MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIA: MYTH AS MEMORY

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Introduction: The Myth of Moonlight and Magnolias

"There was the glamorous, distant past of our heritage. Besides this, there was the living, pulsing present. Hence, it was by no means our business to merely preserve memories. We must keep inviolate a way of life."[1]

-Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin

The Southern plantation legend is a part of our national culture: the South as a land of unfailing gentlemen, sweet and devoted ladies, grand balls at large white mansions with the soft rustle of hundreds of silk hoop skirts swaying to the music, faithful and contented servants; a world controlled by honor, noblesse oblige, and decorum. This image has dominated American culture for over one hundred years, beginning immediately after the Civil War with the efforts of white men and women faithful to the Lost Cause, and has remained strong through literature, memoirs, and film. Although many historians would argue that the plantation legend has no basis in reality, I contend that memory cannot come from nothing. There is some truth to the image of moonlight and magnolia, although a great majority of elite southerners, many of whom were women, greatly exaggerated and romanticized that image.

In this thesis, in an effort to understand why the myth is indeed a myth, although one that is based on some real phenomena, I will juxtapose it with an analysis of elite women's status in antebellum Georgia. In this way, I can show where the planter women unearthed the foundations for the plantation legend, while at the same time illustrating

[1] Lumpkin, Katharine Du Pre. The Making of a Southerner. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947) 127.

how they romanticized and embroidered those foundations. Then, I will show why numerous planter women constructed and perpetuated the myth of the Old South through their creation of a collective memory. While many planter women complained about their lives during the antebellum period after the Civil War, their attitudes went through a radical shift as they fashioned and then defended the plantation legend. This reformulation was part of their effort to right the perceived wrongs of wartime, to reconcile their lives with Reconstruction, and to justify to themselves and others the life of the antebellum planter class, and the deaths of their fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons. On a more individual level, many planter women had led extremely complex lives before the war, and by making the past seem simple and romantic they were able to provide themselves with a sense of comfort and high status that was often lacking in their lives after the war.

It was with the Lost Cause and the formation of an elite collective memory that many planter women were first able to make the plantation legend dominant in white American culture. The Cult of the Lost Cause transformed the memory of the Civil War to work to the advantage of the twentieth century South. The Lost Cause espoused the idea that the North may have won, but the South remained the gentleman in the conflict. The Lost Cause ideology slowly romanticized and idealized the world of the antebellum South and continues to do so today. White southerners realized that not only did they have physically to rebuild the south, but they also had to rebuild it mentally, and it was for this purpose that men and women of the planter class established the Cult of the Lost Cause. For many white southerners, this necessitated a reshaping of the facts to correspond with the fortification of white power through the establishment of de jure

segregation. The ideas of the Lost Cause ultimately found their way into popular culture and even into historical scholarship. Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, a history professor at Columbia University during the first half of the twentieth century, began what would become the Phillips school of Southern history with his 1918 book *American Negro Slavery*. In this work, Phillips argued that "slavery was a benign institution—benevolent slave owners created a 'plantation school' to educate backward blacks to the virtues of discipline and productivity."[2] Phillips' work dominated much of southern history for the first half of the twentieth century and his positive images of the Old South, along with those of other southerners, became a part of popular culture and found a captivated audience within white America. Epic stories that portrayed the "moonlight and magnolia" plantation society dominated much of the silver screen, books, and theater and rarely, if ever, dealt with the moral issues of slavery or took the complicated reality of white women's lives seriously.

Regardless of how familiar and friendly these romantic images of the Old South—begun by the Cult of the Lost Cause and continued in popular culture—may be, they are a fictionalized image of the south. The lives of elite southern women that are revealed in their diaries, memoirs and personal letters show that the images of the serene belle and her columned plantation home, though based on certain aspects of the reality, simplify the intricate social dynamics of the antebellum south and neglect to look at how the selective memories of elite southern women influenced this image.

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[2].Clinton, Catherine. Tara Revisited: Women, War, and the Plantation Legend. New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1995) 21.

Many historians have tried to see the issue in one way only—the moonlight and magnolia society either existed or it did not. I argue that it was a little of both: to be sure some planter women did little all day but needle point and imagine what dress they would wear to the next ball, but others managed plantations while dealing with sweltering heat and numerous diseases. Most plantation mistresses were a combination of the wealthy socialite and hardworking housewife, and any attempt to place these women in one category or the other would be a mistake. The antebellum South was a land of contradictions and complexity and by ignoring these aspects one misses the true character of the Old South; yet, it was these same complexities that planter women ignored and suppressed as they helped to generate the memories of the plantation myth. This paper will show how planter women used direct action and subconscious formation of memory to create this shared remembrance of the plantation society in order to combat the perceived chaos and incivility of the post-Civil War era. It will also go beyond the simple characterizations of plantation mistresses that dominate that memory to show the complex status of the elite women of the planter class in the state of Georgia.

In an effort to reconcile the plantation myth with the everyday reality of the plantation mistress and to show why and how these women formed that myth, I analyze three different kinds of primary sources: memoirs, diaries, and letters. The construction of memory is an important aspect in all three of these sources, but especially in the memoirs and diaries that women wrote after the war when the Lost Cause had already been established. Many of these memoirs and diaries, as Catherine Clinton has stated so clearly, are a "'remembrance of things imagined,' some more propagandistic than others,

but confabulations of days gone by, tinted rosy for effect."[3] Moreover, all of the primary sources I use are published, and therefore editors and others contributed to what was put in the book and what was not.

A Note on the Primary Sources

Eliza Frances Andrews was born in 1840 in Wilkes County[4], near Athens, Georgia. Her diary, entitled *The War-Time Journal of a Georgia Girl*, was written during the Civil War years of 1864 and 1865, but was only published in 1908 after it Eliza did some serious editing.[5] She decided to publish her diary as part of the larger effort taking place on a national level, to exonerate the Confederacy and the elite way of life.

Sarah "Sallie" Conley Clayton was born in April of 1845 in Athens, Georgia to one of the wealthiest families in the state.[6] Her family lived on a large plantation in Bartow County, just north of Atlanta. Sallie began writing her memoirs during the early 1900s, but historians have not been able to determine the exact dates. It is clear, however, that when Sallie wrote her memoir, the South of her youth no longer existed. Her memoir begins in 1860 and ends sometime in 1866 and like many of the other southern women in this thesis, Sallie did not present a realistic view of plantation life or the Civil War, choosing instead to present the reader with an idealistic and sentimental image.

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[3] Clinton,Catherine. Half Sisters of History: Southern Women and the American Past. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994) 5.

[4] See map on page 8.

[5] Andrews, Eliza Frances. The War-Time Journal of a Georgia Girl, 1864-1865. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

[6] Conley, Sarah Clayton. Requiem for a Lost City: A Memoir of Civil War Atlanta and the Old South. (Ed. Robert Scott Davis, Jr. Atlanta: Mercer University Press, 1999).

Cornelia Jones Pond was born on her family's plantation in Liberty Country in southeastern Georgia.[7] The nostalgic Cornelia dictated her "recollections" to her daughter when she was sixty-five beginning with her birth in 1834 and ending in 1874, when she was married with four children. Cornelia's purpose in creating her memoir was to bring pleasure to her children and grandchildren. She also wanted to hand down her traditions and values and in doing so she reinforced the dominant images of the plantation myth.

Mary A. H. Gay, from Dekalb Country, wrote her memoir, *Life in Dixie during the War*, in the early 1890s in an effort to "bequeath to posterity the traditions" of the antebellum and Civil War eras.[8] In her memoir, the Civil War emerges as one of the greatest periods in southern history, in which courage and patriotism ruled the day. Mary's memoir is similar to others in that it does not show the negative side of the war or of the social conditions of the South during that time.

Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin's autobiography, *The Making of a Southerner*, was published in 1947, and traced the foundations of her family values and beliefs through six generations, beginning with her great-grandfather. She then looked at how those values affected her own life. She wrote of her experiences in the post-war South and the influence of the Lost Cause on herself and those around her. Katharine Lumpkin's work is most effective in showing elite southerners dedication to the Lost Cause and their subsequent invention of the plantation legend and how that effected the cultural direction of the New South.

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[7] Pond, Cornelia Jones. Recollections of a Southern Daughter: A Memoir by Cornelia Jones Pond of Liberty County. (Ed. Lucinda H. MacKethan. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998).

Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas was born in Columbia County in 1834. She began her journal in 1848 and was dutiful in her writings until 1889. She wrote the journal with the knowledge that it was for her children and while writing her entries, she often self-edited. One of the phrases mentioned repeatedly throughout the diary is, "There are some thoughts we utter not. Deep treasured in our inmost heart. Ne'er revealed and ne'er forget."[9] This is indicative of her writing style in that she often omitted or edited some of the events in her daily life.

The rest of the sources that I use, including the Jones family letters (Liberty County), the Bird family letters (Hancock County), and the diary of Dolly Lunt Burge (Newton County) were not published until well after the Civil War and were not edited by the writers or their families.[10] These sources reveal the intricacies of elite women's lives and show how the Lost Cause embedded the plantation myth into southern culture.

