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# The Rhetoric of Enslavement in White Confederate Planter Women's Civil War Diaries (1861–65)

Kristen Brill

Department of History, Keele University, Keele, UK

## ABSTRACT

Recent historiography has shown how slaveholding white women in the antebellum South United States often played active and eager roles in the administration of slavery and used violence against enslaved persons. Building on this recent historiography, this article will show how in the American Civil War (1861–65), such white middle and planter class women not only played central roles in slavery on antebellum plantations, but how this rhetoric of enslavement played a central role in how these women discussed their own experiences of war in the Confederate South. Particularly from 1862, when the ideology of secession and nationalism met the material circumstances of surviving on a wartime home front, middle and planter class white women resorted to the language of secular and non-secular enslavement to convey their own lived wartime experiences. As both enslaver and “enslaved”, these planter women framed their wartime identities in the same system of power, violence and degradation they had been instrumental in sustaining before the war.

**KEYWORDS** Gender; slavery; American Civil War; diaries

The outbreak of the American Civil War in April 1861 and its ensuing four years of bloodshed not only irrevocably reformatted national and regional identities, but individual gendered identities on both Confederate and Union home fronts and front lines. Alongside the political and military crisis, the Civil War must also be understood as a crisis in gender and a referendum on women's roles in this new wartime society, particularly in the South. As the war was fought mostly in the South, southern women were forced to contend with the realities of war in an immediate and visceral way from which most northern women were spared. With the advent of war, southern women engaged with political culture in new ways and negotiated a new relationship with their new government.<sup>1</sup> The Confederate

**CONTACT** Kristen Brill  [k.c.brill@keele.ac.uk](mailto:k.c.brill@keele.ac.uk)

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government would come to depend upon the support and conviction of its Confederate white planter women on the home front to help bolster the war effort, to observers both inside and outside of the South. However, as evidenced in their diaries, these planter women believed they faced dire material hardships on the home front including threats to their physical safety from the advancing Union army, scarcity of food and basic goods as well as strained travel and communications networks. What is so striking about these wartime diaries is not that women detailed their conditions of hardship and suffering, but rather, the rhetorical lens they often chose to present their conditions of hardship and suffering: slavery.<sup>2</sup>

Some women from slaveholding families in the antebellum South used the rhetoric of enslavement to convey their own lived experiences of war, as middle and planter class white women, in the Confederacy. These same women and their families benefitted socially and economically from slavery as an institution for generations. As recent historiography has shown, these white women often played active and eager roles in the administration of slavery and used violence against enslaved persons.<sup>3</sup> Such middle and planter class white women were far from the ideal of the passive “southern lady”; they were not only invested in the Confederacy, but the institution of slavery.<sup>4</sup> Building on this recent historiography, this article will show how planter women not only played central roles in slavery on antebellum plantations, but how this rhetoric of secular and non-secular enslavement played a central role in how planter women discussed their own experiences of war in the Confederate South. Slavery, as not only an economic and social institution extending from the plantation household, but as a rhetorical device, worked to define planter women’s relationship to society as well as her own self-identity. These planter women reconfigured familiar antebellum networks of language, in terms of both content and rhetoric, assembling a wartime discourse entrenched in their experiences of and relationship to antebellum society and antebellum slavery. Particularly after the first year of the war, from 1862, when the ideology of secession and nationalism met the material circumstances of surviving on a wartime home front, middle and planter class white women resorted to the language of enslavement to convey their own lived wartime experiences. Their diaries reveal the ways in which slavery not only underpinned women’s power in the antebellum plantation household, but how the rhetoric of enslavement was central to women’s sense of identity in the wartime South.<sup>5</sup> As portraying themselves as both enslavers and “enslaved”, middle and planter class white women manipulated language associated with the system of slavery that they had supported, strengthened and sustained in the antebellum period. Before the war, planter women exploited slavery as a system. During the war, planter women not only exploited the system, but the rhetoric associated with enslavement for their own ends.

