they commanded Dawson's respect, and while she was never ashamed of the Confederacy, this encounter left her ashamed of her fellow Confederates and herself.[77]

Dawson was ashamed that she did not conduct herself as a lady in the face of an honorable enemy. Her "unladylike display of defiance" was problematic for numerous reasons. Firstly, she was convicted of "unnecessarily drawing attention" to herself. She would "Never!" remove her flag from her shoulder in front of the enemy, she exerted, but the shame she felt standing there in front of those gentlemen was "totally distasteful" to her. It is notable that

[76] Dawson, "A Confederate Girl's Diary: 1842-1909," 27-28.
[77] Dawson, "A Confederate Girl's Diary: 1842-1909," 28-29.

Dawson did not question her behavior that morning when she was revolted by the Union army. This implies that women only felt compelled to act honorably when they were faced with honorable men. So, when Dawson perceived the Union soldiers as honorable, she felt the need to respect them. Respecting them meant acting like a lady. And, "a lady can gain nothing by such a display." Instead of being pinned to her chest, she thought, her Confederate flag should have been displayed in her home – on her parlor mantel –- for a lady's place was in the private sphere, not the public. Secondly, Dawson considered the epithets that people used to describe the Union soldiers, such as "liars, thieves, murderers, scoundrels, the scum of the earth, etc.," to be "unworthy of ladies." Thus, Dawson connected vocabulary to honor for women. This means that the vulgar and colorful descriptions women used to describe "Yankees" in their diaries would have been considered unladylike, at least by Dawson.[78]

Dawson's tune changed again when she heard Butler's Order No. 28. Butler issued his order on May 15, 1862, and on May 17, Dawson wrote about it. As her previous diary entries suggested, Dawson considered women turning up their noses to and gathering their skirts away from Federal soldiers to be "unladylike, to say the least." She reiterated that sentiment here. However, in light of this decree that brought her mother to "utter despair," she made excuses for these women's behavior. Perhaps they moved away because of the Union soldiers' deplorable odor, for instance. She lamented, "Let us hope for the honor of their nation that Butler is not counted among the gentlemen of the land." If he were, the nation as a whole would lose its respectability. She went on to cry for her male family members, saying "never did we need your protection so sorely as now." But, immediately after iterating their dependence, she reassembled her weapons. She wrote rather poetically,

[78] Dawson, "A Confederate Girl's Diary: 1842-1909," 31-32.

> "Come to my bosom, O my discarded carving-knife, laid aside under the impression that these men were gentlemen. We will be close friends once more. And if you must have a sheath, perhaps I may find one for you in the heart of the first man who attempts to Butlerize me."

Since these men were not as honorable as she had concluded, she would have no problem killing them. This was especially true if they attempted to dishonor her by violating her body.[79] As a young, unmarried woman, it was especially important that she maintained her chastity. A threat to this was a declaration of war. Again, while men fought on the battlefield, women were engaged in a domestic war with two fronts, home and body.[80]

This regard for respectability between Union soldiers and Confederate women went both ways. When a group of young women emptied their chamber pots on a group of Union soldiers in Rome, Georgia, they responded by stripping and spanking them. While the women viewed this as deplorable and dishonoring, the soldiers justified themselves by saying, "No one but an abandoned woman would do a thing like that. Abandoned women had no rights that anyone was bound to respect."[81] This same logic was applied in Butler's Order no. 28. When the editor of the *New York Times*, Goldwin Smith, weighed in on Butler's decision, he labeled it "coarse." This did not mean, however, that he did not agree with it. Instead, he argued that southern white women brought it upon themselves by "unsexing themselves."[82] If they did not act like ladies, no one should be expected to treat them as such. It is not difficult to imagine the vicious cycle these mindsets created. Women did not perceive the Union soldiers as honorable, so they did not treat them as such. In response, Union soldiers saw women "unsexing themselves" and could justify

[79] Dawson, "A Confederate Girl's Diary: 1842-1909," 35-36.
[80] Frank, *The Civilian War*, 4-5.
[81] Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, 19.
[82] Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, 18.

treating them dishonorably. This is a chicken or the egg conversation, but it is not really important who got the wheel spinning. What matters is it that it spun for a majority of the Civil War, varying from state to state, city to city.