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[8] Gay, Mary Ann Harris. Life in Dixie During the War. (Atlanta: Constitution Job Office, 1892) 5.
[9] Thomas, Ella Gertrude Clanton. The Secret Eye: The Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1848-1889. (Ed. Virginia Ingraham Burr. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1990) 128.
[10] Myers, Robert Manson, ed. The Children of Pride: A True Story of Georgia and the Civil War. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972). Rozier, John B., ed. The Granite Farm Letters: The Civil War Correspondence of Edgeworth and Sallie Bird. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1988.) Burge, Dolly Lunt. The Diary of Dolly Lunt Burge, 1848-1879. (Ed. Christine Jacobson Carter. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1997.)

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Why Study Elite Women?

The question that often comes to mind when studying the elite class, and especially elite women, is why them? Why should such a small portion of southern society, and one that seemed to have virtually no influence in the social, economic, and political realm, even be studied? The answer is actually quite simple; these women did have great influence on the path that the pre and post-Civil War South took as they shaped the elite's collective memory of the plantation society. That memory, in turn, influenced southern education, literature, attitudes and culture until the present.

Although plantation mistresses did not constitute the majority of Georgian women, they were major players in upholding the southern cultural system. Anne Firor Scott states that elite "women, like slaves, were an intrinsic part of the patriarchal dream. If plantation ladies did not support, sustain, and idealize the patriarch, if they did not believe in and help create the happy plantation . . . who would? If women, consciously or unconsciously, undermined the image designed to convince the doubting world that abolitionists were wrong, what then?"[11] Elite southern ladies played an intrinsically important role in plantation society and by looking at their lives, the reality behind the southern myth can be discovered. The importance of memory and the objectives of the Lost Cause cannot be ignored lest a major aspect of these women's lives after the war be neglected. These women accepted, and even upheld, the patriarchy of the Old South before the war, but they continued to maintain its legitimacy with the Lost Cause and the formation of the plantation myth.

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[11] Scott, Anne Firor. Making the Invisible Women Visible. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984) 176.

Southern society was remarkably class-conscious, and although the planter class did not dominate numerically, they did dominate both socially and culturally, especially in creating the plantation legend. As Eliza Andrews remarked in her memoir, the elite were like, "the ripple mark left on the sand that shows where the tide came in, and the simple undergrowth of forest gives a character to the landscape without which the most carefully-drawn picture would be incomplete."[12] Elite women reflected the ideals of southern society, and even the minute details of their lives are important for understanding those ideals. These southern women's experiences, behavior, and values were different from their male counterparts, and to ignore them would be to ignore a substantial part of the planter class. To describe sufficiently the social situation of the antebellum South, historians must understand elite white women. In understanding their perspective on southern society and culture, one will have a fuller understanding of the antebellum south and of why and how these women formed and maintained the plantation myth.

Historiography

Although this thesis does not assert that the women it discusses epitomize the experience of all the elite slaveholding women in the south, one should not regard it as unrepresentative of the elite southern woman's experiences in the pre- and post-Civil War. It is an attempt to define the plantation myth, how it began and why it is still perpetuated today and to discover the complexity of the southern lady that is hidden behind the simplicity and idealism of the myth. While many of these diaries, letters and

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[12] Andrews 57.

memoirs present an exclusive and narrow view of life, these prejudices are important in understanding the motivations and ideals of the planter class—a class that continues to govern our image of the antebellum south. The planter class was an extremely small, yet powerful and cohesive group, which according to the women themselves "dominated Southern sentiments and for years dictated the policy of the nation."[13]

Southern elite women and their influence on society were long neglected in the secondary literature, until Anne Firor Scott's groundbreaking book, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930.* Scott's theories on the complexities of the planter woman's life reflect my own findings most closely and so have served as an important foundation for this thesis. Scott's purpose was to "describe the culturally defined image of the lady" and the realities of these women's lives that were contradictory to that image.[14] She describes southern women as practical and resilient in a time when every aspect of their lives was set up to restrict them.

In *The Southern Lady*, Scott argued that the southern woman railed against her prescribed role within the cult of ladyhood, but she neglects to point out their influence in upholding the ideals of the southern lady after the Civil War with the Lost Cause. Scott does admit that the characterization of the southern lady as a woman of "softness, purity, and spirituality" did not describe the intricacy of a plantation mistress's life. She failed. however, to explain how this myth of the lady survived or why the elite women helped to continue the ideals themselves when, according to Scott, they were so opposed to them. Scott did not make clear why the cult of ladyhood continued to trap southern women

[13] Andrews 2.

even after the breakdown of southern society after the Civil War and, to some extent, still does today. Scott has argued that the Civil War emancipated the southern woman and allowed her to escape from the patriarchy of the plantation society, but she does not explain why these same women were so active in sustaining the ideals and morals of that patriarchal society.

In *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South*, published 12 years later, Catherine Clinton attempted to reconstruct the world of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century elite white woman. She focused on the period from 1780 to 1835 in seven seaboard states of the plantation south (Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana) in her effort to debunk the "pageantry of days gone by—chivalrous cavaliers and belles in hoop skirts."[15] Unfortunately, by using such terms, Clinton reinforced the myth of the plantation legend rather than destroying it. She did, however, point out that women were not simply dependent beings, but effectively managed many aspects of plantation life, such as the kitchens, larder, and gardens, whereas other historians, like Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, have argued that most of the work was done by slaves.

Clinton's main theme was that of "parallel oppression" in which "southern women suffered from a lack of freedom that was, in a certain sense, analogous to that of slaves."[16] This extreme simplification of southern society neglected the fact that, although women were oppressed in several areas of their lives, they enjoyed the benefits

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[14] Scott, Anne Firor. The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970) x.
[15] Clinton, Catherine. The Plantation Mistress: Women's World in the Old South. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982) xi
[16] Clinton, Plantation Mistress, 176.

of owning slaves along with their husbands. brothers, and fathers. The institution of slavery and benefits of relative wealth spared elite women much of the hardship and labor of women of the lower classes. Clinton ignored the fact that most white women of the planter class accepted the life they were given and, rather than protesting its drawbacks, found solace in other aspects of their lives, such as religion, class status, and motherhood. Clinton also failed to connect, with any conviction, elite women to the construction of the plantation myth and their motivations for aiding in this construction.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese moved away from Clinton's idea of the "parallel oppression" of both white and black women in *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South.* Like Scott, Fox-Genovese stressed the importance of elite white women's support of the plantation system. In Fox-Genovese's view, women of the planter class were not victims but beneficiaries of the institution of slavery and often found ways to make it work more efficiently. She used the term paternalism, instead of patriarchy, to emphasize the fact that the male master viewed his domination of both wife and slave as legitimate. Throughout *Within the Plantation Household*, Fox-Genovese continually used the terms "ladies" and "servants," perpetuating the plantation myth that white women were privileged and black slaves protected under this paternalistic system.

According to Fox-Genovese, the goal of plantation mistresses was "to order, persuade, or cajole servants to do assigned tasks properly," and she dismissed the idea that to instruct and manage more than twenty slaves was no small task for a woman with

little to no training.[17] For Fox-Genovese, plantation mistresses completely accepted the social conventions of the time and felt no discontentment: "Overwhelmingly, they supported slavery and its constraints as the necessary price for their own privileged position. They emerge . . . as remarkably attractive people who loved their children, their husbands, their families, and their friends and who tried to do their best by their slaves, but who accepted and supported the social system that endowed them with power and privilege over black women."[18] She oversimplified the life of elite southern women and their place in society by ignoring the contradictions that ruled their world and invoking the myth of the plantation legend even while trying to discover the truth about elite women.

In *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*, Drew Gilpin Faust described how elite Southern women during the Civil War longed to return to the old model of life where they were always protected and provided for. She outlined their disillusionment with the institution of slavery and their decreasing faith in the Confederacy, which she argues, may have contributed to the South's defeat. In my own research, I did not find that southern women's weariness of the war contributed to the South's defeat. The diaries, letters, and memoirs of these women show their supreme dedication to the Confederate cause and at no point did their frustration with the war elevate to a level that could have influenced the war's outcome. Faust described elite southern women who viewed the war as a burden on their gentility and their lack of male protection caused them to resent the institution of slavery because they

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[17] Fox-Genovese, Elizabeth. Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the South. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988) 115.

found it a hardship. Faust revealed the southern lady as plagued by ambiguity, conflict and repression during the war and described the loss of her pride and social status after the war. For Faust, like Fox-Genovese, southern ladies reveled in a society that protected and shielded them, and they had no yearning for a different kind of life. Unlike during subsequent wars, women did not seize opportunities for empowerment; rather, they resented the Confederacy's inability to care for them. According to many of its promoters, southern men were fighting the Civil War to protect the delicacy of women from the immorality of the North, yet the war itself was endangering the very ideas that defined southern women as ladies.

