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CATHERINE CLINTON

SESQUICENTENNIAL REFLECTIONS ON CIVIL WAR WOMEN¹

The nation looked back on its Civil War, in the midst of a whirlwind of domestic debates, while impending foreign crises loomed—but with a new young President in the White House, with his charismatic wife and children, the country seemed on the brink of momentous change. On the cusp of a new era, it seemed an appropriate time, if not overdue, to reflect on the legacy of an epic historical era that tore the nation in two. Whether referring to the centenary in 1961 with John F. Kennedy in office, or the sesquicentennial in 2011 with Barack Obama, backward glances at the legacy of the American Civil War offered challenges as well as possibilities. Race was at the center of visceral debates in both of these historical moments. By the time of the Civil War sesquicentennial, a vast body of scholarship had endorsed slavery as well as states' rights, white supremacy as well as patriotism, as centerpieces for our understanding of the war's causes. Emancipation and constitutional amendments have proven equally compelling to appreciating the era's key outcomes.

The fact that American women, black and white, North and South, confronted daunting obstacles to equality—during the Civil War era and during its centennial—was no mere coincidence. The struggle for women to overthrow male restraints was, just as the struggle to seize equal opportunity remains, an intricate challenge. Anti-slavery and equality battles were intertwined: as antebellum activist Angelina Grimké Weld (1805-1879) noted, slaves might be emancipated at the same time that women were still being denied equal status—and women could never be free until slavery was abolished. Grimké recognized interlocking systems of oppression, and proposed a domino effect to destroy these destructive constrictions.

¹ I wish to thank Professor Minh Nguyen, Chautauqua Lecture Coordinator at Eastern Kentucky University (2010-2014), Professor Thomas Appleton of Eastern Kentucky University and the wonderful faculty and students in Richmond, Kentucky for hosting the lecture on which this essay is based.

Nina Silber and I argued, in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War* (1992), that women's history and Civil War history were two fields which had too long conspired to remain mutually exclusive domains. A few years before the Civil War centenary, Allan Nevins persuaded Mary Elizabeth Massey, a respected scholar in Civil War history, to undertake a commission for his new series on the history of the war. In 1966, she published *Bonnet Brigades: American Women and the Civil War*. Massey was the only woman to contribute to the fifteen-volume set.² The historical work on American women that emerged in the 1960s, and grew exponentially into the twenty-first century, eventually shifted to include the American Civil War, which nevertheless remains a period in which women's roles remain understudied and undervalued—especially in contrast to the American Revolution or even World War II.

When Massey's book appeared, Scarlett O'Hara—the fictional heroine of Margaret Mitchell's 1936 bestseller, *Gone with the Wind*, dominated popular cultural images of women and the war. Her deprivation and dilemmas became symbolic of Civil War sacrifice. O'Hara retains her crown as an iconic afterimage of the Lost Cause, but she has definitely been joined by a new cast of characters. Modern Pulitzer Prize winning novelists have given us a wider range of fictional heroines, including Sethe (from Toni Morrison's *Beloved*), Ada Monroe and Ruby Thewes (from Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*), and a reimagined Alcott family (in Geraldine Brooks's *March*).

Meanwhile, we hope fictional heroines will be crowded out by documented cases of real life heroines who contribute to a more authentic appreciation of war's indelible impact. Penguin Classics now includes *Mary Chesnut's Diary*, which has reigned for over a century as the most cited and influential of Civil War reminiscences, and even plaques and statuary are playing a role in this twenty-first century revival. Educators have access to newly published Civil War manuscripts, letters and diaries, and stand amazed at online repositories that enable them to track down many new and neglected aspects of war. All of this renews our appreciation of women's multifaceted roles.

² See Roundtable on Mary Elizabeth Massey in the special issue of *Civil War History*, guest edited by Judith Giesberg, Vol. 61, No. 4, December 2015.