Further complicating this conversation about honor is the question of where to situate African Americans. Enslaved and newly freed people accounted for a large portion of the southern population, so they are integral to creating a full picture of elite white women's wartime experience. White women often relied heavily on enslaved people for food and news. In some ways, the Civil War blurred the lines that staunchly separated enslaved people and enslavers in the antebellum period. LeConte's family was particularly dependent on their slaves. In February of 1865 Emma wrote, "The negroes are very kind and faithful - they have supplied us with meat.... How times change! Those whom we have so long fed and cared for now help us."[83] Later, she clarified that this help was a daily occurrence – they provided bacon for them *every* morning.[84] She, along with other slaveholding women, were willing to acknowledge the great aid that African Americans provided them during the War, and they expressed their gratitude. They were still unable, or unwilling, to see how forcing these men and women into the status of dependents was not truly "caring" for them, but that is because, despite being entirely reliant on them for survival, they still did not see them as equals. No matter how helpful they were, they did not consider them to be capable of *honor* in the way that white people were.

The LeConte's also relied on enslaved, and later formerly-enslaved, people for news. This was the case up until the end of the war. In February of 1865, for instance, Emma wrote, "we are intensely eager for every item of news, but of course can only hear through the negroes."[85] After nearly five years of war, the LeConte's had grown accustomed to depending on

[83] LeConte, "Diary, 1864-1865," 27-28.
[84] LeConte, "Diary, 1864-1865," 36.
[85] LeConte, "Diary, 1864-1865," 27-28.

African Americans for updates on friends, family, troops, etc. They did not force them into this role either. On another occasion, Emma wrote, "We are anxious to learn the fate of our friends, but the little we can gather (except from Aunt Josie and Mrs. Green) is through the negroes, and ours scarcely dare venture uptown."[86] She does not think to ask them to go, however, because that was not her place anymore. Not two days later, she wrote a diary entry explaining that "they are free…at present and we ask as little as possible of them."[87] Despite their freedom, they continued to provide sustenance and intelligence. The only thing that held the LeConte's back from praising them as the most honorable people in their lives was their race.

Ironically, despite having been the most reliant on African Americans, LeConte's diary contains the clearest examples of Southern racism. A sentence after explaining how her family depended on servants for news, LeConte quipped, "The Yankees plunder the negroes as well as the whites, and I think they are becoming somewhat disgusted with their *friends.*"[88] This was steeped with condescension, as LeConte was mocking the hope that African Americans had for freedom. She gloated that the Union army treated them just as awfully. Meanwhile, they provided food for her so that she would not starve. Additionally, throughout the war, LeConte continually refused to leave her home. As dangers presented themselves, she remained determined to stay put. She only wavered once, when there was talk that "a negro garrison may be sent" to Columbia. She responded, "If such fears should be realized we must leave if we have to walk to Augusta."[89] She endured the burning of Columbia but drew the line at being faced with African American troops.

[86] LeConte, "Diary, 1864-1865," 36.
[87] LeConte, "Diary, 1864-1865," 37-38.
[88] LeConte, "Diary, 1864-1865," 36.
[89] LeConte, "Diary, 1864-1865," 49.

In some ways, Confederate men's honor was tied to maintaining this same sense of superiority. A few hundred yards from Edmondson's house in Memphis, Tennessee, Mr. Brent, a family friend, came across a family of formerly enslaved people who seemed to be escaping North. When recounting this story, Edmondson wrote, "Of course no Southern Soldier would ever surrender to a Negro."[90] It would be considered so dishonorable that it was unthinkable. The use of "of course" here is notable. This notion was so inherently clear to Edmondson that she would not think to explore the thought further. It was so ingrained in southern society that a white man was superior to a black man that surrender was never an option, no matter the circumstances. We can assume that Edmondson would scold any white man who forgot this.

Honor serves as a fascinating lens for studying the American Civil War. A study of elite white women's diaries reveals the complexities in how white women viewed Confederate men, Union men, and African Americans, and how their behavior varied depending on how they perceived a certain group at a certain moment in time and t. We also see the ways that the Union army leveraged their knowledge of the South's obsession with respectability and waged a war on Confederate men and women's honor, while using the South's own language to justify acts that might have otherwise been considered criminal. This five year period led many women to realize that their vulnerability was manufactured, not inherent, leading some to push for legal rights after the war. This is not to say that the Old South mentality was entirely dismantled after the war. If the Lost Cause narrative demonstrates anything it is that many white Southerners clung to the Old South way of life as tightly as they could.

[90] Edmonson, "Diary, January-November, 1864," 5.

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