Southern society expected plantation women to be docile and pure, but they also had to be competent mothers, wives, and managers. The elite plantation society defined women in remarkably contradictory terms. In turn, this society created complex women who had to combine two paradoxical images of what a woman should be into a functional ideal that they strove to attain. The male portion of the plantation society wanted to be able to present their women as perfect southern ladies, but realistically plantation women had to be capable and hardworking in order for the society to survive. Consequently, antebellum women's diaries, letters and memoirs reveal inner turmoil and confusion as they attempted to reconcile their two differing roles into one—a complexity that the secondary literature has yet to capture. The secondary literature has also failed to explain why these same women went on to form one of the most well known myths in Southern Culture: that of the belle, her beau, and their uncomplicated world of moonlight and magnolias. This thesis follows in the tradition of Anne Firor Scott's deeper explanation

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[18] Fox Genovese 243.

of the lives of plantation mistresses, but also adds analysis of the memories and consciousnesses of these women to explain the continuing influence of the plantation myth on popular culture and the white collective memory.

Chapter I: The Material Culture of the Plantation Mistress

The English established the colony of Georgia in 1733 to protect the state of South Carolina against the Spanish and "savages" of Florida but also to promote silk culture and a variety of utopian social reforms. Settlers soon found out that silk did not flourish in the southern colony but that commercial agriculture did, and it soon became the mainstay of Georgia's economy. Georgia was the poorest and most uncivilized of the colonies that joined in the American Revolution and in the 1800s was still considered a frontier state.

By the 1820s, cotton had become king in Georgia and agriculture was flourishing, drawing more settlers to the state. In 1820 there were 340,989 people living in Georgia (this number includes both whites and slaves). By 1840, the population was 691,392 and by 1860, it had almost doubled to 1,057,248. The invention of the cotton gin in 1793, made it was much more economically feasible to grow cotton, and the demand for slaves increased dramatically.[19] In 1820, there were 148,656 slaves; in 1840 that number had grown to 280,944; and in 1860, the 462,198 slaves in Georgia consisted of half of the total population of the state. By the year 1826, Georgia was the world's chief cotton producer, and from 1821 to 1860 cotton production dramatically increased from 90,000 bales to 701,840 bales per year. Most of the large plantations using slave labor concentrated on cotton production, although their owners constituted an extremely small sector of the white population. While Georgia did produce several crops—such as corn, which was consumed within the state and rarely exported, and rice—the Georgia

[19] Clinton, Plantation Mistress 38.

plantation was founded on the production of cotton.[20] Of the 62,003 farms in Georgia only six percent of those (or about 3,594) had over 500 acres and a little less than two percent (about 900) of the farms contained more than 1,000 acres. In 1860, 3500 individuals, less than half of one percent of the total population, owned twenty or more slaves. Only 212 Georgian plantations housed more than 100 slaves, and only 23 had over 200 slaves. Regardless of the plantation myth, large, self-supporting plantations with several hundred slaves did not dominate the antebellum south.

Most of the large plantations were located in the Georgia Piedmont where upland cotton flourished. The production of cotton was largely dependent on slave labor and consequently strengthened the hold of the slave economy on the South, especially in Georgia. In Georgia most of the elite did not have an extensive history of wealth and privilege and by today standards would be referred to as the *nouveau riche*. Although there were a few families, such as the Jones family of Liberty County, that could be considered the "old money" of the state, the majority of the elite "were much more bourgeois than aristocratic."[21] Most of the elite lived in rather modest houses, not in the grand pillared mansions so often pictured in books and movies. In her book about her travels through antebellum Georgia, Emily Burke describes one such house and living arrangements:

> There was a paling enclosing all the buildings belonging to the family and all the house servants. In the center of this enclosure stood the principal house . . . It was only one story high, though much taller than buildings of the same description in the North. It was divided into four apartments below and two in the roof and furnished with broad piazzas . . . In this the

[20] Coleman, Kenneth, ed. A History of Georgia. (2nd ed. Athens: The University of Georgia Press. 1991) 162-164.
[21] Coleman 174.

> father of the family and all the females lodged. The next house of importance was the one occupied by the steward of the plantation and where all the white boys belonging to the family had their sleeping apartments.

Along with the main house, most large plantations contained a schoolhouse, kitchen, storehouse, corn-house, stables, hen house, dog kennel, slave quarters, and several gardens. The cook, washerwomen and the milkmaid also had separate houses where they stored all of their supplies.[22] As Katherine Lumpkin has stated, plantations were like "a community and business rolled into one."[23] Plantations usually needed to grow enough food to feed the white family as well as all the slaves, so a fair portion of the land was devoted to gardens.

Although the image of the spoiled southern lady is a persistent aspect of the plantation legend, most of planter women did not live in large mansions with a servant at hand to do their bidding. In fact, most of these women found themselves in fairly dilapidated houses that were constantly in need of repair. It was only with the Lost Cause and the effort of many elite southern women that the plantation myth began to take shape.

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[22] Burke, Emily. Reminiscences of Georgia in the 1840s: Pleasure and Pain. (Savannah: The Beehive Foundation, 1991) 36 and Fox-Genovese 103.
[23] Lumpkin 22.

Chapter II: The Foundations of the Myth

Women and the Law

A southern elite woman was subordinate to men for her entire life, first to her father, until the time of her marriage, and then her husband, and if her husband died or abandoned her, her father or brothers became her keepers once more. Many of these women realized that much of their lives was controlled and dictated by the men in it and sometimes voiced their frustrations with their lot in life. Yet, with the onset of the Lost Cause and the formation of the plantation myth, women idealized their subordination into a type of protection that guarded them from all the evils of the world.

The subordination of a woman had long found support in the Christian doctrine that dominated most aspects of Anglo-American life in the New World colonies. The inequality of women found in the Bible was adopted into English common law, and that same cultural pattern came to the New World with the explorers and settlers, eventually finding its way into Georgia law. The Bible declares that women should be "submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master."[24] It followed that women should submit to their husbands as they did to the Lord "for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church . . . Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything."[25] As Adam was formed first, the woman became a sinner and could only be saved "through

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[24] I Peter 3:6.
[25] Ephesians 4:22-24.

childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety."[26] Paul ordered women to keep silent in church for "they are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says." If women wanted to ask questions, they should ask their husbands at home and not in public for such questioning before others was considered disgraceful and against the law of God.[27] Paul went on to declare, "a woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent."[28]

Most of these ideas were incorporated into canon law and subsequently into English common law, which became the basis for Georgia law. These traditional ideals of patriarchy and the supposed inferiority of women defined the majority of the law regarding women during the period from 1787 to 1872 that Joan Hoff has described as one of "constitutional neglect." According to the law and social belief, women's inferiority rendered them incapable of accomplishing most tasks within the public sphere and restricted them to childbearing and rearing. The law placed white southern women on a pedestal of morality, propriety and femininity and expected them to combat the inherent immorality of the men around them.[29]

In theory, marriage was to be an equal exchange in which women gave up all her property and independence in return for the protection and support of her husband. Like many states, however. Georgia adopted William Blackstone's inherently unequal principle of the unity of husband and wife (1795) that declared:

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[26] I Timothy 2:13-15.
[27] I Corinthians 14:34.
[28] I Timothy 2:11-13.
[29] Hoff. Joan. Law, Gender and Injustice: A Legal History of U.S. Women. (New York: New: New York University Press. 1991) 119.

> By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, or protection, and cover she performs everything: and is therefore called in our law-French a *femme-covert* . . .under the protection and influence of her husband, her baron, or lord . . . a man cannot grant anything to his wife or enter into covenant with her: for the grant would suppose her separate existence: and to covenant with her would be to covenant with himself.[30]

The Georgia Code of 1861, confirmed that "the husband is the head of the family and the wife is subject to him: her civil existence is merged into the husband's, except so far as the law recognizes her separately, either for her own protection, or for her benefit, or for the preservation of public order."[31] It seems as if Georgia lawmakers paraphrased the words and thoughts of Paul on the status of women and made these concepts the basis for the status of women in the legal system.

The South adhered more rigidly to these ideals than the North because the idea of the lady and gentility was such an important aspect of southern society. In the South, the hierarchy and paternalism of the plantation system was upheld by an established agreement between elite white men and women in which women took on a subordinate role in exchange for a guarantee of protection, and this agreement was reinforced by the law.[32] Many elite women accepted and reveled in this protectionism. As Ella Thomas wrote in 1855, "Combining such moral qualitys, such an affectionate heart, with just such a master will as suits my woman's nature, for true to my sex. I delight *in looking up* and

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[30] Blackstone, William. Commentaries on the Laws of England, 1765. (Vol. 1, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) 430-433.
[31] Boatwright, Eleanor Miot. Status of Women in Georgia, 1783-1860. (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1994).
[32] Faust, Genovese, Clinton and Scott.

love to feel my woman's weakness protected by a man's superior strength."[33] Sallie Bird advised her daughter to "Love your Father supremely. Love him next to your God. He is far worthier than I am."[34] Elite women believed that their relationship to their husband was much like their relationship to God and as such, they felt that they should defer to their husband's authority in all things.