One of the most famous women to emerge from Ken Burns's *The Civil War* (1990) was the wife of Sullivan Ballou, the "very dear Sarah" who at the age of 32 lost her husband at the Battle of Bull Run. Burns used the motif of Ballou's letter to showcase Civil War devotion and sacrifice—and his documentary comments that "Sarah never remarried." How likely was remarriage with a generation of men wiped out? We are given Sarah as the object of a soldier's attachment, rather than the subject of her harsh fate. We don't hear from Sarah—was it fidelity or the inability of widows to find new husbands? In addition, Burns left too many women's voices on the cutting room floor.³

Sarah Ballou eked out a life along with hundreds of thousands of other war widows, trying to raise her children—only eligible to claim a pension years later. Thousands of women of her generation were robbed of their youth, and their security, with hopes dashed by a husband's vainglorious demise. Many women had Scarlett O'Hara's luck with her first husband—dead of dysentery before ever seeing battle. Soldiers' mortality was a harsh reality: three out of five soldiers died of disease—which did not include those who died from injuries resulting from combat, which were one in five (and roughly 20% suffered combat deaths). Thus nursing and medical supplies were not incidentals, but became operationally integrated in order to keep the military staffed and combat ready.

Pioneering medical reformers Elizabeth and Emily Blackwell called a meeting of women in Manhattan to coordinate efforts for soldiers' aid. On April 29, 1861, between 2,000 and 3,000 women responded to the Blackwell's' call. Nurses were trained for work in the field and to establish a network of soldiers' aid societies: the Women's Central Relief Association [WCRA]. Unitarian minister Henry Bellows was elected president of the group, but the board of twelve overseers included six women.

Louisa May Alcott's *Hospital Sketches* etched out the harshness of a nurse's life, describing instances when "legless, armless occupants entering my ward admonished me that I was there to work, not to wonder or weep."⁴ Confederate women organized

³ See Catherine Clinton, "Noble Women as Well," in Robert Brent Toplin, ed. *Ken Burns's "The Civil War"* (New York, Oxford, 1996), 61-80.

⁴ Catherine Clinton, "Noble Women as Well," op. cit., 73.

themselves into similar—although less coordinated—efforts. Most of their contributions were on a local level and individually rather than being collectively sponsored. Former Charleston socialite Phoebe Pember, hard at work as a Confederate hospital matron, complained of rats who "ate all the poultices applied during the night to the sick, and dragged away the pads stuffed with bran from under the arms and legs of the wounded."⁵ When the wife of one of her patients overstayed her welcome, giving birth to a daughter on her husband's cot, Pember charitably tended to the newborn (who was named Phoebe by grateful parents).

There were a good number of little Clara Bartons as well. Barton repeatedly challenged military and government dictates which banned women from the battlefield—making her a welcome nuisance during expeditions, where she saved a good many men's lives by bringing medicine closer to the front. Juliet Hopkins, nicknamed "the Angel of the Confederacy," was wounded in the leg while nursing fallen soldiers at Seven Pines. She spent the rest of her life with a limp due to this injury. Most women did not venture out onto the field, like Union stalwart Mother Bickerdyke, who endeared herself to soldiers from her native Illinois. The majority of nurses on both sides of the battle waited for the wounded to come to them—and thousands upon thousands arrived.

As wartime inflation doubled prices between 1861 and 1863, Yankee women encountered challenges in finding basic goods such as sugar, eggs and bread. And poor women in the needle trades, along with domestic servants, were at the bottom rungs of the economic ladder. By 1863, one New York newspaper reported that many women's wages had decreased nearly 50 percent since 1860, while the cost of living had increased more than 50 percent. But, once again, activist women stepped into the breach, erecting the Educational Industrial Institution and Asylum, where homeless or destitute children of deceased or disabled soldiers found food, clothing, and "such training in the arts or daily life as will be designed to fit its beneficiaries for usefulness and respectable self-support."

⁵ Phoebe Yates Pember, *A Southern Women's Story* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), 102.