Diary writing as a practice is integral to the meaning of the diary as an object. While in the antebellum South, middle and planter class white women's diaries tended to focus on the individual's life, with the outbreak of war, diaries shifted their attention to the national conflict. In the Civil War South, literacy and leisure time were the primary determinants in the practice of diary writing. Literacy and education often coincided with class status; most Confederate diaries were written by the middle and planter classes. Such women generally had more leisure time than lower class women, although this too became distorted by the hardships of war. Middle and planter class white women also had greater access to the material resources required for diary keeping, including access to pens, ink and paper. Diaries almost always have an intended audience, even if that audience is just the diarist herself focused on self-presentation.<sup>6</sup> As much as possible, unpublished diaries are referenced below both to bring lesser-known archival diaries to scholarly attention and to minimize issues related to the distortion of the diarist's original 1860s narrative through editorial intervention and/or the passage of time.

Considering diary writing as a process elucidates the intellectual and literary milieu in which diarists situated their texts. The "diarist's *modus operandi*" is a critical site of analysis that links an individual diary to the collective society; in doing so, this reveals how diarists engaged with the surrounding cultural context.<sup>7</sup> According to Suzanne Bunkers, the diary portrays "life as a process, not a product".<sup>8</sup> Examining the diary in this way, as a life practice and a literary product, allows for a more comprehensive examination of the individual diarist's relationship to society to emerge. Understanding when, where, why and how diarists composed their narratives helps scholars more fully understand the sociohistorical context in which the text was written.<sup>9</sup> Diaries can be conceptualized as more than autobiographical texts, as they are also a barometer to measure the circulation and significance of wider societal discourses through an individual narrative.<sup>10</sup> In this way, Confederate women's diaries can be read as not only their individual lived experiences of war, but as another way to examine the centrality of slavery to planter class women's wartime lives.

Consistent with the fervent Protestant culture of the antebellum South, middle and planter class white women's Civil War narratives were saturated with references to the Old Testament. Christian devotion was foundational in the lives of middle and planter class white women; it was considered a prerequisite for respectability and status. Antebellum women studiously read the Bible, attended church regularly, participated in Christian benevolent societies and taught the Bible and Christian doctrine to their children.<sup>11</sup> Such women were perceived as the purveyors of morality and Christian virtue within the plantation household. Within this plantation household, white women also wielded power and violence against the enslaved. As Thavolia Glymph has argued, white women were intrinsic to the management of plantation slavery and were actively engaged in the required systemic

violence of the institution.<sup>12</sup> Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers expands on Glymph's work to show how white women gained economic power from slavery: white women bought, sold and perpetuated violence against enslaved persons, and in doing so, worked to shape the domestic slave market economy.<sup>13</sup> Both Glymph and Jones-Rogers reveal white women derived power from their active, willing and violent roles in the managerial and economic operation of the plantation household. The plantation household was a site of power for white women, in terms of both religious authority and the violent administration of slavery.

These diaries frequently evoked biblical themes and passages from the Book of Exodus. They did not as often include New Testament passages on subservience that could be applied to uphold patriarchal relationships with their husbands and fathers. Exodus, the story of Moses leading the enslaved Israelites out of the Pharaoh's Egypt, clearly resonated with white slaveholding women on the home front. Using their existing frameworks of knowledge rooted in Christian doctrine, women situated their experience of suffering in the most authoritative, definitive source in antebellum America: a Protestant interpretation of the Bible. At the beginning of the war, Julia Johnson Fisher lived with her husband William Fisher in Camden County, Georgia. Living in an extremely isolated corner of the Confederacy on the Florida border, in April 1864 Fisher lamented her family's inability to acquire varied food, "Had another corn cake and boiled rice for breakfast [...] Providence does not leave us to starve in the wilderness – Yet like the Israelites we are continually murmuring".<sup>14</sup> In December 1862, on the eve of the Battle of Fredericksburg, Virginian Ida Dulany commented on the prospect of securing meat for her family, "I shall consider it an especial provision of Providence, fully equal to the supply of manna and quails given to the Israelites".<sup>15</sup>