Until 1861, free women of Georgia had the right to vote. The original charter did not deny them that right, and although the constitution of 1777 restricted suffrage to males, those of 1789 and 1798 did not. This did not mean that women voted or that the male leaders meant them to do so; however, the fact that the law did not explicitly define the political status of women is indicative of their political insignificance in Georgia. It was with the constitution of 1789 that women first gave up all property rights when they were married, and this remained largely unchanged until the mid-nineteenth century. During this time, numerous economic downturns plagued the United States, which prompted passage of the antebellum Married Women's Property Acts in all of the southern states.

The North granted women legal rights, including wage legislation and personal estate access, earlier than the South, while the South passed the aforementioned property acts earlier. While the North passed laws that actually benefited women, the South passed laws that in theory were to help women, but were really for the advantage of men. As Marylynn Salmon writes, "In comparison to northerners, southerners behaved in an overprotective, patriarchal fashion because they placed so much emphasis on female

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[33] Thomas 122.
[34] Rozier 209.

helplessness. By preventing women from action for themselves, they effectively kept women in a subservient position."[35] These property acts emphasized the importance of equity procedures and were in the interests of elite men more than elite women. State legislatures passed these acts in an effort to protect women from marauding husbands by keeping a woman's property separate from her husband's after marriage. The acts did not permit women to sell, sue or sign contracts without the consent of their husbands. Married Women's Property Acts were not passed in Georgia until after the Civil War, and as Ella "laughingly told some gentleman the bill securing a married woman's property had been passed so that most of the women in Georgia had nothing to lose—like locking the stable door after the Horse had been stolen."[36]

Elite women could find some relief with the legal system of equity. Equity allowed a woman's property to be freed from her husband's control and creditors, either in the marriage contract, or in a will or deed of an estate, but women rarely took advantage of this system because it required foresight and an extensive knowledge of the legal system.[37] As a rule, the South was slower than other regions of the country to grant rights to white women, but it did grant women property rights earlier than the North did. The South was predominantly an agricultural society, which made the need to provide women a way to inherit land free from the debts of their husband more important than in the industrial North

The legal status of women is an important part of understanding how women were regarded and how the law established their role in society, but it is certainly not the only

[35] Salmon, Marylynn. Women and the Law of Property in Early America. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press) 39.

indicator of an elite woman's status or situation. As Eleanor Boatwright stated, "A married woman's position in Georgia before 1860 was always hazardous, frequently humiliating, and often tragic. Her true status, nevertheless, was far more commonly determined by her character, that of the man she married, their personal relations to each other, the use they made of the law, and even by public opinion, than by the statutes themselves."[38] One cannot start and end with the law, for although it gives one a good idea of an elite woman's role in society, it does not define the complete status of elite women in Georgia.

[36] Thomas 319.
[37] Salmon 40.
[38] Boatwright 65.

Education of a Belle: The 3R's, Social Status, and a Wedding Ring

Because women of the lower classes usually received little to no formal education, a woman's educational accomplishments became a symbol of the upper classes and an important part of her status within the planter elite. As Emily Burke remarked in her *Reminiscences of Georgia*, "The great expense that attends an education in the Southern states has placed an impassable barrier between the rich and poor."[39] During the late antebellum period "men of the planter class saw good sense in cultivating accomplished as well as ornamental daughters, for education gave these girls a concrete advantage on the marriage market."[40] Today, there is a pervasive belief that women are mentally equal to men and that both should receive the same type of education in order to prepare for a career in either the private or public realm. In the antebellum era, however, education was used to increase a woman's social status and better her chances for a beneficial marriage and prepare her for a life as a mother and wife. As Judge Herschel V. Johnson remarked to the graduating class of the Wesleyan Female College of Mason in 1853: "Thus educated, with reference to her sphere of action and her mission—her social and domestic relations, how charming and how attractive is woman! How noble as wife and mother!"[41]

At no point during the antebellum period was a woman's education equal to that of a man's, although during the late eighteenth century there were vast improvements in the realm of female education. During this time, approximately thirty-five academies, seminaries, institutes, and colleges for women were formed, and one, Wesleyan College,

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[39] Burke 71.
[40] Clinton, Plantation, 124.

gained national recognition.[42] Until the late antebellum period, women of the planter class studied only the Bible and other religious texts while their male counterparts studied the classics, philosophy, history and mathematics. Therefore, most elite women had a low reading level and poor writing skills. Even as female education was greatly improved, its principal goals were still "the '3 R's,' social status, and a wedding ring."[43] There was some concern that if women received the same education that men received they would be unsexed, and so schools selected their subjects with the intent to "soften while they strengthen."[44] Even as a woman's educational attainment increased and improved, it still centered on the Scriptures and a woman's republican responsibilities of motherhood, family ties and the maintenance of her social position.

Most female institutions concentrated on reading and writing and especially quality letter writing, including good penmanship, as most plantation mistresses were in charge of their family's correspondence. In addition, female institutions taught basic arithmetic, so women would be able to manage the most simple of the household accounts. Ornamental subjects such as music, dance, drawing, and sometimes sewing or embroidery were also a large part of the female education. The knowledge of languages was also important, but rather than the Greek and Latin of a male's education, emphasis was placed on learning French because it was considered to be a fitting language for elite women to learn.

Although the state of women's education was distressing on the national level, southern women, on the whole, received even less education than did northern women.

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[41] Fox-Genovese 257.
[42] Coleman 178.

"As a general thing," Emily Burke wrote in 1834, "pupils in the South are not as far advanced in intellectual attainments at the ages of ten and twelve as the same class of students at the North."[45] Elite attitudes dominated the women's educational system in the South and designated a woman's education as way to cultivate and decorate them for the marriage market: "A good education will & prepare you to adorn the station your wealth will call you to occupy."[46] Sallie Bird pleaded with her daughter to "*Study, study*, oh my little one, study," for she understood that in southern society, "an uncultivated women is so unlovely."[47] Sallie's husband was of the same mind, and wrote to their daughter in 1863 that, "As the beauties the diamond shows are only made apparent by an exceeding high polish, so the mind can only be made capable of following the loftier . . . emotions by rubbing off the coarser and lower aspirations."[48] In the South, education was primarily a tool elite women used to elevate themselves above the common masses and to ready themselves for a proper marriage match. In the North, by contrast, there was a commitment to training women to work outside the home, mainly as teachers. In addition, education was considered important to integrate the lower classes, especially people from rural areas and immigrants, into society.

Along with maintaining high social status with their education, religion was an extremely important part of a woman's education. Most schools required that the students attend church and prayer meetings several times a week along with several classes that studied the Scriptures intensely. Ella Thomas attended the Methodist

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[43] Boatwright 5.
[44] Boatwright 5.
[45] Burke 74.
[46] Burge xxxii.
[47] Rozier

Wesleyan College, and much of her time there was concerned with religion. Ella and her schoolmates would often conduct revivals and prayer meetings in their free time in addition to the school-sanctioned religious activities. Her diary, written during her time at Wesleyan, rarely described the non-religious aspect of her education.[49] On her graduation day Ella gave a talk entitled "Learn from the Book of the Lord; drink from the well of his wisdom" emphasizing the dominance of religion in her education and her everyday life.[50]

The fact that women received an education at all during the antebellum era might at first glance seem to be liberating, but like the law, it was insufficient and served to uphold the hierarchy and paternalism of the South. The education of elite women in the South did not result in an increase in the number of women involved with teaching and social services, nor was it cause for any social reform in the slave-owning South. As Clinton has argued, "However equal women might be proclaimed to be in spiritual and intellectual terms, men were still the acknowledged authorities in social, political, and economic spheres."[51] Their education did not train them for the numerous responsibilities that they would have on plantations. " I am inclined to think that we are wrong so far as the education of our women is concerned," Ella Thomas wrote in 1861. "It is apt to be too superficial and our young girls leave school *too soon*."[52] Overall, a woman's education in the antebellum era was inadequate and inapplicable in their later lives.

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[48] Rozier 143.
[49] Thomas 82-92.
[50] Thomas 90.
[51] Clinton, Plantation Mistress, 137.
[52] Thomas 198.

Religion: Solace and Ambiguity

God and religion are prevalent in the elite women's journals and diaries and they constituted a major part of their lives and ideology. When she was just fourteen, Ella read "ten chapters in the Bible" before going to bed after she had already attended two services that morning, and this did not seem to be an unusual occurrence.[53] Although religion was certainly a part of her youth, it was not until Ella went to Wesleyan College that religion became a daily concern in her life. Much of Ella's time in school was dedicated to the conversion of her friends along with the strengthening of her own faith through Bible reading and prayer. Ella was not atypical. Her experience was similar to that of many of her female counterparts in that religion was always a part of their lives, but it was with the religious teachings they received in school that God became a major influential force in their everyday lives. God provided women with happiness in a time when they could find little joy in much else.