This movement has been construed by scholars such as Judith Giesberg as a kind of “sisterhood.” An ethic of patriotic sacrifice—giving up curtains so hospital patients might have bedding, for example—promoted domestic values within a political framework. From these humble beginnings, a mighty tide of female activism spread across the North, as sanitary commission work politicized and activated women.⁶

During the war’s first year, Josephine Shaw recorded in a diary: “December 16th: today is my birthday, —18 years. Sent today 42 pairs of mittens to Rob.” She lost her beloved brother, war hero Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, during the Battle of Ft. Wagner in July 1863 when he led his African American troops into combat, and his own death. Josephine was sewing for her own husband, Charles Russell Lowell, and eight months pregnant when news came of his demise on October 24, 1864. But her husband had urged her during their few months of marriage to “...live like a plain Republican, mindful of the beauty and duty of simplicity... I hope you have outgrown all foolish ambitions and are now content to become a ‘useful citizen’.”⁷

Lowell was perhaps cautioning against the “smart set” of women who attempted to commingle their interests in high society with that of partisan charity. In Chicago, the first Sanitary Fair—a bazaar run by the U.S. Sanitary Commission to raise money for soldiers’ aid—ran for two weeks in October 1863. This event generated nearly \$80,000 in profits.⁸

Many leaders were extremely ambivalent about this development, and worried about their supporters abandoning mundane clothing and food drives. The money raised by fairs could be diverted to buy supplies for dwindling warehouses, but depleting supplies concerned volunteers and reformers. Women from the great city of Brooklyn imitated their Midwestern sisters and generated nearly half a million dollars in cash for

⁶ Judith Giesberg, *Civil War Sisterhood: The U.S. Sanitary Commission and Women's Politics in Transition* (Boston: Northeastern University Press; Revised Edition, 2006)

⁷ His bride of less than a year was unable to attend his funeral at Harvard College Chapel and his burial at Mt. Auburn cemetery. She also bore the brunt of his family’s disappointment when she gave birth to a daughter instead of a son, a few weeks later. Joan Waugh, *Unsentimental Reformer: The Life of Josephine Lowell Russell* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 84-85.

⁸ Women in the Chicago-based Northwest Sanitary Commission decided to hold fairs—with entrance tickets offered at 75 cents and donated goods for sale. They set a goal of \$25,000, and President Abraham Lincoln contributed an original draft of the Emancipation Proclamation, which was auctioned off at \$3,000.

widows and orphans at their fair in February 1864. Two months later, Manhattan women built themselves a fairground at the corner of Sixth Avenue and Fourteenth Street, where they sold donations from around the country.

Organizers raised over a million dollars for this initial Metropolitan Fair, which opened on April 4, 1864, attracting a parade of nearly 10,000. This extravaganza's entrance fee limited attendance to none but a well-heeled elite.⁹ But the fashionable bought over 30,000 tickets during the fair's three weeks. Visitors viewed Frederick Church's *Heart of the Andes* and Emanuel Leutze's *Washington Crossing the Delaware* in an art gallery. These fairwomen also created a children's department, a music hall and a "Knickerbocker Kitchen."

Women outside the Northeastern corridor were equally caught up in warwork and reform, but not with such glamorous projects. However, these plebian efforts could and did have spectacular results. One particularly exemplary leader, Annie Wittenmyer, after witnessing horrid conditions in military hospitals, asked the United States Christian Commission to help her pioneer a "dietary kitchen system." This provided for a revolution in hospital care, and would remain in use down to the present day. With this new system, each soldier/patient would be given a separate diet, tailored to individual medical needs. She organized special dietary units, and hired women supervisors to oversee their implementation. So absorbing was this work that she gave up other Sanitary Commission duties to devote herself exclusively to running kitchens for soldiers' until war's end. This health advance saved hundreds of lives and improved the return to the ranks for thousands. None other than Ulysses S. Grant suggested that "no soldier on the firing line gave more heroic service than she did."¹⁰

Even ordinary women could find themselves in extraordinary circumstances. Southerner Sarah Morgan wailed in her diary, "If I was a man. O if I was only a man. For two years that has been my only cry..."¹¹ And so some women did something about their

⁹ See William Y. Thompson, "Sanitary Fairs of the Civil War," *Civil War History* Vol. 4, No. 1 (March 1958): 51-57.

¹⁰ Janice Beck Stock, *Amazing Iowa* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 98.