Likewise, in the early 1860s, Lizzie Jackson Mann was a self-described "young girl" and lived with her family in Gloucester County, Virginia. In the immediate aftermath of General Robert E. Lee's surrender and the arrest of President Jefferson Davis, Mann forecasted her family's dismal future, "Our future was like Egyptian darkness. Our father and mother were helpless, with 11 children, only two educated and no income".<sup>16</sup> Mrs. William Simmons of Richmond was also deeply concerned about feeding herself and her recently returned soldier husband during their flight from the capital in April 1865,

All day we plodded on hungry for the little we could gather up as we started, was consumed and we looked back with longing — not to the flesh-pots of Egypt — for the flesh-pot had long been in a stranger in Richmond.<sup>17</sup>

Virginia Clay, wife of Alabama Senator Clement Claiborne Clay, relocated to Richmond during the war. Although the Clays were among the most

powerful and privileged families in the capital, they were not immune to the strife surrounding them. Describing the scene when Senator Hammond made his personal salt supply available to Confederate wives, Mrs. Clay recalled, "it was like going down into Egypt for corn, and the precious crystals were distributed to all who came, according to the number in each family".<sup>18</sup>

The use of the Book of Exodus in Confederate rhetoric was not exclusive to women. The Confederacy identified itself as the successor to Israel as God's chosen people. Despite the trials and hardships faced during the war, the South would ultimately reign victorious. The North considered itself to be God's chosen people as well.<sup>19</sup> In a notorious example, addressing the New Jersey Senate in February 1861, two months before the Battle of Fort Sumter, President Abraham Lincoln compared Americans to the Israelites, "I shall be most happy indeed if I shall be an humble instrument in the hands of the Almighty, and of this, his almost chosen people".<sup>20</sup> Yet the South exercised unbridled zealotry and fervor in proclaiming themselves as God's chosen people, far outreaching the less frequent and less vitriolic rhetoric in the North.<sup>21</sup>

This exultation of the war as providential in nature was a dominant theme continually expounded by the Confederate political apparatus, even by President Davis himself. Davis declared nine official days of national fasting over the duration of the Confederate republic, with state legislatures and independent religious organizations calling for additional days. The act of fasting recapitulated the Israelites' journey through the desert after their emancipation from the Pharaoh. In February 1862, Davis declared a day of fasting, rationalizing its implementation in a thinly veiled reference to God's dual power to inflict anguish on and grant mercy to the Israelites in the Book of Exodus, "We are not permitted to furnish an exception to the rule of Divine government, which has prescribed affliction as the discipline of nations as well as individuals".<sup>22</sup> Davis declared another day of fasting in March 1863, calling for Confederates to pray to God that He "will continue his merciful protection over our cause, that he will scatter our enemies, set at naught their evil designs, and that he will graciously restore to our beloved country the blessings of peace and security".<sup>23</sup> The President's initiation of an official governmental policy of religious fasting, humiliation and prayer not only reflected the mutually constituted political and clerical spheres of influence, but the relevance of the Exodus metaphor to Confederate leaders.

Substantiating Davis' assertion of the Confederacy as God's chosen people, the Southern clergy was eager to draw further parallels between the Confederacy and the plight and eventual redemption of the Israelites. The southern clergy was essential in the mobilization of the secession movement and the continuous support of the war effort. Southern Protestant theology and the Confederacy's military and political ambitions became

conflated and the ideologies expounded by the political apparatus reified those of the church, and vice versa. George Rable contends that Confederate preachers sought to make connections between Old Testament events and the Civil War to present a more effective, cathartic message to their audiences. Many diarists were prolific in their recordkeeping of their attendance at weekly church sermons, indicating the biblical chapter and often the verse from which the sermon originated. Eliza Chew French of Spotsylvania County, Virginia, was particularly meticulous in her notes on the preaching of “Mr. K”. On March 4, 1866, the anniversary of Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address, French “went in the afternoon to M—to hear Mr. K. Preached from the 12th chpt of Exodus”.<sup>24</sup> In the twelfth chapter of Exodus, the Israelites were driven out of Egypt. Then, on April 15, 1866, the anniversary of Lincoln’s assassination, “Mr. K” preached from the third chapter of Exodus.<sup>25</sup> In the third chapter of Exodus, God sent Moses to deliver the Israelites from slavery. These are the only references made to sermons from Exodus in the two-year duration of her diary. In his alignment of key moments of the Lost Cause’s trajectory with the Book of Exodus, “Mr. K” assembled a divinely inspired notion of nationhood, offering the Old Testament as the primary source of authenticity and legitimization for the Confederate memory of suffering.