The immorality of the men around them greatly disturbed many elite women, as well as other women of the planter class, and to know that her own husband's morality was questionable (Ella strongly believed that her husband were sexually involved with several of their slaves) created conflict for Ella. These women turned to religion to understand and resolve this tension. Only three years into her marriage Ella's thoughts were influenced by her husband's infidelity, "I am as strong an advocate for purity, perfect purity in women as anyone can be and yet I think it is time to change some of our ways of thinking and acting—It is a shame that what is considered a venial thing in a man should in a worldly point of view *damn a woman* and shut her out from every avenue of

employment."[54] Southern women were well aware of the sexual double standard that allowed men sexual freedom while ruining a woman both socially and spiritually if she took that same freedom. Ella's relationship and experience with religion was representative of many of the women in the planter class and shows the innate complexity of the lives these women led.

Religion, the church and the morality it dictated created an inherent contradiction in the lives of women of the planter classes. As Eleanor Boatwright wrote, "The antebellum social and ecclesiastical order in Georgia . . . inconsistently expected a woman to find her greatest expression in the Church, and demanded that she refrain from expressing herself while there."[55] Religion directed many aspects of a plantation mistress's life, including appropriate dress, manners and work. Many churches restricted their female members from dancing, attending theater, or other such activities, which they considered corrupt, for they were commanded "'to take up the cross,' be self denying—and *avoid even the appearance of being evil.*"[56] This was a great source of inner turmoil for many women; while they were to be the moral exemplars, avoiding even the appearance of evil many of their male counterparts were engaged in sexual exploits that were clearly against the teachings of the Bible. Plantation mistresses worried constantly about the kind of afterlife their men would have, and women encountered feelings of depression at the thought of the sins of their male peers. Women were to be the moral bastions of an inherently immoral society, and this was not an easy task for most plantation mistresses. Catherine Clinton has argued that "If plantation

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[53] Thomas 81.
[54] Thomas 152.

mistresses could live above reproach, their husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers could boast of the superiority of their civilization" and this placed a large burden on elite women as they worked hard to maintain their religious virtue and moral purity.[57]

Although it did provide one of the only sources of consolation for women, religion could also result in feelings of frustration and self-doubt as plantation mistresses often saw themselves falling short of their moral standards. Women were engaged in self-scrutiny as they looked for religious contentment, and this self-scrutiny often resulted in feelings of guilt and shame for their perceived failures as the upholders of morality. As one woman wrote, "Again have I to bless God for His goodness toward me for His long suffering and mercy to one of the most wayward of human creatures the most erring of mortals. Here I live day after day feeding upon His bounty upheld by his gracious hand & Oh what a thankless heart! What a cold selfish mortal."[58] Many of these women were highly committed to their faith and reveled so much in the sense of purpose and direction that it provided them that any loss of faith was disturbing for them and could result in depression and debilitating self-doubt. If a plantation woman lost her faith she lost much of the foundation for her life, and that was devastating.

Although religion constricted the lives of these women in many ways, it also provided an emotional outlet and a sense of purpose. Many women had no one with whom they could discuss their problems, so God and religion became a great source of comfort. As Ella wrote in 1864, "I don't think Mr Thomas [her husband] understands or is interested in my struggles and trials. He listens sometimes when my 'Heart unfolds its

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[55] Boatwright 111.
[56] Thomas 124.

leaves' and I read to him some of its pages. Listens. but that is all."[59] Ella turned to prayer to ease her worries because her husband could not provide her with any solace. Religion also gave women a sense of their significance within society. As "the guardians of virtue" women had to balance the ideals of Christianity with the ideals of the antebellum south and slavery "and the deception, self-deception, and contradiction involved imposed considerable strain on their emotional lives."[60]

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[57] Clinton. Plantation Mistress 89.
[58] Burge 24.
[59] Thomas 227.
[60] Clinton, Plantation Mistress 92.

Women and Their Slaves: A Peculiar Relationship

It is quite clear to the majority of historians and the public that slaves led an extremely harsh and oppressive life, but the image of the attentive and devoted slave, epitomized by the mammy image, still exists. This image comes from the writings of the white elite in the antebellum period, and was then reinforced with the Lost Cause and the plantation legend. Often, the diaries, letters, and memoirs of plantation mistresses defined slavery, when it still existed, as beneficial to the slaves themselves, while being a burden both physically and morally for the elite of the planter class. With the post-war creation of the plantation myth, many elite women chose to ignore all of the negative aspects of slavery and present it as a charitable institution that benefited everyone.

Most plantation mistresses had grown up with the institution of slavery and accepted it as a matter of course in their adulthood. For many southern elite women, the institution of slavery was justified by the fact that many of their Christian ancestors had owned slaves. As one Dolly Burge wrote in 1864:

> I have often heard Mr. Burge say that if he could see that it was sinful for him to own slaves, if he felt that it was wrong, he would take them where he could free them he would not sin for his right hand. The purest & holiest of men have owned them & I can see nothing in the Scriptures which forbids it. I have never bought nor sold & have tried to make life easy & pleasant to those that have been bequeathed me by the dead. I have never ceased to work, but many a Northern housekeeper has a much easier time than a Southern matron with her hundred negroes.[61]

These same concepts were reinforced and then passed on to future generations, furthering the influence of the plantation legend. As Katharine Lumpkin wrote in 1945, "It is true. I also knew here, as I had always known it, our 'peculiar institution' which was our

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[61] Burge 156.

heritage from slavery. But had it not also been fashioned by the hands of our fathers, who in passing it on to us told us to maintain it?"[62] Elite women's ancestors had given the slave system its legitimacy, and they did not feel that it could be or should be challenged.

For most of the southern elite, both the law of the land and the law of God protected the institution of slavery, and they saw it as their duty to be guardians over the black race. Many white southerners also felt that it was hypocritical of northerners to condemn the institution of slavery, if it had only ended in the North because it was not economically practical, when they received, indirectly, its economic benefits. As one diarist wrote, "The Yankee held slaves also, but in his climate he could not make them profitable so they were freed."[63] Southerners felt that there was a balance between slave and master, for in return for their work, slaves received a home, food, spiritual guidance and care when they were sick. To the white southerner, the slave was happy to fulfill his part in the southern social order.

With the Lost Cause, slavery became part of white southerners' romantic ideals of the antebellum past in which slavery was beneficial to both slave and slave-owner, whereas before the war many elite women had found slavery to be a burden. The plantation legend was also built upon justifications for slavery that were developed before the war, such as the idea that whites had civilized and Christianized the slave who, without the institution, would have remained primitive and backward. Blacks were simple, childlike beings who needed the guidance of the intellectually and morally

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[62] Lumpkin 178.
[63] Clayton 170.

superior whites to prosper but if left to their own devices would have degenerated. This misleading image of the kind white masters and the happy slaves perpetuated the idea that slaves were rarely treated unkindly because it would have been asinine to mistreat such a hardworking asset. The supposed joviality of the slaves in their quarters was another sign of their inherent happiness with their position in society.

After the war, elite women often considered each slave to be a "little pet" ready and willing to do the mistress's bidding.[64] They considered these pets ignorant and uneducable and in dire need of the protection and guidance that only the plantation system could provide for them: "[Negroes were a] poor depraved race that under no circumstances take care of itself in the way of carrying on a government, and if they [the Yankees] don't believe it all they have to do is remove him from the white man's influence and example and see that back to barbarism with few exceptions he would go."[65] Most elite women held onto the belief that slavery was for the benefit of Negroes and that without it they would revert to their savage ways, endangering the white people of the South.

This thinking also led to comforting images of slaves, like the "cheerful" and childlike Sambo or the maternal Mammy, who often was "more like a member of the white family than a negro."[66] One can still see the Mammy image today as with Aunt Jemima in her red handkerchief and is still an integral part of the plantation legend. In her memoir, Cornelia Pond wrote fondly of the slave that cared for Cornelia and her sisters:

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[64] Andrews 179.
[65] Clayton 169.

> Mother used to leave us at home at the plantation on very cold Sundays in the care of 'Mum Willoughby,' a much-loved and trusted servant belonging to my father. A happy day we always had. When Mother would return, we would follow 'Mum Willoughby' to the gate begging her not to leave us.[67]

For amusement, many plantation mistresses would watch the slaves in their quarters during their celebrations or religious events because they found their simplicity entertaining and interesting. Women of the planter class saw slaves as savages with exotic and eye-pleasing rituals, but possessing no real culture or refinement: "After dinner I took Mecca over to the Praise House to hear the negroes sing. I wish I was an artist so I could draw a picture of the scene. Alfred, one of the chief singers, is a gigantic creature, more like an ape than a man. I have seen pictures of African savages in books of travel that were just like him."[68] Eliza Andrews went on to describe the women as being "picturesque and happy," her tone suggesting that slave religion was of no real substance—as a parent regards a child when he or she attempts to act like an adult.[69]

White elites believed that because slaves were like children, they had to be punished when they did anything wrong. This punishment was not like any that one would dole out to a child, however, it was brutal and unrelenting. When white masters (both men and women) punished or reprimanded their slaves, white women did not concern themselves for they believed that with the slave's inherently happy nature the slave would soon forget the punishment:

> In speaking of the negro there was one fortunate quality given him that made the unkind treatment many had to bear very much easier for him than it would have been possible for the white man, that was his childlike

[66] Andrews 320.
[67] Pond 5.
[68] Andrews 101.
[69] Andrews 69.