¹¹ Sarah Morgan, *The Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 491.

frustrations.¹² Rosetta Wakeman served with the 153rd New York volunteers as Private Edwin Wakeman, writing home about her adventures: “I was not in the first day's fight but the next day I had to face the enemy bullets with my regiment. I was under fire about four hours and laid on the field of battle all night. There was three wounded in my Co. and one killed.”¹³ Wakeman participated in the Red River Campaign where the commander issued an executive order that no women would accompany the troops—trying to rid the march of both family and camp followers. Little did he realize that not only was Wakeman serving in disguise, but so also was Jeannie Hodges, an Irish immigrant who fought as Albert Cashier in this same campaign. (Hodges was born female, but lived most of her adult life as a man.)

Canadian born Emma Edmonds enlisted in the 2nd Michigan as Private Franklin Thompson and left us a memoir in which she thanked God in 1861 to be “permitted in this hour of my adopted country's need to express a tithe of gratitude which I feel toward the people of the Northern States.”¹⁴ After contracting malaria at the Battle of Fredericksburg she deserted, fearing discovery. A soldier in the 10th Massachusetts, confided “there was an orderly in one of our regiments and he and the Corporal always slept together. Well the other night the corporal had a baby for the corporal turned out to be a woman.”¹⁵

DeAnne Blanton and Lauren Burgess, in *They Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers and the American Civil War* (2002), explore an array of fascinating cases which have been excavated, and they debate critical issues surrounding cross-dressing Civil War soldiers. Southerner Amy Clarke disguised herself to serve with her husband, and she continued as a soldier even after he was killed at Shiloh. Clarke was eventually wounded and captured by federals who gave her a dress and sent her back behind Confederate lines. Less than two weeks before the end of the war, Mary Wright and Margaret Henry

¹² See in particular, “Impermissible Patriots,” Chapter Two of Catherine Clinton, *Stepdaughters of History: Southern Women and the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016), 40-74.

¹³ Lyde Cullen Sizer & Jim Cullen, eds. *The Civil War Era: An Anthology of Sources*, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 92.

¹⁴ Diane L. Abbot & Kristoffer Gair, *Honor Unbound* (Lanham, Md.: Hamilton Books, 2004), 71.

¹⁵ DeAnne Blanton and Lauren M. Cook, *They Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers in the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002).

were captured and imprisoned after fighting undetected for the Confederacy for years. Mary and Molly Bell served under the names of Tom Parker and Bob Martin, but were accused by officers of being “common camp followers and... the means of demoralizing several hundred men.”¹⁶

This complaint about women in camp was a familiar lament, as the Civil War created the largest increase in the sex trade in nineteenth-century America, perhaps the single greatest growth spurt in the nation's history. Judith Giesberg's new study, *Sex and the Civil War* (2017), imaginatively explores issues of gender, sexuality and pornography during the Civil War. Evidence indicates that hundreds, perhaps thousands, of nineteenth-century women were involved with a system of concubinage through private contractual arrangements with individual men. Whatever these combined numbers amounted to, they were overshadowed by the figures for those who participated in a more “casual” sex trade. These women never thought of themselves as “prostitutes.” “Public women” was a term of contempt for females who supported themselves *solely* through supplying multiple partners with sex for money, and their lives remain relatively undocumented beyond criminal and court records. Civil war soldiers and their commanders commented frequently on the topic, especially as officers saw prostitutes as a health hazard for their men.¹⁷

One Confederate wrote to the post commander in Dalton, Georgia, that “complaints are daily made to me of the number of lewd women in this town.”¹⁸ The problem was deemed so extreme that a Confederate officer ordered men to “sweep out” the town. Any woman who could not document her respectability would be expelled. Undocumented females would be confined to the guardhouse, with a diet of bread and water. The streets of wartime Richmond became a kind of complex stage onto which the players were thrust without scripts. Unescorted females were subject to danger on city

¹⁶ Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Women and the Civil War* (reprint ed.: Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 85.

¹⁷ Catherine Clinton, “Public Women and Sexual Politics During the American Civil War,” in Catherine Clinton & Nina Silber, *Battle Scars: Gender, Sexuality and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 61-77.