This Exodus-inspired rhetoric was also expressed in more horizontal social relations in the correspondence between families separated by the war. Twenty-one-year-old Charles Fenton James, of the 8th Virginia Infantry Regiment wrote to his sister, Emma, of President Lincoln and the Union army, “Surely their hearts have been hardened, as was Pharaoh’s, and they are rushing blindly to their own destruction”.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, after his imprisonment in Fortress Monroe under suspicion of involvement in the assassination of President Lincoln, Clement Claiborne Clay wrote to his wife, Virginia, “No people, save the Jews, have ever been more oppressed and afflicted than those of the South”.<sup>27</sup> Women’s experience of the front lines of the war effort was mediated through this biblical metaphor expounded by their government, clergy and their male familial relations.

In their references to the Book of Exodus, women may have adopted a prevailing rhetorical strategy exercised by Confederate leaders and their male family members, but they molded it to fit the conditions of their own subjectivity. Political and church leaders united a religious mission of salvation (the Israelites’ flight from Egypt) around a political mission of salvation (the victory of the Confederacy); this rhetoric was used to serve nationalist purposes.<sup>28</sup> Invoking Exodus was a stratagem to secure allegiance to the Confederate cause under the auspices of religion. When Jefferson Davis employed the trope, he did so only in reference to the Confederacy and its people as a whole – “our beloved country” and “our cause” – the parallel was only made to the plural collectivity of the South. Similarly, preachers

exclusively conceived the South's corollary with Israel in terms of a collectivity, equating the Kingdom of Israel with the South and the suffering Israelites with the southern people. Even in personal correspondence to their loved ones on the home front, soldiers adopted politicians and clerics' standard of collectivism. There was no individuality in this rhetoric; Confederate leaders only employed the Exodus metaphor corporately and for nationalist purposes.

In contrast, women diarists almost always employed the metaphor to describe their individual circumstances. Women did not use allusions to Exodus to describe the Confederacy as a whole; they used it to describe their own individual suffering within the Confederacy. That is, women resorted to this metaphor to convey their own distress and peril on the home front. Most often, women used it to depict the crippling scarcity of food and the matriarchs' ongoing struggle to provide nourishment for their families. Household and family maintenance was the province of plantation mistresses; this was their realm of absolute authority during the antebellum period, and it translated into the negotiation of conditions of scarcity and starvation during the war. The diarists did not employ the rhetoric to discuss the suffering of the collective southern people, but to discuss the suffering of themselves and their families on the home front. In this way, women reconfigured this metaphor of national devotion to channel their own hardships.

Planter women also compared their wartime experiences to slavery in secular terms. In addition to her usage of biblical slavery, in April and May 1862, Ida Dulany offered descriptions of her bondage and captivity, in secular terms, interwoven throughout her narrative,

We might as well be caged [...] I scarcely recognize my own identity [...] if in the daily occupation of gardening and looking after the place the loveliness of nature tempts me to forget our bondage for an instant [...] We feel the bitterness of our capture in every way.<sup>29</sup>

Likewise, Sarah Morgan described the peril of her home state of Louisiana in 1862, specifically the Union occupation of Baton Rouge and the vilified leadership of Union General Butler in New Orleans, as congruent with the conditions of serfdom and slavery,

We are serfs; we have forfeited the respect of foreign nations by submitting patiently to our yoke of iron; we are bondsmen, no longer free citizens [...] O degraded Southerners! Where now is your boasted freedom and pride? Fallen, fallen below the level of your meanest slave!<sup>30</sup>