> disposition, very soon forgetting his sorrow or inquires, this was the black man.[70]

Even when slaves were whipped or hung by their thumbs, even if in front of the plantation mistresses, these women clung to this idea, most likely in an attempt to justify for themselves the degradation of another human. Women of the planter class never looked critically at the institution of slavery, preferring instead to accept the romantic ideals that they had created for themselves.[71]

With the romanticizing of slavery that took place after the Civil War, plantation mistresses often conveniently forgot that slave punishment had ever taken place at all. In 1852, Dolly Burge "Punished John for stealing."[72] In 1865, however, she worried about her slaves and their new freedom and wrote, "My poor boys my poor boys, what unknown trials are before you. How you have clung to your mistress & assisted her in every way you know how. You have never known want of any kind. Never have I corrected them."[73] Clearly, she had forgotten the punishment she meted out earlier in her life. In addition, it is obvious that her slaves had most certainly experienced "want," but Dolly's position did not allow her to recognize that her slaves could want for anything. Much like Dolly, Eliza Andrews felt that slaves had received stellar treatment from their white masters, and it was only with the invasion of the Yankees that they experienced any hardship: "The Yankees have taken all [control of the slaves] out of our hands, and deprived us of the means for caring for even our own negroes. There is nothing for it but to harden our hearts against sufferings we never caused and have no

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[70] Clayton 171.
[71] There are, of course, exceptions to this statement. Some women, like the Grimke sisters did advocate abolition.
[72] Burge 131.

power to prevent."[74] This type of "forgetting" was a part of their effort to cement the idea of the happy and contented slave into the minds of white southerners.

Because the efforts of those involved with the Lost Cause were so successful, the idea of a plantation filled with thankful and contented slaves did not dissipate with time. "Doubtless Great-grandfather Billy often threatened to sell "Runaway" Dennis, a quarrelsome slave, nagging and rousing the ire of his fellows, until he . . . fearful of punishment, would take to the swamps" wrote Katharine Lumpkin in 1945. "Surely, it would try a master's patience, in particular that of a gracious, kindly man, and it would puzzle him too, for from Uncle Jerry, the foreman, on down, my grandparents' slaves were known for their warm devotion and willing obedience."[75] Not only does Katharine correctly capture the white elites' disbelief that a slave would try to run away, but also those slaves who did so were seen as the exception to the rule. It is also remarkable that she wrote of a slave who was fearful of punishment, but at the same time seemingly denies that her Great-grandfather punished any of his slaves.

Whereas slavery was viewed as beneficial for slaves, elite women also saw it resulting in the moral degradation of white men. As the ethical barometer of the South, women were wary of sexual misconduct by their men that resulted in mulattos or "white children of slavery."[76] The presence of these children lowered the overall moral health of the South, and white women deeply resented them. As Ella Gertrude remarked in 1859, "I *will stand* to the opinion that the institution of slavery degrades the white man more

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[73] Burge 160.
[74] Andrews 366.
[75] Lumpkin 13.
[76] Thomas 168.

than the Negro and oh exerts a most deleterious effect upon our children."[77] Although she tried to ignore her husband's wayward actions, the results of his sexual exploits caused Ella to "shudder for the standard of morality" in her home and the slaveholding south in general.[78]

Despite elite women's worries about the negative moral effects of slavery, slaves were markers of high social standing and much of an elite woman's identity and beliefs was tied to her support for the peculiar institution of slavery. Even the physical appearance of a family's slaves could be an indicator of their social status. If a family's slaves were well dressed and groomed that showed others that the family was of sufficient means to adequately support their slaves, further elevating their elite status. Cornelia Pond's mother was aware of this fact and upon seeing one of her slaves wearing "shabby shoes when he was going to take her out driving," reprimanded him, "saying 'People will think that I do not give you good shoes."[79]

The abolishment of slavery in late 1865 jolted southern elite women's entire social and religious foundations, and as Ella stated, a woman had to redefine who and what she was without reference to her slaves:

> I did not know until then how intimately my faith in revelations and my faith in the institution of slavery had been woven together—true I had seen the veil of the latter but if the *Bible* was right then slavery *must be*—Slavery was done away with and my faith in God's Holy Book was terribly shaken . . .From May until July I lived a sad life—Lived with a prospect of again becoming a mother and yet felt no longing . . .Our cause was lost. Good men had had faith in that cause . . . I was bewildered—I felt all this and could not see God's hand—[80]

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[77] Thomas 169.
[78] Thomas 168.
[79] Pond 17.
[80] Thomas 277.

For Ella, and other women like her, having to reconcile themselves to an entirely different lifestyle and the death of the one they had known for most of their lives was a difficult process. This process affected everything that they held dear—their social status, strong religious beliefs, and their culture: "What . . . Southerners understood was not the Negro, but their own view of themselves which was reflected in the friendly relationships they had with people they considered inferior. To lose their reflections was difficult to bear, harder even than the immense burden of slavery."[81]

At the end of the war Mary Jones remarked, "Of early possessions and enjoyments I have seen an end; riches have taken to themselves wings and flown away; I am a captive in the land I love, and soon must wander from it—an exile in my native land."[82] Her daughter expressed similar feelings of despondency and hopelessness in a letter to her mother, "Our country is no more—merely a heap of ruins and ashes. A joyless future of probably ignominy, poverty, and want is all that spreads before us."[83] This loss of social order and definition is one of the reasons that women of the planter class were motivated to become active in the efforts of the Lost Cause. They longed for a way to show their social superiority and with the loss of much of their property, they used the glory of the past to elevate themselves above the masses: "It remained true, regardless of present circumstances, that 'old-family' still meant the good things of this world—land, houses, servants, everything on a luxurious scale. The difference was that one

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[81] Sides, Sudie Duncan. "Southern Women and Slavery." History Today. (Part I, Vol. 20, 1970: 54-60, Part II, Vol. 20, 1970: 1117-1129) 128.

could only enjoy these by turning one's gaze backward. Only by a tenuous claim upon the past could old families establish their station in this all-important way."[84] In forming this new collective memory, women of the planter class chose to remember slavery as a beneficial institution that Christianized a morally retarded race and kept them from being lazy and ignorant. Women forgot, however, that they had once considered slavery to be a burden and a moral degradation.

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[82] Myers 657
[83] Myers 549.
[84] Lumpkin 107.

Women and Work: Maintenance of the Plantation Economy

"I do not often complain to you dear Journal of my domestic annoyances. Sometime I think it would perhaps be better if I did and kept a record of the trials to which Southern housekeepers are exposed."[85]

-Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas

Although elite women did have slaves to do much of their work, the importance of the work plantation women did do cannot be dismissed. In antebellum Georgia, like the rest of the United States. women were not often employed outside the home; instead, they were relegated to the domestic and private spheres. The work of a plantation mistress, however, was not always easy and was invaluable to the maintenance of the plantation economy. To be sure, there were elite women who had fewer responsibilities than others did, but overall a plantation mistress had to supervise the upkeep of the large plantation household, often acting as a nurse, teacher, manager, and religious advisor. As I stated earlier, many historians have attempted to define these women as either ladies of total leisure or hardworking women on a par with the slaves themselves. What is also important to remember is that, while it may not seem that plantation mistresses did a great deal of work compared to women of other classes or to women today, it seemed like a lot of work to the plantation mistresses themselves. During the romanticizing of the antebellum era that began with the Lost Cause, it was the image of the pampered lady of the plantation, rather than the busy and hardworking plantation mistress, that became dominant in southern culture.

Although most young girls of the planter class knew that someday they would be a plantation mistress, they were rarely trained in household management as their education focused on intellectual, religious, and artistic accomplishment. At the age of fourteen, four years away from having several plantations of her own, one such girl was busy trying to fill the long days during which she often had nothing to do: "I can scarcely tell how today has been passed. I have done little or nothing but arrange my room and the contents of my portfolio . . .This morning I indulged in my habit of lying in bed late."[86] Even if they were taught such skills as sewing, it was to learn how to make ornamental items and not for practical uses such as making clothes. When Cornelia Pond was a young lady about to be married, she had so little to do that she broke the law in order to ease her boredom by teaching one of her personal slaves to read.[87] When these young women of the planter class were busy, it was with social events, such as visiting friends and neighbors, which gave them little preparation for the management of a large plantation.

When a woman became a plantation mistress, she felt that she had to maintain an organized home in order to be viewed as a good wife, mother, and southern lady. As Mary Jones wrote to her daughter, it was her responsibility as a "good wife to relieve him [her husband] as much as possible from domestic cares, and make his hours at home hours of enjoyment and repose" that was her largest burden.[88] Ella Thomas also felt that her responsibilities as a wife were the most troublesome of all her chores as seen by one of her journal entries:

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[85] Thomas 370.
[86] Thomas 71.