¹⁸ Ray Broadus Browne & Lawrence A. Kreiser, *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 2003), 9.

streets. What was new was the way in which public space was being shamelessly expropriated by “public women.” Headlines became more daring and colorful: “Queer Rollickers” and “Stabbing Affair at a House of Ill Repute.”¹⁹

American women of color had a special stake in the epic Civil War struggle, as they rightly perceived of the battle as a conflict to establish black liberation: war, the dizzying carousel, and emancipation, the brass ring. Their moving roles in the Civil War have long been obscured by myth and distortion.

Harriet Tubman recognized that *slavery* was war, and she aligned herself with John Brown and declared war against slaveholders long before 1861. She made her way into enemy territory again and again to rescue enslaved African Americans. When the Civil War was formally declared—in a sense moving her “underground” struggle above ground—Tubman joined with federal forces—first in Virginia and then in South Carolina. She was instrumental in one of the most daring Union raids deep into the heart of Dixie, the Combahee River Raid on June 2nd, 1863, when three federal ships moved cautiously upriver shortly before midnight, loaded with the soldiers of the Second South Carolina. On this historic journey, Tubman was liberating more than the handfuls at a time she had freed during her UGRR days. On the lookout, Tubman guided the boats to designated spots along the shore where runaways had hidden. The Union operation proceeded like clockwork.

The horror of this attack on the prestigious Middleton Place drove the point home. This distinguished family owned several estates in the region and was one of the wealthiest clans in the state. Robbing warehouses and torching planter homes was an added bonus for former slaves sent as soldiers, striking hard and deep at the proud master class. Over seven hundred and fifty slaves were spirited onto Union gunboats that night, shepherded by one hundred and fifty black soldiers. Tubman’s plan was triumphant.

By the summer of 1863, Union commanders were willing to risk sending men into the interior, even greenhorn colored troops, based on Tubman’s assessment of enemy strength and positions. Tubman described slaves as a fifth column, restless on Low

¹⁹ See Catherine Clinton, “Public Women and Sexual Politics During the American Civil War,” in Catherine Clinton & Nina Silber, *op. cit.*

Country plantations, eager to anticipate the Union invasion. Many slave men wished to join the Union Army, but would do so only after federal troops transported their families to safety.

In her magisterial *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household*, Thavolia Glymph tells us about enslaved women rebels during the war. Enslaved women could and did find war was sheer hell, as testified a Missouri wife who wrote her husband, “They are treating me worse and worse every day. Our child cries for you. Send me some money as soon as you can for me and my child are almost naked.” Desperate circumstances caused drastic results. One Kentucky woman spirited her children away, only to be accosted by her master’s son-in-law “who told me that if I did not go back with him he would shoot me. He drew a pistol on me as he made this threat. I could offer no resistance as he constantly kept the pistol pointed at me.”²⁰ She was forced to return home at gunpoint, while the white man kidnapped her seven year old as hostage.

Susie King Taylor was born on a Georgia plantation in 1848, the first child of a slave mother named Baker. Her grandmother was born in 1820, the granddaughter of an African slave brought to Georgia during the 1730s. Taylor went to live with her grandmother in Savannah, escaping the plantation when she was just a young girl. During her years in Savannah, she was fortunate to have white playmates willing to teach her to read and write, as offering instruction to a slave was against the law.

One of her tutors abandoned her to serve with the Savannah Volunteer Guards when the war broke out in 1861. Taylor vividly recalled the shelling of Fort Pulaski, which prompted her return to the countryside to be with her mother: “I remember what a roar and din the guns made. They jarred the earth for miles.”²¹ When federals captured the fort, Taylor was ferried behind Union lines, onto St. Simon’s Island. Because she could read and write, white Union officers drafted her, at the age of fourteen, to teach freed slaves. She married a black soldier, a sergeant with the first South Carolina

²⁰ Catherine Clinton, *Tara Revisited: Women, War and the Plantation Legend*, (New York: Abbeville Press, 1995), 74.

²¹ Susie King Taylor, *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp: An African American Woman's Civil War Memoir* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 103.

Volunteers, and subsequently served alongside her husband as a nurse and laundress for the troops. Taylor practiced other skills as well and confided, “I learned to handle a musket very well while in the regiment, and could shoot straight and often hit the target.”²² When Clara Barton came to the sea islands, Taylor worked alongside this Yankee legend—but remained with her own regiment through February 1865.