Some diarists selected specific features from antebellum slavery, such as the underground railroad and pass system, to articulate their struggles to travel. In appropriating the term "Underground Railroad" to describe white planter



networks of communication and travel to the North during the Civil War, women diarists applied the language of antebellum enslavement to the wartime restrictions applied to the planter class. Relaying the story of her friend Carro Morrill, Lucy Butler evoked the trope of the Underground Railroad to characterize Morrill's 1863 journey from Virginia to Maine,

Last week, much to our surprise, Carro Morrill made her appearance early one morning, and announced in her intention of starting off on the underground railroad, so she started off in a little covered wagon with other ladies. She was to travel this way until she reached the Potomac where she would stay at the home of the old man who drove the wagon until she could cross the river and make her way home. God grant that she found kind friends and warm hearts to greet her in Maine, and that she had no trials on her way. She declared that nothing would make her take the oath to the northern government.<sup>31</sup>

Likewise, teenager Kate Sperry of Winchester, Virginia referred to the clandestine mail carrier network between the South and the North as the Underground Railroad, "We have an 'underground-railroad' here — letters come and go every day and no one seems to know anything about it".<sup>32</sup> Confederate women appropriated the metaphor for fugitive enslaved persons' journey North to portray their own restrictions on travel and communication during wartime.

Sarah Morgan drew another parallel between her wartime experience and slavery in the institution of passes. In antebellum slavery, enslaved persons were required to obtain a pass from their masters to leave their plantation for a short period of time to visit family on a neighboring plantation or sell their labor outside of the plantation. Likewise, to leave or enter Union-occupied territories during the Civil War, southerners were required to obtain a pass from a northern political or military official granting them passage. This exercise of securing a pass was met with chagrin, and at times outrage, by planter women. In June 1862, Sarah Morgan outlined the process of travel in the Union-occupied South,

No one is permitted to leave without a pass [...] Here is an agreeable arrangement! I saw the 'pass' just such as we give our negroes, signed by a Wisconsin Colonel. Think of being obliged to ask permission from some low ploughman, to go in or out of our own homes!<sup>33</sup>

Whereas planter women held the authority to write and issue passes to enslaved persons in the antebellum years, the Civil War had rescaled their authority and made these women dependent upon the discretion of lower class white men (i.e. "some low ploughman") to sanction their travel.

Like its women diarists, the southern government also implemented the secular enslavement metaphor to portray its collective suffering under the brutality of the North. Addressing the Mississippi State Legislature on

December 26, 1862, Jefferson Davis proclaimed, "We are not engaged in a conflict for conquest, or for aggrandizement, or for the settlement of a point of international law. The question for you to decide is, Will you be slaves or will you be independent?"<sup>34</sup> Speaking to the soldiers of the Confederacy on August 1, 1863, Davis again used the prospect of slavery as a channel for popular support, "Fellow citizens, no alternative is left you but victory, or subjugation, slavery and the utter ruin of yourselves, your families and your country. The victory is within your reach – You need but stretch forth your hand to grasp it".<sup>35</sup> This nonreligious language of slavery and captivity was routinely articulated by the upper echelons of the Confederate political and military apparatus as an appeal for public support and to strengthen Confederate nationalism.

To audiences of Confederate slaveholders, this enslavement metaphor was an effective rhetorical stratagem. Its visceral, emotive connotations of Old Testament and antebellum slavery struck a chord with southern society, molding the hearts and minds of Protestant slaveholding families. While not inventing this metaphor, middle and planter class white women nevertheless adopted and refined it to the conditions and adversities of their own subjectivities. Their renegotiation of the existing metaphor simultaneously legitimized their subjective experience of suffering to a Confederate audience, even if that audience was just themselves reading their own diaries.