> True, men have the world to face while woman may stay at home . . . Men got out into the world & endeavor to retrieve their loss & come home depressed dejected and irritable, glad of a safety valve for the annoyance of the day. They come to wifes who have been fretted with careless servants and crying servants, fretted by little worries . . . They come expecting to find a soothing welcome, gentle words and loving glances, and here dear Journal I try to do my duty. I . . . do my best to have tea ready and a fire, to have the children taken to bed directly after tea knowing how essential perfect quiet is to tortured nerves. Know this as only a woman can know . . . Mr T himself in an attitude of abject dejection . . . & so nervous that the least thing annoys him, Mr Thomas presents an appearance well calculated to try my nerves.[89]

This entry demonstrates quite effectively how trying a woman's daily life could be, and debunks the image of the southern lady of leisure that is prevalent in the plantation legend.

Ironically, women's chores and responsibilities were not decreased with the addition of more slaves. Plantation mistresses were in charge of dressing and feeding all of the slaves as well as directing the activities of all the household slaves. As Catherine Clinton has written, "the institution of slavery made the domestic work of plantation mistresses difficult and forced upon them a way of life and set of duties quite different from those of other ante-bellum housewives, especially their northern counterparts."[90] Plantation mistresses were also in charge of nursing the slaves if they got sick, and this often proved a frequent and extremely tiresome task. When slaves were taken ill, the plantation mistress's work increased tenfold, as she had to complete all of her chores with little help while at the same time nursing the slaves back to health. "I have been in a constant state of bustle and excitement," Ella wrote in 1862, "[and] not of the most

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[87] Pond 48.
[88] Myers 33.
[89] Thomas 327.
[90] Clinton Plantation Mistress 21.

pleasurable character for nearly every servant on the place has been sick." Sick slaves also proved a daunting task for Mary Jones when "near twenty cases of sickness, all connected with the measles" overtook the slaves and turned the plantation into a "hospital." After the "constant care" of the slaves, Mary herself became unwell.[91] In addition, slaves' minor ailments and injuries were a constant hindrance for plantation mistresses as Sallie Bird demonstrated in this letter to her daughter, "Henry is 'laid by' with his cut foot, Isaac with general debility. Ed had some sore throat and fever, which I cured in one night by turpentine inside and outside. The rest are well. Before I got sick, I made pretty sleeves to my pretty white lawn."[92]

Along with being the resident doctor and nurse, many elite women were involved with other aspects of the plantation. One of a plantation mistress's most important and largest undertakings was that of the kitchen garden, which provided most of the food for the household. In addition, they managed all the food stores and allocated the amount of food (such as flour, lard, and butter) that was to be used each day. This required planning and precision in order to guarantee enough food for the entire household, including the slaves, each year. Plantation women, like Dolly Burge wrote of "planting cotton . . . house cleaning & whitewashing" while at the same time making pants for all her male slaves.[93] Dolly was certainly not a plantation mistress of leisure, and she was like most women of the elite class.

While most plantation women worked hard to maintain a serene and well-provided-for household, it is true that some did little and were surrounded by luxury, and

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[91] Myers 217 and 247.
[92] Rozier 187.

it was these women that became a part of the plantation legend. Cornelia Pond was one of these women, and she often remarked that she "had nothing special to do, surrounded by plenty."[94] Even after her marriage, her father still gave her 500 to 600 dollars a year, although her husband was quite wealthy. Cornelia's coddled lifestyle was certainly an exception to the rule. After the war, many of these pampered women lost the majority of their slaves, and their circumstances forced them to become more involved in the maintenance of their homes, which came as quite a shock: "Who would ever have believed that we could come to this? I can hardly believe it is I, plotting with the servants in the pantry to get up a dinner out of nothing, like the poor people I read about in books," wrote an astounded Eliza in late 1864, "It requires a great deal of management to find time for both parlor and kitchen, and to keep my manners and my dress unruffled."[95]

With the Lost Cause, women like Eliza and Cornelia became the standard image of all plantation mistresses. They did little to no work on the plantation and could be perceived as decorative ornaments with little function in the plantation society. As Katharine Lumpkin stated in 1945, it was these women who became the embodiment of women of the planter class:

> Neither men nor women on Grandfather's . . . plantation had much time to cultivate leisure-class occupations or ways in the sense of true large-scale landlords. More often that not the latter were absentee owners, for at least part of the year, keeping up town houses in the more sophisticated surroundings of city life. They traveled more, built more elegant dwellings, lived more richly altogether. It is of these planters that I, as a child, used to read in romantic Southern stories, filling my mind with their exotic luxuriousness. I certainly heard father tell of life as it was on his

[93] Burge 61
[94] Pond 51.
[95] Andrews 272.

> own plantation. It may seem strange to have missed the difference. Somehow the two pictures became blurred and blended until years later.[96]

Although most plantation mistresses could not afford to travel and ignore their plantation duties, those women who did became the embodiment of all that was desired for the southern lady during the Lost Cause. As I have shown, however, most plantation women worked remarkably hard to help maintain the organization and profitableness of their homes.

[96] Lumpkin 9.

Chapter II: Memory and the Creation of the Plantation Myth

"I have long felt that it was the duty of the South to bequeath to posterity the traditions of that period; for if we do it not ourselves they will be swallowed up in oblivion."[97]

-Mary A. H. Gay

The identity of individuals and the groups and cultures to which they belong all intertwine to create a memory of experiences, in both the private and individual realm and in the realm of public and collective memory. Many elements that make up one's perception of the present eventually become one's memory of the past. Psychological and motivational issues, along with perception, help to create personal and individual memories. Cultures use collective memory to establish traditions and myths in an effort to help guide the behavior of their members in the present. What is interesting about the relationship of memory and history is how people construct or revise their memories in response to changes in attitude or circumstance. In the South, elite women's views on numerous aspects of life, such as slavery and work, changed with the onset of the Lost Cause.

Even in the process of writing a diary, something that is not meant for the consumption of others, memory can be constructed as one rethinks the events of the day. As a person experiences the events of day-to-day life, she stores traces of those events in her mind and then elaborates on these traces when thinking about them later. Many biologists and psychologists believe that the brain remembers events by association and

not by passively retaining an entire construction of that event in the mind. In other words, memory is an association of one thing to another. For example when trying to remember a person, we begin with associations: Where was I? What was that person wearing? What was I wearing? This process continues until one decides that one has enough associations to remember the entire situation. The mind does not retain a virtual video library of experiences and memories, but a series of associations and feelings that together construct the memory.[98]

The construction of memory takes place during this process on both the individual and collective level. Several other factors influence the construction of memory, including social norms and values and taking other people's perceptions into consideration. "Memory, private and individual as much as collective and cultural, is constructed, not reproduced," David Thelen has explained, "This construction is not made in isolation but in conversations with others that occur in the contexts of community, broader politics, and social dynamics."[99] People are constantly revising their created memories as they "omit, distort, combine, and reorganize details from the past in an active and subjective way."[100] The past is a product of the present and is therefore constantly being reshaped.[101]

People also romanticize or idealize the past in two distinct ways. Often, with the ability to look back from a safe distance, people romanticize the past as they remember the pleasant days of their youth in contrast to the difficulties of adulthood. People enjoy

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[97] Gay 5.
[98] Thelen, David. "Memory and American History." (Journal of American History. Vol. 75, No. 4, March 1989) 1120-21.
[99] Thelen 1119.
[100] Thelen 1120.

taking nostalgic trips to the past. but this does not necessarily indicate a want to escape from the progressiveness of the present. Many people "want to relive those thrilling days of yesteryear, but only because we are absolutely assured that those days are out of reach."[102] We are all familiar with people who remember the good ol' days when movies were only twenty-five cents and life was idyllic. After further investigation. however. we usually discover that life was not as perfect as their memory would lead us to believe. This usually occurs on the individual level, but on some occasions can be absorbed into the collective consciousness. More often. however, societies and cultures will romanticize the past as groups of people create memories that are static, virtuous and harmonious in an effort to resist rapid or unwanted change.

This is clearly the case with what many elite white southerners did during Reconstruction. They collectively created an idealized image of the antebellum south, by glorifying certain aspects of the economy and social atmosphere, which became the conceptual framework they could use to criticize and deplore the present. Although one cannot place all southerners in this category, it is safe to say that a large percentage of the property-owning population focused their memory on the favorable characteristics of the antebellum south. They did not linger on the less-favorable aspects of the past, for they contributed nothing to the white southerner's defense of the Old South, which stated that it was a harmonious society defined by honor and gentility. As Eliza Andrews wrote the Old South " stood for gentle courtesy, for knightly honor, for generous hospitality; it stood for fair and honest dealing of man with man in the common business of life, for

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[101] Lowenthal. David. The Past Is a Foreign Country. (London: Cambridge University Press. 1985) 26.
[102] Lowenthal 7.

lofty scorn of cunning greed and ill-gotten gain through fraud and deception of our fellowmen."[103] The white southerner's disenchantment with the present and the future provided them with an impetus to try to salvage all that was good from the past. With each new construction of memory about the antebellum period, southerners suppressed, reformed, or eliminated different features of that memory altogether.