After the war, Taylor resettled in Savannah and opened a school. But when her husband died in 1866, she faced an uncertain and unsettling future—she was left “soon to welcome a little stranger alone.” Pregnant and widowed, she struggled to survive. By 1868 Taylor had to close her school, and in 1872 she left her child with her parents and took a job as a domestic for a wealthy Savannah family. Unlike most women of her race and class, she did not spend the rest of her years in this role, slavery’s legacy. Rather, Taylor secured a job in Boston, then remarried, and embarked on a career as a clubwoman and civic activist. In 1902 she published *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp with the 33rd United States Colored Troops, Late 1st S.C. Volunteers*, a remarkable chronicle. Despite the great rarity of her account, Taylor made dramatic point near the end of her memoir, which speak to us across the generations:

There are many people who do not know what some of the colored women did during the war. There were hundreds of them who assisted the Union soldiers by hiding them and helping them to escape. Many were punished for taking food to the prison stockades for the prisoners... Others assisted in various ways the Union Army. These things should be kept in history before the people. There has never been a greater war in the United States than the one of 1861, where so many lives were lost,—not men alone but noble women as well.²³

These sacrifices and contributions remain, a century later, as Taylor complained, generally unheralded. The depletion of *adult* labor increased the burdens on enslaved children. Eliza Scantling, fifteen in 1865, remembered she “plowed a mule an’ a wild un

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 104.

at dat. Sometimes me hands get so cold I jes' cry."²⁴ During wartime, thousands were fatherless and hundreds were orphaned.

While we track and translate, debate and proclaim, the histories of too many black southern women are “obscured.” When I began my journey nearly thirty years ago, I was standing on a decidedly empty, if not barren, ground. We did have the emergence of the magnificent multi-volume *Documentary History of Emancipation* edited by Ira Berlin et al. We had prize winning studies by Leslie Schwalm (*A Hard Fight for We: Women's Transition from Slavery to Freedom in Lowcountry South Carolina*, 1997), Jacqueline Jones (*Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family, from Slavery to the Present*, rev. ed. 2009) and Deborah Gray White (*Aren't I a Woman: Females Slaves in the Plantation South*, rev. ed. 1999).

Today there are many strong and sturdy inroads which have transformed the field—including certainly Jean Yellin's prize-winning biography *Harriet Jacobs: A Life* (2005) and Thavolia Glymph's equally lauded *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (2008) which allows us to move the study of freedwomen to a forward march.

We see glimpses of black men and women, enslaved and liberated, in powerful memoirs such as Pauli Murray's magnificent *Proud Shoes: The Story of an American Family* (1978) and Carla Petersen's *Black Gotham: A Family History of African Americans in Nineteenth Century New York City* (2011). Petersen tells the story of Maritcha Lyons, part of the New York elite, black abolitionists and entrepreneurs who would agitate to improve the lot of African Americans. Harriet Tubman, Susie King Taylor and Maritcha Lyons can replace the unnamed stand-in for all those black women subsumed under the heading of “Mammy.”

Writers like E.A. Pollard, author of *The Lost Cause*, peppered their stories with an obligatory reference to the “auntie” if not Mammy of southern lore. This genre became so popular that northern writers joined in—to cash in on the popularity. Such is the story “Aunt Rosy's Chest” (1872) by Kathryn Floyd Dana, who lived in New York but wrote

²⁴ Peter Bardaglio, “The Children of Jubilee,” in Catherine Clinton & Nina Silber, *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 221.

under the name Olive A. Wadsworth (signing her letters “O. A. W.”—shorthand for only a woman). Sherwood Bonner expropriated the local color of black life in Old South for many of her short stories.²⁵ Mammies did not leave us their story, but white confabulations filtered through the lens of romanticized fiction, becoming what I have labelled “Confederate Porn.”²⁶