However, to those audiences outside of the Confederate slaveholding elite, the use of a rhetoric of enslavement to describe the conditions of the white planter Confederate home front was far more problematic. In terms of ideology, the Confederacy was established and waged a war for the right to own slaves; in terms of everyday life, Confederate leaders and the diarists referenced above were slaveholders or from slaveholding families and interacted with enslaved persons on a regular basis. These Confederates were intimately acquainted with the institution of slavery and they understood enslavement as more than an abstract rhetorical concept. Yet while middle and planter class white women were eager to compare their own wartime subjectivity to enslavement, most diaries did not focus on the everyday conditions of antebellum slavery. At times, diarists commented on slavery at an institutional level. For instance, Susan Cornwall of Burke County, Georgia commented on slavery beyond her own lived experience. She offered slavery as an institution of benevolent paternalism and mutual betterment, and focused on slavery's effect on southern society as a collective, as opposed to its effect on herself as an individual: "While the Northerners profess to see nothing in a state of slavery but degradation for the slave and in the slaveholder we consider it a condition highly honorable to both parties".<sup>36</sup> According to Cornwall, slavery and the Confederacy improved humankind and society as a whole. However, most diarists only commented on their

conversations with and activities of their “servants”. Discussions of enslaved persons were integrated into discussions of their daily routines and responsibilities.<sup>37</sup> Some diarists not only chronicled the roles of the enslaved, but at the same time, self-reverentially praised the role of the planter class in maintaining control and order. Jennie Friend lived at her father’s White Hill plantation just east of Petersburg, Virginia, during the war. Friend was keen to acknowledge her family’s model of slaveholding in the local community: “*our* intercourse with the servants was with checks and bounds; we were not turned over to *them* as those young ones seem to have been”.<sup>38</sup> In a similar vein, according to Mrs. M.E. Garthright, also from Virginia,

As a farewell compliment to the race gliding out of slavery, let me say they were exceptionally temperate. I believe, however, it was due to the restraint put upon them by their owners, more than their high sense of morality.<sup>39</sup>

Still, discussions of slavery, inside or outside of the plantation household, did not tend to be focal points of white planter women’s wartime diaries. This relative silence in these diaries should not be read as ambivalence or opposition to slavery. Recent historiography has shown, through elite white women’s actions and through Works Progress Administration (WPA) interviews with former enslaved persons, white slaveholding women were actively engaged with the administration of the plantation household and slavery, and its attendant processes of violence.<sup>40</sup> These women may not have written about their roles in slavery in detail as they may have considered it too mundane to record.<sup>41</sup> Slavery was not a significant focus of these women’s Civil War diaries, but slavery was a significant feature in women’s wartime lives.

It is important to note that this rhetoric of enslavement in mid-nineteenth-century America is perhaps most often associated not with the Civil War, but with the northern reform movements. Reform campaigns adopted this accessibly poignant discourse to viscerally identify conditions requiring reform with the most visible and urgent national issue of the antebellum period: slavery. For instance, nineteenth-century northern women’s rights campaigners often paralleled the condition of white women as enslaved to their husbands and patriarchal society. The northern women’s rights movement emerged out of the abolition movement and focused on women’s attainment of the full rights of citizenship and political equality with men. The movement confronted such issues as women’s right to divorce, right to keep their wages within a marriage, equal custody rights, property rights, and the right to vote. In 1837, Quaker abolitionist Angelina Grimké, a leader in both the women’s rights and abolitionist reform movements, responded to Catherine Beecher’s “An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism with Reference to the Duty of American Females”. Beecher’s essay was directly addressed to Grimké and opposed the public political

participation of women in the abolitionist movement. In one of a series of responses, Grimké linked the unjust power dynamic oppressing enslaved persons and women as the same breach of the universal human rights contract, "The investigation of the rights of the slave has led me to a better understanding of my own [as a woman]".<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, Frederick Douglass expressed this conflation of the collective social reform projects of temperance and abolitionism, and their respective rhetorical captivities to alcohol and slavery. Delivering a speech entitled, "Temperance and Anti-Slavery" on March 30, 1846 in Paisley, Scotland, Douglass declared,

As I desire, therefore, their freedom from physical chains, so I desire their emancipation from intemperance, because I believe it would be the means — a great and glorious means — towards helping to break their physical chains and letting them go free.<sup>43</sup>

Unlike northern reformers, Confederates were slaveholders themselves and the survival of their new republic was reliant upon the continuation of slavery. Slavery was intertwined with the Confederacy in not only political, economic and social ways, but also in terms of rhetoric.