Jacquelyn Dowd Hall has contended that memories depend on forgetting, forgetting most of the emotions that make up the event and then blanketing them with memories that lessen fear, anxiety and pain.[104] Eliminating contrary memories or experiences is another form of idealizing the past, and in this process of remembrance, identities are redefined. This process took place with the emergence of the Lost Cause in the South, when the plantation legend began in full force. Although Catherine Clinton has argued that the plantation image was first formed in the early seventeenth century to encourage settlers, the image did not dominate American culture until after the Civil War with the Lost Cause. Elite white women were at the center of this process and it was in this way that the image of the courageous, yet docile southern lady emerged. These women "were determined to assert women's cultural authority over virtually every representation of the region's past" and therefore created a somewhat fanciful vision of the Old South, which nonetheless became the foundation for their own positions in the New South.[105] Although many of these women led difficult lives and often complained about the adversities of war, they chose to take on a memory of a docile and totally committed lady as part of a hierarchical society because it was an ideal image.

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[103] Andrews 15.

White women of the planter class played a large part in perpetuating the Cult of the Lost Cause. They were determined that they " need not and will not lose those things that made the South glorious."[106] As Eliza Andrews wrote in her diary in August of 1865,

> The frightful results of its [the south's] downfall are all that remain to tell us that there ever was a Southern Confederacy. Oh, for the glorious old days back again, with all their hardships and heroism, with all their "pomp and circumstance of glorious war!"—for war, with all its cruelty and destruction, is better than such degrading peace as this.[107]

These women published memoirs and diaries that reinforced the idea of a benevolent slave system and the overarching gentility of the Old South. They formed the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) in the 1890s (along with similar groups such as the Ladies Memorial Associations and the Children of the Confederacy) to uphold the ideals of the Old South. The UDC used education to instill the plantation legend into the younger generations, by approving and distributing literature that sustained the principles of the Lost Cause. In addition, the UDC held essay contests with cash prizes in public and private schools, and donated subscriptions to the *Confederate Veteran* and other UDC approved literature to school libraries. Katharine Lumpkin remembered reading some of these books that were filled with romantic images of the antebellum period, books that were of a "nostalgic vein . . . poorly printed little volumes of Confederate memoirs then coming off many local presses."[108] The UDC also led the campaign for the replacement of the term "Civil War" with the chosen "War Between the States" and other

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[104] Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd. "'You Must Remember This': Autobiography as Social Critique." (The Journal of American History. Vol. 85, No. 2, Sept. 1998: 439-465.) 439.
[105] Hall 444.
[106] Lumpkin 111.
[107] Andrews 368.

politically correct terms. They erected numerous monuments to veterans and those who were killed during the war. The campaigns of the UDC have not ended, and its members are still active today, indicating the survival of the Lost Cause and the plantation myth into the late twentieth century.[109]

It is important to keep in mind that this image is one of many and all of these images depend upon who is doing the remembering and for what purpose. African-Americans will have an entirely different collective memory of the antebellum South than descendants of the planter elite. The white elite memory of the South neglects to fully confront the issue of slavery, or idealizes it by claiming that slaves were simple-minded people who were happy to toil for the benefits of the white planter class. This image is sometimes referred to as the "domestic metaphor," a paternalistic order in which all men and women, black or white, rich or poor, had a role that they were happy to play.[110] Elite white southerners defined the new ideals of the Old South in which the Civil War became noble and the memories of gruesome deaths and bloody battles were suppressed.

In the early twentieth century, the plantation legend started to emerge in popular culture. Although there had been several Confederate memoirs and diaries published soon after the war, it was not until 1915 with the film *Birth of a Nation* that the Lost Cause was first brought to national attention.[111] Many elite southerners felt that the film had finally legitimized the values of the Old South to the rest of the nation and represented all the important aspects of the plantation myth. As Katharine Lumpkin remembered:

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[108] Lumpkin 123.
[109] Clinton Tara 183-186.

> In the South we had heard the motion picture acclaimed. that here at last we had been done justice. We poured out to the picture . . . Here were romance and noble white womanhood. Here was the black figure—and the fear of the white girl—though the scene blanked out just in time. Here were the sinister men the South scorned and noble men the South revered. And through it all the Klan rode. All around me people sighed and shivered, and now and then shouted or wept, in their intensity . . . Southerners, I believe, had no doubt of what it said or what they read into it of the nobility of our history, the righteousness of our acts, the rightness of our beliefs.[112]

The movie was a huge commercial success and broke all box-office records, although many groups, such as the NAACP, had boycotted the film.[113] After the success of *Birth of a Nation*, Hollywood began making more films that capitalized on the images of the Old South founded by the Lost Cause.

The best-known work that followed in the tradition of the Lost Cause is Margaret Mitchell's novel and subsequent film, *Gone with the Wind*, with its anti-heroine Scarlett and her depiction of the Civil War. The film and novel have dominated American popular culture and in some ways has encumbered attempts to demystify and deconstruct this era. *Gone with the Wind* was once referred to as,

> An encyclopedia of the plantation legend . . . the big white-columned house sleeping under its trees among the cotton fields; the band of faithful servants, including two that quaintly resemble Aunt Jemima and Old Black Joe; the white-haired massa bathing in mint juleps; the heroine with her seventeen-inch waist and the high-spirited twins who come courting her in the magnolia-colored moonlight with the darkies singing under the hill—then the War between the States . . . making Georgia safe for democracy and virtuous womanhood. . . it is all here, every last bale of cotton and bushel of moonlight, every last full measure of Southern female devotion working its lilywhite fingers uncomplainingly to the lilywhite bone.[114]

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[110] Clinton, Half Sisters 76.
[111] Hall 444.
[112] Lumpkin 200.
[113] Clinton Tara 204.
[114] Pyron, Darden Asbury, ed. Recasting: Gone with the Wind in American Culture. (Miami: University Presses of Florida, 1983) 19.

Although this image might make us laugh, it also appeals to a romantic ideal of the past which may be part of the reason that it has endured for so long. The Cult of the Lost Cause and the plantation legend allowed women of the elite classes to save, through collective memory, "the civilization they were forbidden to defend by open force."[115]

[115] Andrews 286.

Conclusion

"The old life goes on. The old ways still mold the lives of Southern children."[116]

-Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin

For most of us when someone mentions the Old South, the first image that comes to mind is of the beautiful southern belle constrained by corsets and draped in luxurious silks swirling around a ballroom in a pillared mansion while servants attend to her every whim. While it is true that there were balls, large plantation houses and slaves, southern women could not lead such a life of luxury for there were houses to manage, slaves to administer, gardens to plant and maintain, books to keep, morality to guard, children to raise and husbands to please, not to mention the ultimate goal of sustaining the stature of a true lady.

As hard as it is to describe, it is important to show the complex lives these women led. The law's lack of recognition for the woman's place in southern society is indicative of her ambivalent station in southern society. Southern society expected the plantation woman to be hardworking and resourceful while retaining her docility and meekness as part of her ladyhood, yet society saw her as having a symbolic more than practical role in maintaining the planter economy and social order. As this thesis has shown, however, elite women were important for the maintenance of the plantation culture, both before and after the war. Elite women were for the most part well-educated, especially in comparison to other women in the South, became the moral bastions of the planter class, and successfully helped to manage large plantation with numerous slaves thereby keeping

the economy afloat. Only after understanding the intricacies of these women's lives can the formation of the plantation myth be appreciated.

In their diaries and memoirs, and even some of their letters to family members. women used their memory to modify the image of southern women and the South in general. In an effort to reconcile their old way of living after it was destroyed by the Civil War, these elite women became the leaders of the Lost Cause and in upholding the ideals and standards of the Old South through their collective memories. In doing so they created an ideal vision of the Old South in which all was perfect and it is this image that has so captured the white population's imagination and became the truth beyond the historical facts.

With their diaries, memoirs and family letters. elite women created a new memory for the white planter class and an image of the Old South that they could be proud of and that gave purpose to those who fought to defend it. By ignoring the negative aspects of the antebellum south, elite women were able to move forth with purpose and pride in a time that was defined by hardship and hopelessness. Therefore. while they may have railed against the constraints imposed on them during the pre-war years by everything from their clothes to their religion, during the chaos of Reconstruction most elite women coveted such constraint and intense protectionism. Though not the southern belles of leisure described in much of popular culture, they were unable to define themselves outside of their class and social status. With those indicators gone after the destruction of the southern economy and the abolition of slavery. southern ladies had to find a new way

[116] Lumpkin 233.

to elevate themselves above the masses—the creation and perpetuation of the plantation myth dominated by moonlight and magnolias.

The plantation myth and the Cult of the Lost Cause enveloped the South and kept it from moving forward, leaving the majority of the South in economic, political, and social devastation. With the emergence of the plantation myth also came the creation of the Ku Klux Klan and the white elite's adoption of white supremacy as a form of protection from their newfound poverty. White southerners passed on these racist ideals to future generations and they became embedded in the New South's social culture. This paper did not discuss the new form of white supremacy that materialized after the war, because it was not a part of the collective memory that elite men and women created, although it did have numerous consequences on the direction of the New South. Not only did white southerners accept the plantation myth, but white northerners accepted it as well. Historians need to look at why the plantation legend was so readily accepted by the white population throughout America and what this says about the collective conscious of the United States as a whole.

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