In 1923, the U.S. Senate authorized a mammy statue, “in memory of the faithful slave mammies of the South,” attempting to set their passions and prejudices into stone. As a Southern congressman stated in support of the monument, “The traveler, as he passes by, will recall that epoch of southern civilization when ‘fidelity and loyalty’ prevailed. No class of any race of people held in bondage could be found anywhere who lived more free from care or distress.”²⁷

Central to this idyll was the figure of Mammy, who in popular imagination resembled Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s wife, Aunt Chloe, a cheerful, plump slave in a checked kerchief. White performers blackened their faces to tell stories and sing spirituals in the style “of the old time ‘house darkey’.” The ready-made pancake mix of Aunt Jemima—a “slave in a box,” as one historian puts it—quickly became a national sensation; a “biography” of her was subtitled “the Most Famous Colored Woman in the World.”

The six year-old “negro girl Melvinia” was bequeathed by her owner, David Patterson, to his wife Ruth. When Ruth died in 1852, Melvinia—known as Mattie, went to live with Ruth’s daughter, Christianne Shields. Living in rural Georgia, near Atlanta, she was illiterate, and like most women of her generation she struggled against incredible odds to survive, but in 1870 she appears in the census with four children. More than one of them may have been fathered by the son of her former master, Charles Shields. But we also might speculate that a child born after the war might have indicated a long term liaison with this man. She worked as a maid, a washerwoman and a farm worker, and lived a hard life before her death in the 1930s—no fictional mammy she.

²⁵ Sheri Parks, *Fierce Angels: The Strong Black Woman in American Life and Culture* (New York: Ballantine, 2010), 49.

²⁶ See Clinton, *Tara Revisited: Women, War and the Plantation Legend*.

²⁷ Tony Horwitz, “The Mammy Washington Almost Had,” *The Atlantic*, 31 May 2013.

One of Melvinia's sons born either shortly before or shortly after the Civil War, did learn to read and write, and by 1900 he was listed in the Birmingham, Alabama census as owning his own home: with his first wife Alice, he had a son named Robert. Robert married Annie, and they had two children. After Robert disappeared, Annie moved to Chicago during the great migration—and her son Purnell Nathaniel Shields married a nurse and they had eight children. Their granddaughter, Michelle Obama, moved into the White House as First Lady in 2009, and is ranked as one of the most admired women in American by recent polls. This story was recovered only in the recent past, first broken as a story in the New York Times, then in an expanded book on the topic, Rachel L. Swarns's *American Tapestry: The Story of the Black, White, and Multiracial Ancestors of Michelle Obama* (2012).

For decades of commemoration, we have visited statues of men on horseback and battlefields, but Thavolia Glymph suggests we now turn our lens to encompass a broader view.²⁸ Jim Downs has offered us new insights into the costs of this war, along with the gains for black women, in his *Sick from Freedom: African-American Illness and Suffering during the Civil War and Reconstruction*.²⁹ Televised dramas like “Mercy Street” are featuring the roles of women as well as men during wartime, while Websites and Internet resources are growing exponentially.

And from kitchens to courtrooms, porches to pedestals, American women renewed their battles—after peace was declared at Appomattox. Commemoration became a female pre-occupation in post-Civil War America, raised into an art form by groups such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Their stories have remained overshadowed by those of generals and diplomats, battles and boardrooms. But *recovery* and *rediscovery* are watchwords in our dramatic era of expanding horizons, digitization and global ambitions. Renewed intellectual campaigns for recognizing women's

²⁸ See Thavolia Glymph in CSPAN video, “James M. McPherson: A Life in American History” (Jan. 8, 2012): <https://www.c-span.org/video/?303793-1/career-historian-james-mcpherson>

²⁹ For further information, see CSPAN video, “The Medical Crisis of Emancipation” (June 20, 2015): <https://www.c-span.org/video/?326466-4/gettysburg-college-civil-war-institute-conference-discussion-end-civil-war>

achievements and appreciating their hardships can make us eager for remembrance of things *not* imagined.

I predict our new and even more robust era of Civil War Studies will not just remember the ladies (as an earlier generation admonished), but will also fully integrate an historical perspective on gender. And women who fought so valiantly to survive are not lost, but are finally making their way toward a broader and deeper appreciation of our nation's greatest era of crisis and sacrifice, the American Civil War.