To conclude, the future of the Confederacy was wedded to the institution of slavery and descriptions of the suffering Confederate home front were wedded to the language of enslavement. Confederate middle and planter class white women used a rhetoric of enslavement to describe their own lived experiences of hardship. Whereas northern reform movements frequently employed the metaphor of enslavement to convey collective inequities in society, and Confederate political and religious leaders later used this metaphor to convey the South's alleged unjust suffering caused by the Union, Confederate women reconfigured this lexicon to describe their own individual experiences of suffering. Particularly from the second year of the war in 1862, after the fervor of secession had ended and the realities of living in a wartime society had become more clear, Confederate planter women used the language of enslavement to depict their own lives on the home front. At times, such Confederate women reinterpreted and rearticulated nationalist metaphors and discourses circulated by Confederate leaders. Recent scholarship has explored white slaveholding women's social and economic engagement with slavery; their engagement with slavery was interlaced with violence and afforded them power in the plantation household. Speaking to this body of work, this article has shown the ways in which white planter women engaged with enslavement in a rhetorical sense to represent and articulate their own wartime experiences. In portraying their wartime situations as akin to the conditions of secular and non-secular enslavement, planter women's diaries reveal how slavery was central to not only their roles in the plantation household, but their own sense of identity; how they saw themselves as individuals could not be divorced from slavery. As both

enslaver and “enslaved”, these planter women framed their wartime identities in the same system of power, violence and degradation they had been instrumental in sustaining before the war.

## Notes

1. This conceptualization of political culture as including women’s actions outside of the electoral sphere was developed by Elizabeth R. Varon in her analysis of women’s conservative politicization in antebellum Virginia. See Elizabeth R. Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 2–4. More recently, Caroline Janney and Stephanie McCurry have applied a similar definition of political culture to include the work of postwar Ladies’ Memorial Associations and wartime lower-class women, respectively. See Caroline E. Janney, *Burying the Dead but Not the Past: Ladies’ Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 5–6; and Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 3–7.
2. This article uses the term ‘slavery’ to refer to the economic, social and political institution of bondage and ‘enslavement’ to refer to women’s language choices.
3. Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019).
4. Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 6–7.
5. Linda Colley investigates the relationship of individual experiences of captivity to British projects of imperialism and expansion. Documenting the capture of British citizens overseas, Colley attempts to refute over-homogenized understandings of the British empire based on the dominant white masculine historical record. In her fusion of “the large-scale, panoramic and global, with the small-scale, the individual, and the particular” Colley pivots the individual voice as central in the formulation of a complete history of the British empire (17). In the context of British empire, these narratives of white British captivity show slippages in British power. This framework of analysis can be applied to wider historical contexts, including the Confederate home front; reading first-person accounts provides another lens to consider collective power structures and systems of governance in a “history from below” framework. See Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600–1850* (London: Pimlico, 2002), 12–20.
6. Kimberly Harrison, “Rhetorical Rehearsals: The Construction of Ethos in Confederate Women’s Civil War Diaries,” *Rhetoric Review* 22 (2003): 245–6.
7. Rebecca Steinitz, *Time, Space, and Gender in the Nineteenth-Century British Diary* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 4.
8. Suzanne Bunkers, “Reading and Interpreting Unpublished Diaries by Nineteenth-Century Women,” *alb: Auto/Biography Studies* 2 (1986): 15. For more information on the life and literary processes of diaries, see Ellen Gruber Garvey, “Anonymity, Authorship and Recirculation: A Civil War Episode,” *Book History* 9 (2006): 159–78.

9. *An Evening When Alone: Four Journals of Single Women in the South, 1827-67*, ed. Michael O'Brien (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993), 3–7.
10. Victoria Stewart, *Women's Autobiography: War and Trauma* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 22. This idea of 'action through narration' is a helpful theoretical contribution to the tenuous triangulated relationship between the author, the reader and the autobiographical text. This is explored in the autobiography scholarship of Philippe Lejeune; see Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, ed. Paul John Eakin, trans. Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).
11. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 37–99.
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## Notes on contributor

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